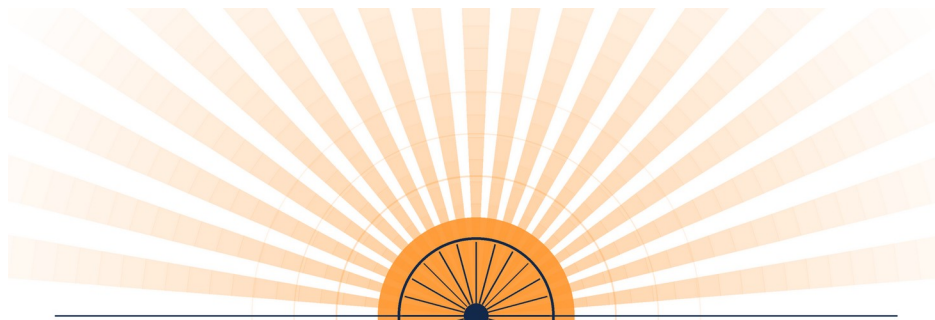




UPSC DARPAN

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

"It is not merely of some importance but is of fundamental importance that justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done."

— Lord Hewart, Lord Chief Justice of England, judgment in *R v Sussex Justices, ex parte McCarthy* (King's Bench, 9 November 1923; reported [1924] 1 KB 256)

The Hindu, The Indian Express & The Economic Times (Delhi Editions) — 24 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 · 24 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.

“A dissent in a court of last resort is an appeal to the brooding spirit of the law, to the intelligence of a future day, when a later decision may possibly correct the error into which the dissenting judge believes the court to have been betrayed.”

— **Charles Evans Hughes (later Chief Justice of the United States)** · *The Supreme Court of the United States* (Columbia University Press, 1928), p. 68

Use in: Dissent inside institutions (today's Election Commission dispute and Justice Datta's separate opinion). Use it in essays on courage, truth or institutions, and in GS2 answers on multi-member constitutional bodies: a recorded dissent is not disloyalty but an appeal to a later day, as Justice Subba Rao's dissent in *Kharak Singh* (1962) was vindicated in *Puttaswamy* (2017). Pair it with Article 145(5), which protects a Supreme Court judge's right to dissent, and with Section 18 of the 2023 Election Commissioners Act, which provides for unanimity where possible and a majority where members differ.

“By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”

— **Rob Nixon** · *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2

Use in: The heat wave that kills quietly (today's Climate Impact Lab estimate of about 15,800 additional heat deaths in India between September 2026 and February 2027, give or take 1,600). Use it in essays on climate justice or disasters, and in GS1/GS3 answers on heat waves: heat deaths are scattered, under-counted and concentrated among outdoor workers, the elderly and the poor, so they draw less response than a cyclone that kills fewer. Argue for city heat action plans, cause-of-death audits and treating extreme heat as a disaster for relief funding.

“Labour is not a commodity; freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress.”

— **International Labour Conference** · *Declaration of Philadelphia* (Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation), Part I (a) and (b), adopted 10 May 1944

Use in: Labour, strikes and essential services (today's strike by Delhi's contractual bus drivers, who earn ₹862 a day with no paid leave or social security, the Delhi High Court's question on why ESMA has not been invoked, and the three-day bank strike). Use it in GS2/GS3 answers on the labour codes and contract work, and in essays on the dignity of work: the Supreme Court held in *All India Bank Employees' Association* (1961) that Article 19(1)(c) does not guarantee a right to strike, but a state that may keep essential services running must also ask why the people who run them had to strike. Pair it with Articles 39(e) and 43.

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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 is about who may lawfully act in an institution's name. A three-member Election Commission is accused of being run by one member, the law that picks its members now waits for a Constitution Bench, a District Magistrate's personal liability for a detention is suspended while the detention itself is argued, and an accident tribunal is told to put a floor price on a homemaker's care. The lesson is the same each time: authority must be traceable to a statute or the Constitution, and when it is not, the citizen pays first — with a vote, a health card, months in jail, or a language she cannot use in her own district office.

1.1 Election Commission Calls Every Decision 'Unanimous'; Former CECs Invoke Section 18 as Annual Roll Revision Stalls

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 23. This magazine carded The Indian Express investigation on September 23: Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi objected on record at least 14 times between October 2025 and August 2026 to decisions taken in the Commission's name without their knowledge. New today are the Election Commission of India's (ECI) answer, the law it must satisfy, and the first measurable costs. The ECI first said, in a source-based clarification, that all decisions, "including SIR" (the Special Intensive Revision, a fresh re-enumeration of voters), were "unanimous and with the approval of both the Election Commissioners and the Chief Election Commissioner", The Hindu reports. A press note signed by Deputy Director P Pawan then called differing views "a normal part of deliberation" and said all orders "carry full legal sanctions" under the 2023 Act. It did not say, The Indian Express notes, who approved the change to Form 6 (the application for new voters), who authorised appeals in the ECI's name against restored voters in West Bengal, why an audit of ECINet (the Commission's digital roll platform) went unanswered, or why the full Commission did not meet between May and August. The governing law is Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023: business is transacted unanimously as far as possible, and where members differ, the majority decides. Former CEC S Y Quraishi argues that two of three members are a majority, so decisions taken without them are "prima facie ultra vires" — beyond legal power; he cites 38.31 lakh West Bengal appeals, 16.10 lakh reportedly filed by the ECI seeking deletions. The Economic Times reports that the annual Special Summary Revision, held since 1958 to enrol those turning 18, has not resumed after the 2024 cycle, and confidential reports of nearly 50 transferred officials are stuck because the three could not sign together. In Goa, 97 voters cleared by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) stayed off the roll because ECINet had no "rollback", though Deputy Election Commissioner Sanjay Kumar wrote that the "IT system cannot block necessary action"; they also lose access to the Goa Mediclaim Scheme. The Opposition demands the CEC's removal, a Supreme Court-monitored probe and a halt to the SIR; the BJP calls it a "smear campaign". Syllabus: GS2, constitutional bodies and the Representation of the People Acts.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Anoop Baranwal (2023) makes an independent Election Commission a constitutional expectation → the 2023 Act gives the government two of three selectors but keeps collective decision-making in Section 18 → the SIR runs on a centralised ECINet and a revised Form 6 over two Commissioners' written objections → the objections surface, the Commission calls every decision 'unanimous' and former CECs demand the record → routine work such as the annual summary revision stalls

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- Article 324 entrusts elections to a Commission, and the Commission has been multi-member since 1993** — Article 324(1) vests 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 in the Election Commission. Article 324(2) says the Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners as the President may fix, appointed subject to any law made by Parliament. Two Election Commissioners appointed in October 1989 lost office when their posts were abolished in January 1990, and the three-member form has run continuously since October 1993. Under Article 324(5), the CEC can be removed only in the manner and on the grounds of a Supreme Court judge, while the other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation — a protection of tenure, not a hierarchy of votes.
- Section 18 makes unanimity the norm and the majority the rule of decision** —

Section 18 of the 2023 Act, which replaced the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991, allows the Commission to regulate its procedure and allocate business among its members only by unanimous decision, requires all other business to be transacted unanimously as far as possible, and provides that where the CEC and the Election Commissioners differ, the opinion of the majority prevails. The 1991 law carried the same rule after its 1993 amendment. In *T N Seshan v Union of India* (1995), a Constitution Bench upheld this design and rejected the claim that the CEC stands above his colleagues in decision-making, warning, in a line Quraishi quotes today, that 'it would be wrong to project the individual and eclipse the Election Commission'. The CEC presides, but two members can outvote him.

3. **The roll is the legal product of a statutory officer, the ERO, working under rules the Centre frames** — Under Section 13B of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the electoral roll of each Assembly constituency is prepared and revised by an Electoral Registration Officer, an officer of the government or a local authority designated by the Commission in consultation with the State government. Section 21 provides for revision before each general election and at other times the Commission directs, and permits a special revision at any time for recorded reasons. The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 — which prescribe Form 6 for new electors, Form 7 for objections and Form 8 for corrections — are made by the Central Government under Section 28 after consulting the Commission, which is why Mr. Joshi advised that Form 6 could not be altered without amending the Rules. A revision may be intensive (fresh house-to-house enumeration) or summary (updating the existing roll through claims and objections).
4. **The roll is the gateway to universal adult franchise, and completed elections can be challenged only by petition** — Article 325 provides one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency and bars exclusion on grounds only of religion, race, caste or sex, and Article 326 guarantees adult suffrage to every citizen aged 18, the age lowered from 21 by the 61st Amendment Act, 1988. The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 amended Section 14 of the 1950 Act to create four qualifying dates a year — 1 January, 1 April, 1 July and 1 October. Article 329(b) says no election to Parliament or a State legislature can be called in question except by an election petition, which under the Representation of the People Act, 1951 must be filed within 45 days of the result. Removal of a CEC follows the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968: a motion signed by at least 100 Lok Sabha or 50 Rajya Sabha members, an inquiry committee, and a special majority in both Houses.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS2 names this exact topic** — The syllabus asks for 'appointment to various constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various constitutional bodies' and the 'salient features of the Representation of People's Act'. Mains questions on the Election Commission have moved from the Model Code of Conduct and electoral reforms towards its independence and credibility. Today's story adds a dimension examiners are likely to use: the internal accountability of a multi-member body, not only its independence from the government.
2. **Prelims keeps returning to Article 324 and the mechanics of the roll** — UPSC has repeatedly tested who appoints and removes the CEC and the Election Commissioners, whether the multi-member structure comes from the Constitution or from statute, and how members are protected. The four qualifying dates, the statutory role of the ERO and the difference between summary and intensive revision are the natural next questions after two years of SIR coverage.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Article 324(2) provides that the Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners as the

President may from time to time fix.

- Under Article 324(5), an Election Commissioner other than the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 provides that the Commission's business shall as far as possible be transacted unanimously and, where members differ, according to the opinion of the majority.
- In *T N Seshan v Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld the multi-member Election Commission and decision-making by majority among the CEC and the Election Commissioners.
- Under Section 13B of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the electoral roll for each Assembly constituency is prepared and revised by an Electoral Registration Officer.
- The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 provides four qualifying dates in a year — 1 January, 1 April, 1 July and 1 October — for enrolment as a voter.
- Under Article 329(b), an election to Parliament or a State legislature can be called in question only by an election petition.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The Commission's rebuttal answers a question nobody asked** — The charge is not that the three members disagreed and then voted; it is that decisions were issued in the Commission's name without being placed before two of its three members. Saying that 'all decisions' were 'unanimous' does not meet that charge, and it sits uneasily with the record the papers describe: Mr. Sandhu's August 13 note calling the Form 6 change 'unauthorised/illegal', and the two Commissioners jointly setting aside the July 28 work-allocation order on July 30. The Commission is right that recorded differences are normal in a collegial body, and the final SIR orders may well carry all three signatures. But the question is documentary, and minutes and file notings can settle it. Former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa, speaking to *The Hindu*, put it exactly: the only refutation is a record showing the two were present when the decisions were taken.
- 2. Section 18 turns a political row into a question of legal authority, but it cannot unwind elections** — If a statute vests a power in a three-member Commission and two members were bypassed, the act is open to challenge as *ultra vires*; Quraishi's phrase is that 'a letterhead cannot supply authority that the statute withholds'. The Form 6 change carries a second defect, because the form is prescribed by rules the Central Government frames, so even a unanimous Commission could not alter it by a direction. The most exposed acts are those litigated in the ECI's name, such as the 16.10 lakh West Bengal appeals. The Opposition's demand for fresh elections, however, runs into Article 329(b): a completed election can be questioned only by an election petition within 45 days, not by a later finding of internal irregularity. The realistic remedy is prospective — withdrawing unauthorised decisions and restoring the Rules — not undoing mandates.
- 3. A collegial body fails first in its routine, not in its headlines** — The *Economic Times* report shows the price of a Commission that cannot act together. The annual Special Summary Revision, a convention since 1958, has not resumed after the 2024 cycle, so the four qualifying dates Parliament created in 2021 open doors with no one on the other side, and poll-bound Uttar Pradesh and Goa, *The Economic Times* notes, should have had one before their 2027 elections. Nearly 50 officials' confidential reports wait because the three members could not sign together. The 2023 Act assumes cooperation: a rule of unanimity or majority presupposes that the members meet and

see the files. Published rules of business, a minimum frequency of full-Commission meetings and time-bound disposal of routine files by majority would stop disagreement over the SIR from freezing everything else.

4. **Software is quietly becoming the rule-maker, and the law has not caught up** — The ERO is the statutory authority on who is a voter, yet in Goa an ERO's decision, taken after the hearing the Supreme Court ordered on January 29, could not be recorded because permissions on ECINet are set in Delhi. Deputy Election Commissioner Sanjay Kumar wrote that EROs have powers under Sections 21 and 21A and that the IT system cannot block necessary action, and nothing followed. Manoj Kumar Jha's formulation, that a constitutional right cannot become subordinate to software architecture, is the correct legal principle. Because the Goa Medclaim Scheme, which pays for dialysis, transplants and chemotherapy, is open only to voters, a missing rollback button becomes a denial of health care. The Commission's counter-argument is real — central control can stop local manipulation of rolls — so the answer is auditability, through the independent audit Mr. Joshi proposed in May, not a crude choice between central and local control.
5. **Beneath the institutional quarrel lies a design choice about the burden of proof** — Surjit S Bhalla frames the SIR as a choice between two errors: striking off a genuine voter, or leaving a ghost on the roll. He argues the costlier error is disenfranchisement, because a wrongly deleted voter loses the vote with certainty, while a ghost does harm only if someone impersonates him past polling agents, indelible ink and the tendered ballot. The 2002 revision presumed an existing entry correct until shown otherwise; the SIR demanded a fresh form from every voter and dropped those whose forms did not return. The CEC's 'zero appeals' in 12 States measures how hard it is to appeal, not how accurate the roll is. The counter-view, which Bhalla concedes, is that a roll full of the dead and departed also diminishes every genuine vote; the answer is to keep the burden on the State and publish estimates of wrongful deletion.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"The Chief Election Commissioner is not the Election Commission of India." In the light of recent disclosures of dissent within the Commission, examine the legal framework governing decision-making in the Election Commission and suggest measures to make it internally accountable without compromising its independence. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — Open with Article 324 and the three-member Commission, and the finding that two Election Commissioners objected on record at least 14 times in ten months to decisions taken in the Commission's name without their knowledge.
2. **Body — the law** — Explain Section 18 of the 2023 Act (unanimous allocation of business, unanimity as far as possible, majority where members differ), its origin in the 1991 Act, and T N Seshan (1995). Add the ERO's statutory role under Section 13B of the 1950 Act and the Centre's rule-making power over Form 6 under Section 28.
3. **Body — what the episode reveals** — Use the Form 6 change, the centralisation of ECINet, the West Bengal appeals (38.31 lakh, 16.10 lakh reportedly by the ECI), the Goa rollback case and the stalled Special Summary Revision to show legal and administrative costs. Present fairly the Commission's view that differing notes are normal deliberation.
4. **Body — reforms** — Suggest published rules of business, recorded minutes with votes disclosed after decisions, an independent audit of ECINet, limits on the IT division's control over EROs, and time-bound routine functions. Note that remedies against completed elections lie only through election petitions under Article 329(b).
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that independence from the executive and collegiality within are two halves of the same guarantee, and that a body demanding strict legal

compliance from nearly a billion voters must comply strictly with the law that governs it.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Electoral Registration Officer in a Goa constituency. You have heard an elector, accepted her documents and ordered her restoration, but ECINet will not let you record it. What do you do?

Approach: My order under the Representation of the People Act, 1950 is the legal act and the software only records it, so I would pass a written, reasoned order and keep it on the physical file. I would report the case in writing to the District Election Officer and the Chief Electoral Officer and ask for specific written directions. I would help the elector apply afresh on Form 6 as a safeguard, recording that this is without prejudice to my original order, so that she does not lose scheme benefits tied to the roll. If the roll is published without her name, the file will show the State's error, not hers.

Q2. As an Election Commissioner who believes decisions are being issued in the Commission's name without you, what is the right course — record dissent, go public, or resign?

Approach: The first duty is to the statute: record the objection on file, cite Section 18, and ask that the matter be placed before the full Commission. Escalation outside needs care; writing to the Cabinet Secretary, as Mr. Sandhu and Mr. Joshi did, invites the objection that a constitutional body is drawing the executive into its affairs. Going public is justified once internal routes are exhausted and voters' rights are at stake — former CEC O P Rawat told The Hindu the two could have gone public at once rather than waiting ten months — but it should be done with documents, not adjectives. Resignation is a last resort, because it removes the very majority the law relies on.

Q3. An interview board asks: should the Election Commission's internal notes and votes be public?

Approach: Deliberations in progress deserve protection, because members must be able to argue freely before a decision. Once a decision is taken, the public has a strong claim to know whether it was unanimous or by majority and under what authority, which is what Quraishi and Rawat have asked for. The Commission is a public authority under the Right to Information Act, 2005, and a practice of publishing decisions with the voting record would have pre-empted the present crisis. Transparency after the fact strengthens independence rather than weakening it.

1.2 Supreme Court Splits on Referring EC Appointment Law; Justice Datta Invokes 'Perception Test', Defends Collegium

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 23. A two-judge Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma split 1-1 on the Centre's plea to refer petitions against the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 to a Constitution Bench — a bench of at least five judges that settles substantial questions of constitutional interpretation. When two judges disagree there is no majority, so both agreed the papers go to Chief Justice of India Surya Kant to constitute a bench to decide the validity of Section 7 and other provisions, The Economic Times reports, since routing it first through a three-judge bench would be of "little worth", as The Indian Express quotes the order. The Act replaced the CJI, whom the five-judge Anoop Baranwal judgment of March 2023 had placed on an interim selection panel, with a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister, alongside the PM and the Leader of Opposition. Justice Datta held that no reference was needed because Anoop Baranwal had settled that appointments cannot remain under "exclusive executive control". Prima facie, he said, a Minister "cannot be expected to defy his own nominator" given collective responsibility under Article 75(3), leaving the Leader of Opposition's role "largely ornamental"; "it is not enough for the ECI to be independent, it must also appear to be independent". An umpire picked by one captain carries "the patina of suspicion" even when correct, he said, and the arrangement fails the "perception test". Justice Sharma held that since no authoritative ruling on the Act's validity exists, Article 145(3) requires at least five judges. Both flagged delay — the original plea was filed in 2015, referred in 2018 and decided in 2023 — and

urged a permanent five-judge bench: “Self-introspection indeed is required.” In the 70-page verdict, Justice Datta called the Solicitor General’s argument that courts cannot demand an outsider on the EC panel when the Collegium has none “disingenuous, evasive and disquieting”, said “judges appoint judges” is “a myth”, criticised the Centre’s “selective” clearance and “piecemeal approvals” of Collegium recommendations, and said the Collegium, despite “opacity and imperfections”, remains “the most viable option”. Justice Sharma read the Solicitor General’s point as one about separation of powers, not an attack on the Collegium. Syllabus: GS2, constitutional bodies, the judiciary and separation of powers.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Article 324(2) leaves Election Commission appointments to a law Parliament does not make for seven decades → a 2015 petition leads to Anoop Baranwal (2023) and an interim panel of the PM, Leader of Opposition and CJI → the 2023 Act replaces the CJI with a PM-nominated Cabinet Minister, a 2:1 executive majority → a two-judge bench splits on whether Article 145(3) demands five judges → the CJI must now constitute a Constitution Bench while the Commission chosen under the Act faces its own credibility crisis

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Article 324(2) left appointments to Parliament, and Anoop Baranwal filled the silence** — Article 324(2) provides that the CEC and other Election Commissioners shall be appointed by the President subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament. For over seven decades no such law existed, and appointments were made on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers. In *Anoop Baranwal v Union of India* (March 2023), a five-judge Constitution Bench held that, until Parliament legislated, appointments should be made on the advice of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party) and the CJI. Independence in the appointment and functioning of the Commission is, as Justice Datta put it on Wednesday, ‘well-settled’ law and part of the Basic Structure through free and fair elections. Earlier, the Dinesh Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms (1990) and the Law Commission’s 255th Report (2015) had also recommended a non-executive element in the selection.
- 2. The 2023 Act gives the executive two of three votes on the Selection Committee** — Under Section 7 of the 2023 Act, the President appoints the CEC and Election Commissioners on the recommendation of a Selection Committee of the Prime Minister as chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the single largest opposition party) and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. Per PRS, a Search Committee prepares a panel of five names, but the Selection Committee may consider persons outside it, and its recommendation is not invalid merely because of a vacancy in the Committee. Appointees must hold or have held a post equivalent to Secretary to the Government of India, and serve six years or until 65, whichever is earlier. The same formula of PM, Leader of Opposition and a PM-nominated Cabinet Minister selects the Chief Information Commissioner under Section 12(3) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, while the CBI Director is chosen by the PM, the Leader of Opposition and the CJI or a judge he nominates.
- 3. Article 145(3) reserves unsettled constitutional questions for at least five judges** — Article 145(3) fixes five as the minimum number of judges to decide any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution, or to hear a presidential reference under Article 143. A case does not qualify merely because it involves the Constitution; the question must be unsettled, one the Court has never authoritatively answered, and that is exactly where Justices Datta and Sharma differed. When a two-judge bench is divided, the matter goes to the CJI, who as master of the roster decides whether and how to constitute a larger bench; a split does not by itself compel a Constitution Bench. The Karnataka hijab case, split in October 2022, and a split this year on Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 are recent examples, and the hijab reference remains pending, *The Indian Express* notes.
- 4. The Collegium is a judge-made system the Court has defended against Parliament** —

	Articles 124(2) and 217(1) require the President to appoint Supreme Court and High Court judges after 'consultation' with the CJI and other judges. In <i>S P Gupta (1981)</i>, the First Judges case, the Court held that consultation did not mean concurrence, giving the executive primacy; the Second Judges case (<i>Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association, 1993</i>) reversed this and created the Collegium, and the Third Judges case (1998), a presidential reference under Article 143, enlarged it to the CJI and the four senior-most judges for Supreme Court appointments. The 99th Amendment Act, 2014 created a National Judicial Appointments Commission of the CJI, two senior judges, the Law Minister and two eminent persons, which a five-judge bench struck down by 4:1 in October 2015 as violating judicial independence. Appointments still pass through executive processing, intelligence inputs and the President's warrant — the stages Justice Datta relied on to call 'judges appoint judges' a myth.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	Two syllabus lines meet in one judgment — GS2 lists 'appointment to various constitutional posts', 'separation of powers between various organs' and the 'structure, organisation and functioning of the Judiciary'. Mains has asked about judicial appointments and the NJAC, and separately about the Election Commission's independence; this judgment lets a candidate answer both with one example of how appointment design shapes institutional credibility. Prelims loves selection committees and procedural articles — Composition of selection panels is a staple — who selects the CIC, the CVC, the Lokpal, the NHRC chairperson and now the CEC. Article 145(3), presidential references under Article 143 and the procedure after a split verdict are the kind of provisions UPSC tests through statement-based questions. The 'perception test' is a GS4 idea as much as a legal one — Justice Datta's line restates the maxim that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done. Ethics papers test exactly this: public trust as part of legitimacy, and the appearance of bias.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 324(2) provides that the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners by the President is subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament. - Under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (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 and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. - In <i>Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023)</i>, a five-judge Bench directed that, until Parliament made a law, the CEC and Election Commissioners be appointed on the advice of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India. - Article 145(3) requires a bench of at least five judges to decide a case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution or to hear a reference under Article 143. - Article 75(3) makes the Council of Ministers collectively responsible to the House of the People. - The Collegium system originated in the Second Judges case (1993) and was enlarged in the Third Judges case (1998), which arose from a presidential reference under Article 143. - The National Judicial Appointments Commission, created by the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act, 2014, was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015.
ANALYSIS	The perception test is Justice Datta's strongest argument and, in law, his most

contestable one — Courts routinely demand the appearance of independence from judges and tribunals, and the standard fits an umpire of elections. But a statute is tested against constitutional text and the Basic Structure, and Article 324(2) expressly lets Parliament legislate on appointments; Anoop Baranwal itself said its panel would operate only until Parliament made a law. The government will argue that Parliament did exactly what the Court invited, using a formula already accepted for the Chief Information Commissioner. The petitioners reply that Baranwal located independence in the Basic Structure, so the law must satisfy the principle, not merely fill the gap. Whether the appearance of executive dominance, without proof of actual partiality, can invalidate a law is precisely the unsettled question — which is why the reference matters.

2. **Justice Sharma has the better procedural case, Justice Datta the better institutional one** — Article 145(3) is mandatory in its wording, and a two-judge bench striking down a central law on Basic Structure grounds would invite the objection that it lacked the numbers to do so. The Act has never been examined, and whether Parliament may exclude a neutral selector is, as Justice Sharma says, a question arising for the first time. Justice Datta's concern is cost: Anoop Baranwal took eight years from petition to verdict, and the hijab reference has waited four. A reference that takes as long would outlast the six-year terms of Commissioners appointed under the law. Both judges converge on the real reform, a standing Constitution Bench, and the CJI can honour both views by constituting a bench quickly and fixing a hearing schedule.
3. **Delay is itself a decision, and today it has a face** — While the challenge waits, the Act operates, and the Commission chosen under it is at the centre of the dissent crisis described in the previous card. The Hindu's editorial draws the link explicitly: it was this panel that chose Mr. Kumar as CEC. No court has found any appointment unlawful, and the Act is presumed valid until struck down. But when a selection design fails the perception test in a judge's prima facie view, and the person selected is simultaneously accused of bypassing his colleagues, each problem magnifies the other. The Court cannot cure the first quickly, but a prompt Constitution Bench would stop the uncertainty from compounding.
4. **The Collegium detour exposes a symmetry both branches would rather avoid** — The Solicitor General's argument was rhetorical but pointed: if outsiders are unnecessary in the Collegium, why insist on one for the Election Commission? Justice Datta's reply — that the executive already holds the last word through consultation, intelligence inputs, processing and the President's imprimatur, and uses it selectively, letting recommended names 'gather dust for years', as The Hindu reports him saying — is a strong factual answer. Yet the executive's power is essentially a veto by delay, initiation lies wholly with judges, and the Collegium publishes no reasons. Both appointment systems share one flaw: a dominant actor and an opaque process. Justice Datta's own phrase points to the cure: not transferring primacy from one organ to another, but 'calibrated checks and balances'.
5. **There are ways to make the panel credible short of putting the CJI on it** — A judge on an executive selection panel raises its own separation-of-powers problem, since the Court may later hear challenges to appointments its head helped make. Alternatives exist: requiring the Leader of Opposition's concurrence, or written reasons whenever he is overruled; a genuinely independent search committee whose shortlist binds the panel; or a wider panel including presiding officers of Parliament, as the Second Administrative Reforms Commission suggested. The design goal is simple — no single side should be able to appoint alone. Parliament could adopt such a change voluntarily and make the Constitution Bench's task easier, which would be the most credible answer to the perception test.

	be independent.” Critically examine the selection mechanism under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 in the light of the Anoop Baranwal judgment, and explain why the challenge to it has been placed before a Constitution Bench. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Begin with Article 324(2), the absence of a law until 2023, and the split verdict of September 23, 2026 that sent the challenge to the CJI to constitute a Constitution Bench. 2. Body — from Baranwal to the Act — Explain the interim panel of PM, Leader of Opposition and CJI laid down in March 2023, and the Act’s Section 7 panel of PM, Leader of Opposition and a PM-nominated Cabinet Minister; note the 2:1 executive majority and the Search Committee’s non-binding shortlist. 3. Body — the two opinions — Present Justice Datta’s view (settled principle, collective responsibility under Article 75(3), ‘largely ornamental’ Leader of Opposition, perception test) and Justice Sharma’s (first ruling on validity, Article 145(3) requires five judges). Mention the eight-year delay in Anoop Baranwal and the proposal for a permanent Constitution Bench. 4. Body — evaluation — Weigh Parliament’s express power under Article 324(2) against the Basic Structure; compare with the CIC and CBI Director panels; cite the Goswami Committee and the Law Commission’s 255th Report; suggest alternatives such as the Leader of Opposition’s concurrence or a binding independent shortlist. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that an election umpire’s legitimacy depends on both sides trusting the selection, and that Parliament and the Court should converge on a design in which no single side can appoint alone.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Union Law Secretary. The split verdict has gone to the CJI. What would you advise the government? Approach: I would advise the government to defend the Act on the strength of Article 324(2), which expressly allows Parliament to legislate, and on the precedent of similar panels such as the one for the Chief Information Commissioner. I would also point out that the Commission’s credibility is itself under question, and that a voluntary amendment — written reasons whenever the Leader of Opposition dissents, or a binding independent shortlist — would reduce the litigation risk. I would recommend supporting an early hearing, because prolonged uncertainty harms the Commission more than an adverse ruling would. The government’s interest is a trusted umpire, not a won case. Q2. An interview board asks: is the Collegium system defensible? Approach: It is defensible as a guard against executive capture of the judiciary, which is why the Court struck down the NJAC in 2015, and Justice Datta is right that the executive retains real influence through processing and selective clearance. But its opacity is a genuine weakness: it gives no public reasons and applies no criteria the public can see. The best reform keeps judicial primacy while publishing criteria, recording reasons and setting time limits for both the Collegium and the government. Independence and accountability are not opposites. Q3. As an officer asked to propose how the Supreme Court can decide Constitution Bench references faster, what would you suggest? Approach: I would suggest, as the Bench itself did, a standing five-judge Constitution Bench sitting on fixed days, with references listed by age and public importance. Written submissions with page limits, fixed time for oral argument and a published calendar of pending references would add discipline. A periodic public report on pending references would make delay visible and therefore harder to tolerate. An

eight-year wait for a ruling on how election umpires are chosen is itself a constitutional problem.

1.3 Road-Accident Compensation Explained, as Supreme Court Values a Homemaker's Care at ₹30,000 a Month

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Hindu's explainer today, by New Delhi lawyers Kartikey Singh and Barkha Dwivedi, sets out how India compensates road-crash victims and flags a new Supreme Court head of damages for homemakers. India has the world's largest road network, about 6.7 million km (the U.S. has 6.59 million km, China 5.49 million km), and the world's highest road fatalities. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' Road Accidents in India 2024 report counts 4,87,707 accidents that killed 1,77,175 people — about 485 a day, or 20 an hour — and injured 4,71,441; crashes cost an estimated 3.14% of GDP. The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 governs. Section 165 lets States set up Motor Accidents Claims Tribunals (MACTs), special courts for accident claims; under Section 166, the injured, the owner of damaged property or, in a death, the deceased's legal representatives (heirs entitled to sue) may claim. Appeals lie to the High Court under Section 173 within 90 days, on depositing ₹25,000 or 50% of the award, whichever is less. In *Reena v Managing Director, KSRTC* (2026), the Court held that acquittal in the criminal case does not affect the claim, since the two apply different standards of proof. Section 146 makes third-party insurance compulsory; under Section 150 insurers must satisfy awards, and even where a defence succeeds courts may order them to "pay and recover" from the owner. A separate no-fault route pays ₹5 lakh for death and ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt without proof of negligence. Section 168 requires "just" compensation, which Sarla Verma (2009) and Pranay Sethi (2017) standardised into four heads: loss of income, loss of estate, funeral expenses and loss of consortium (companionship). Recent rulings refine the inputs: Saroj (2024) — age from the school-leaving certificate, not Aadhaar; Rashmirekha Tripathy (2026) — the preceding year's income-tax return for salaried victims; Jitender Kumar (2025) — all legal representatives may claim regardless of dependency. In *Shishu Pal* (2026), on a homemaker's death, the Court fixed a minimum notional income of ₹30,000 a month under a new head of "loss of domestic care", rising 10% cumulatively every three years, recognising that cooking, cleaning and caregiving support the paid workforce. Syllabus: GS2 on statutory bodies and vulnerable sections, GS1 on women's unpaid work.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rapid motorisation on the world's largest road network → the world's highest road deaths, 1,77,175 in 2024 → the MV Act, 1988 routes claims to MACTs backed by compulsory third-party insurance → the Supreme Court standardises 'just' compensation in *Sarla Verma* (2009) and *Pranay Sethi* (2017) → later rulings fix the inputs of age, income and heirs, and *Shishu Pal* (2026) puts a floor price on a homemaker's unpaid care

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Motor Vehicles Act turns a private tort into an insured statutory claim** — A tort is a civil wrong, such as negligent driving, for which the wrongdoer pays damages. The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, which replaced the 1939 Act, converts this into a statutory scheme: Chapter XI makes third-party insurance compulsory (Section 146) and obliges insurers to satisfy awards (Section 150), while Chapter XII sets up Claims Tribunals. Under Section 165, a MACT member must be, or have been, a High Court judge or a District Judge, or be qualified for appointment as one, and Section 175 bars civil courts from entertaining claims a Tribunal can decide. The Tribunal follows a summary procedure, its award must be 'just' under Section 168, and it may add interest under Section 171.
- 2. Alongside fault-based claims run no-fault, hit-and-run and emergency-care provisions** — The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019 replaced the old no-fault provision with fixed compensation of ₹5 lakh for death and ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt, payable without the claimant proving negligence. For hit-and-run cases, where the vehicle cannot be traced, Section 161 as amended provides ₹2 lakh for death and ₹50,000 for grievous hurt, paid through the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund the 2019 amendment created. The amendment also defined the 'golden hour' — the first hour after a traumatic injury, when prompt care is most likely to prevent death — and protected Good Samaritans who help victims (Section 134A). Under Section 162, the PM-RAHAT cashless treatment scheme, notified on May 5, 2025 and launched on

	February 13, 2026, covers up to ₹1.5 lakh per victim for seven days from the accident, per a PIB release. 3. The multiplier method turns a lost life into a present value — For loss of income, the Tribunal takes the deceased's annual income, adds 'future prospects', deducts a share for personal expenses and multiplies the balance by an age-based multiplier representing remaining working life. Under <i>Pranay Sethi</i> (2017), decided by a five-judge Constitution Bench, future prospects add 50%, 30% and 15% for permanent salaried employees aged below 40, 40-50 and 50-60, and 40%, 25% and 10% for the self-employed or those on fixed salaries, with nothing above 60. Under <i>Sarla Verma</i> (2009), the personal-expense deduction is one-third for two to three dependants, one-fourth for four to six and one-fifth for seven or more, and usually one-half for an unmarried victim; the multiplier falls from 18 for ages 15-25 to 5 for 66-70. <i>Pranay Sethi</i> fixed loss of estate at ₹15,000, funeral expenses at ₹15,000 and consortium at ₹40,000 for each eligible member — spousal, parental or filial — each rising 10% every three years. 4. Courts have been valuing homemakers' unpaid work for over a decade — In <i>Arun Kumar Agrawal v National Insurance Co.</i> (2010), the Supreme Court held that a homemaker's services must be valued in money, with a concurring opinion noting that the 2001 Census had counted those doing household work as non-workers alongside beggars and prostitutes. In <i>Kirti v Oriental Insurance Co.</i> (2021), the Court held that fixing notional income for homemakers recognises the economic value of their labour, citing the National Statistical Office's Time Use Survey 2019, under which women spent about 299 minutes a day on unpaid domestic services against 97 minutes for men. <i>Shishu Pal</i> (2026) goes further by creating a separate head, loss of domestic care, with a floor of ₹30,000 a month. The System of National Accounts that India follows excludes household services produced for own use from GDP, which is why courts, not statistics, have had to put a price on them.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. One story, three syllabus lines — GS2 covers 'mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections' and quasi-judicial bodies such as tribunals; GS1 covers the 'role of women' and social empowerment, where unpaid care work is a recurring theme. Mains questions on the invisibility of women's work and on the effectiveness of tribunals can both draw on this material. 2. Road safety has an SDG and international frame that Prelims can test — SDG target 3.6 aimed to halve global road deaths and injuries by 2020; the Stockholm Declaration of 2020 and the second UN Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030) reset the goal to halving deaths by 2030. The 2019 amendment's provisions on Good Samaritans, the golden hour, hit-and-run compensation and cashless treatment are natural statement-based questions. 3. Essay and ethics papers ask how the State values a life — Compensation formulae raise the uncomfortable question of how the State values a human life and whose life it values more. The multiplier method is a concrete answer — predicting lost earnings — and <i>Shishu Pal</i> shows the law revising that answer to count work that earns no wage.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Section 165 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 empowers State Governments to constitute Motor Accidents Claims Tribunals by notification. ● Section 146 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 prohibits the use of a motor vehicle in a public place without a policy of insurance covering third-party risks. ● After the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, fixed compensation of ₹5 lakh

for death and ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt is payable in motor accidents without the claimant having to prove negligence.

- Under the 'pay and recover' principle, an insurer may be directed to pay compensation to the victim first and recover it later from the owner or driver where a policy defence is established.
- In *National Insurance Co. Ltd. v Pranay Sethi* (2017), a five-judge Constitution Bench laid down additions for future prospects and fixed amounts for loss of estate, funeral expenses and consortium, to be enhanced by 10% every three years.
- The Motor Vehicles Act, as amended in 2019, defines the 'golden hour' as the period of one hour following a traumatic injury during which prompt medical care has the highest likelihood of preventing death.
- Section 134A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, inserted in 2019, protects Good Samaritans who assist accident victims from civil or criminal liability.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Formulae trade individual precision for speed, and in India that is the right trade —** Before Sarla Verma, awards for similar deaths varied widely across tribunals, which invited appeals and delayed payment to families who needed money quickly. Fixed multipliers, deductions and conventional heads make outcomes predictable, so insurers can settle rather than litigate and claimants can estimate what they are owed. The cost is rigidity: a 24-year-old engineering graduate and a 24-year-old casual labourer get the same multiplier, and future prospects capture only average career growth. The explainer's three-stage method shows both why the system works — once age, income and dependants are fixed, the rest is arithmetic — and why disputes now concentrate on those three facts.
- 2. The real injustice sits in the evidence, not in the formula —** Most crash victims are pedestrians, two-wheeler riders and informal workers who file no income-tax return, so Rashmirekha Tripathy's return-based rule helps the salaried minority while the rest fall back on the State's notified minimum wage. That systematically undervalues informal earnings, which are real but undocumented. Saroj's preference for the school-leaving certificate over Aadhaar reflects a sound point, because Aadhaar is not proof of date of birth, but it also disadvantages those who never finished school. Tribunals could more readily accept bank records, employer statements and local inquiry. Documentary hierarchies decide rights here, just as they do on the electoral roll.
- 3. Shishu Pal prices care, and the reasoning will travel beyond accident law —** A floor of ₹30,000 a month sits well above typical State minimum wages for unskilled work, and it expresses a judgment that a homemaker provides several services — cooking, cleaning, childcare, eldercare and household management — that would cost at least that much to replace. Once a court has put a floor price on care, the reasoning is available in maintenance, divorce and other compensation disputes. The counter-view is that a uniform national floor ignores regional differences in cost and will raise third-party premiums for all vehicle owners. There is also a feminist critique that pricing care treats it only as replaceable labour; but compensation law must produce a number, and a considered number is better than the zero the Census once implied.
- 4. 'Pay and recover' reveals a social-insurance scheme wearing the clothes of tort —** The victim of an unlicensed driver did nothing to cause the policy breach, so it would be unjust to deny her compensation because the insurer has a contractual defence against the owner. Pay and recover shifts the risk of the owner's default from the victim to the insurer, who is better placed to pursue it. The no-fault ₹5 lakh and the hit-and-run fund go further, paying regardless of fault or of whether the vehicle is ever found. The critique is cost: recovery from individual owners is slow and uncertain, and

	compliant owners bear the premiums. But where the victim is usually poorer than the vehicle owner, this transfer is defensible. 5. Compensation is the smallest part of the road-safety bill — At 485 deaths a day and a cost of about 3.14% of GDP, even perfect compensation only redistributes a loss that prevention could have avoided. The explainer lists the causes — over-speeding and reckless driving, poor road upkeep, inadequate driver training and weak emergency and trauma care — and each is a policy lever. The cashless golden-hour scheme addresses the last directly and is likely to save more lives than any enhancement of awards. Compensation law can still serve prevention: insurers who pay large awards have an incentive to price risk, fund road audits and reward safe drivers. The test of policy is whether deaths fall, not whether awards rise.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Motor accident compensation in India has evolved from a private remedy in tort into an instrument of social justice.” Discuss with reference to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Supreme Court’s recognition of the economic value of homemakers’ unpaid work. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State the scale — 4,87,707 accidents and 1,77,175 deaths in 2024 per MoRTH, costing about 3.14% of GDP — and name the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 as the governing law. 2. Body — the statutory scheme — Explain MACTs under Section 165, claims under Section 166, compulsory third-party insurance under Section 146, insurer liability and ‘pay and recover’ under Section 150, the no-fault ₹5 lakh and ₹2.5 lakh route, hit-and-run compensation and the cashless golden-hour scheme. 3. Body — judicial standardisation — Explain ‘just’ compensation under Section 168, Sarla Verma’s multiplier and deductions, Pranay Sethi’s future prospects and conventional heads, and the recent rulings on inputs — Saroj, Rashmirekha Tripathy and Jitender Kumar. 4. Body — social justice and gender — Discuss Arun Kumar Agrawal, Kirti and Shishu Pal’s ₹30,000 floor for loss of domestic care, and link them to the exclusion of unpaid care from GDP and the Time Use Survey. Note the gaps for informal workers and the delays in tribunals. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that compensation law now spreads risk across society and recognises women’s work, but that prevention — safer roads, trained drivers and trauma care — must carry the larger burden.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As District Magistrate chairing the district road safety committee, how would you reduce deaths and ensure families actually receive compensation? Approach: On prevention, I would use police and hospital data to identify black spots, get engineering fixes done, and ensure every trauma-care hospital in the district is enrolled in the cashless scheme so that no victim is turned away in the golden hour. On compensation, I would ensure that police send accident reports to the Claims Tribunal promptly, and ask the District Legal Services Authority to help poor families file claims and trace documents such as school certificates. I would track the time from accident to award as a performance indicator. A family that waits years for an award has been failed twice. Q2. You are a claims officer in a public-sector insurer. The driver in a fatal crash had no valid licence, and your manager wants you to contest the claim. What do you do? Approach: The law lets the insurer raise the licence defence, but courts routinely direct insurers to pay the victim first and recover from the owner. Contesting a claim we will very likely be told to pay only delays money to a grieving family and adds legal costs. I

would recommend paying under the pay-and-recover principle and pursuing recovery from the owner separately, and I would put this reasoning on file. That course is lawful, economical and humane.

Q3. An interview board asks: should unpaid domestic work be counted in GDP?

Approach: GDP deliberately excludes household services produced for own use, partly because they are hard to value and partly to keep the measure comparable across countries. But the exclusion makes women's work invisible and can distort policy, for example by treating a shift from home care to paid care as pure growth. The practical answer is a satellite account built on regular time-use surveys, which values unpaid work without altering core GDP. Kirti and Shishu Pal show that valuation is possible when the law needs it.

1.4 Supreme Court Stays Strictures and ₹5 Lakh Salary Penalty on Noida DM Over Student's NSA Detention

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 23. A Supreme Court bench of Justices Satish Chandra Sharma and N K Singh stayed the operation of the Allahabad High Court's September 2 judgment that had quashed the detention of Delhi University student Akriti Chaudhary under the National Security Act, 1980 (NSA), which lets the State detain a person without trial to prevent future threats to public order or security. The High Court had also passed strictures (adverse official remarks) against Gautam Buddha Nagar District Magistrate Medha Roopam — that her "conduct... is worthy of derision" and that she "is guilty of violating her oath of allegiance" to the Constitution — and directed that ₹5 lakh be paid from her salary to Ms. Chaudhary as compensation. The order reads: "till the matter is heard on merits, the operation of the impugned judgment, particularly para Nos. 27 to 33 shall remain stayed"; those paragraphs hold the strictures and the compensation direction, The Indian Express reports. The Economic Times says the order was passed in chambers and that the stayed paragraphs include the remark that "it shan't be long before the errant in the bureaucracy reduce the state of Uttar Pradesh to an Orwellian Dystopia". Ms. Chaudhary was arrested over a workers' protest in Noida in April and lodged in Kasna Jail. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the DM, said the strictures came "without notice to the DM" and that "it is one thing to quash the order of detention, quite another to castigate the officer", given "several administrative, hierarchical layers" before a DM decides. Senior Advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for Uttar Pradesh, called the High Court order "completely uncalled for" and said the May 12 order "was to maintain public order, not law and order". Senior Advocate Colin Gonsalves, for Ms. Chaudhary, said a ground of detention — that she instigated the mob — was untrue because she was in police custody before the violence, and that the State never produced her alleged speech. The bench observed that the High Court only had to see whether procedure was followed, not go into merits. The same day, Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, after a forest ranger was dragged to death by a dumper carrying illegally dug soil in Rajasthan's Pratapgarh, observed that preventive detention should be used in such incidents. This continues the preventive-detention thread carded on September 17 and 18. Syllabus: GS2, fundamental rights and the judiciary.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

A workers' protest in Noida in April → a Delhi University student is detained under the NSA on a May 12 order of the Gautam Buddha Nagar DM → the Allahabad High Court quashes the detention on September 2, castigates the DM and orders ₹5 lakh from her salary → Uttar Pradesh and the DM argue the court went into merits and condemned the officer unheard → the Supreme Court stays the judgment, particularly the strictures and the penalty, until a hearing on merits

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- Article 22 permits preventive detention but fences it with minimum safeguards —** Article 22(1) and (2) — the right to know the grounds of arrest, to consult a lawyer and to be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours — do not apply, under Article 22(3), to enemy aliens or to persons held under a preventive-detention law. Instead, Article 22(4) bars detention beyond three months unless an Advisory Board of persons qualified to be High Court judges reports sufficient cause; Article 22(5) requires the grounds to be communicated as soon as may be and the earliest opportunity to make a representation; Article 22(6) lets the authority withhold facts it considers against the public interest; and Article 22(7) lets Parliament prescribe the maximum period and

the Board's procedure. Parliament's power comes from Entry 9 of the Union List (defence, foreign affairs, security of India) and Entry 3 of the Concurrent List (security of a State, public order, essential supplies). The 44th Amendment, 1978 sought to cut the three months to two, but that provision has never been brought into force.

2. **The NSA lets a District Magistrate detain for up to twelve months, subject to layered review** — Section 3 of the National Security Act, 1980 allows the Centre or a State to detain a person to prevent acts prejudicial to the defence or security of India, relations with foreign powers, the security of the State, public order, or the maintenance of essential supplies and services. A State may empower a District Magistrate or Commissioner of Police to exercise the power for up to three months at a time; the officer must report at once, and the order lapses after 12 days unless the State approves it. Grounds must ordinarily be given within five days, and within ten in exceptional cases; the case goes to a three-member Advisory Board within three weeks, the Board reports within seven weeks, and under Section 11(4) the detainee cannot appear through a lawyer and the Board's report, except its opinion, is confidential. The maximum detention is 12 months (Section 13), Section 16 protects action taken in good faith from suits and prosecutions, and a Constitution Bench upheld the Act in *A K Roy v Union of India* (1982).
3. **Courts review detention for legality and relevance, and 'public order' is narrower than 'law and order'** — Through habeas corpus under Articles 32 and 226, courts ask whether the authority was competent, whether it applied its mind to relevant and existing material, whether grounds were served in time and the representation considered, and whether Advisory Board timelines were met; they do not substitute their own satisfaction for the officer's. In *Ram Manohar Lohia v State of Bihar* (1966), the Court described three concentric circles — law and order the widest, public order within it, security of the State the smallest — and in *Arun Ghosh v State of West Bengal* (1970) it asked whether an act disturbs the even tempo of the life of the community. In *Rekha v State of Tamil Nadu* (2011) and *Banka Sneha Sheela v State of Telangana* (2021), the Court held that preventive detention cannot replace ordinary criminal law where that law suffices. Since the 44th Amendment, Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended even during an Emergency, reversing the premise of *ADM Jabalpur* (1976).
4. **Compensation for unlawful detention is the State's public-law liability; personal liability needs a hearing** — In *Rudul Sah v State of Bihar* (1983) and *Bhim Singh v State of J&K* (1985), the Supreme Court awarded compensation for illegal detention in its writ jurisdiction, and in *Nilabati Behera v State of Orissa* (1993) it held such liability to be strict, with sovereign immunity no defence to a violation of Article 21. The liability is the State's, which may then recover from an erring officer after inquiry; in *Lucknow Development Authority v M K Gupta* (1994), the Court endorsed recovering such payments from officials responsible for harassment. Before a court makes disparaging remarks about a person, *State of U.P. v Mohammad Naim* (1964) requires that the person be before the court or have a chance to explain, that there be evidence on the point, and that the remarks be necessary to decide the case. That is the principle the Solicitor General invoked.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **Article 22 is among the most tested articles in Prelims** — UPSC has repeatedly framed statements on which Article 22 safeguards apply to preventive detainees, the three-month limit and the Advisory Board. The NSA's twelve-month maximum, the 12-day approval rule and the constitutional source of Parliament's power in the Union and Concurrent Lists are natural extensions.
2. **Mains links preventive detention to liberty and to the accountability of officers** — GS2 asks about fundamental rights and the judiciary, and GS4 about accountability and ethical governance. This case lets a candidate argue both sides in one answer — the

	State's duty to keep public order and the citizen's protection against misuse — with the newer question of who pays when a detention is unlawful. The same thread ran through this magazine's September 17 and 18 cards, including the Allahabad High Court's 'Orwellian dystopia' warning, which is a strong signal for an essay or Mains question.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 22(3), the safeguards in Article 22(1) and (2) do not apply to a person arrested or detained under a law providing for preventive detention. ● Article 22(4) bars preventive detention beyond three months unless an Advisory Board reports that there is sufficient cause for continued detention. ● The maximum period of detention under the National Security Act, 1980 is twelve months from the date of detention. ● Under the National Security Act, 1980, a detention order made by a District Magistrate lapses after twelve days unless approved by the State Government in the meantime. ● An Advisory Board under the National Security Act consists of three persons who are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as, judges of a High Court. ● In <i>A K Roy v Union of India</i> (1982), a Constitution Bench upheld the validity of the National Security Act, 1980. ● In <i>Nilabati Behera v State of Orissa</i> (1993), the Supreme Court held that the State is strictly liable to pay compensation for violation of Article 21 and cannot plead sovereign immunity.
ANALYSIS	1. The Supreme Court has separated two questions the High Court fused, and must say which it has stayed — Whether a detention was lawful and whether the officer who ordered it should personally pay are different questions with different standards. The High Court answered both in one judgment; the Supreme Court has stayed its operation 'particularly' in the paragraphs condemning and penalising the DM. The papers read the stay differently: The Indian Express headlines it as a stay of the order quashing the detention, while The Economic Times describes a stay of the ₹5 lakh direction and the strictures. Which reading is right matters enormously to Ms. Chaudhary, and the Court should clarify quickly, because a person's liberty should not become collateral in a dispute about an officer's reputation. 2. 'Procedure, not merits' is correct as a rule, but a non-existent ground is a procedural defect — The bench's observation reflects settled law: courts do not re-weigh the detaining officer's subjective satisfaction. The same law, however, holds that satisfaction must rest on existing and relevant material, and that detention cannot stand in for prosecution where ordinary law suffices. If, as Mr. Gonsalves argues, one ground was that Ms. Chaudhary instigated a mob when she was already in police custody, that ground was not weak but non-existent, which is non-application of mind — a classic ground of review, not a merits inquiry. Mr. Rohatgi's 'public order, not law and order' framing is the State's best answer, because the Lohia test turns on the effect on the community rather than on an individual incident. The final hearing will turn on which description fits the record. 3. Personal liability of a DM is a blunt instrument, but costless detention is worse — The Solicitor General is right that an NSA order passes through several layers: police inputs, the DM's satisfaction, State approval within 12 days and an Advisory Board. Fixing ₹5 lakh on the signatory alone misallocates blame, and condemning an officer unheard offends the Mohammad Naim principle, which is reason enough to stay those paragraphs. Yet the pattern the Allahabad High Court has described this month — repeated use of preventive detention against protesters and journalists — persists

	partly because it costs officers nothing. The established middle path is better: the State pays public-law compensation promptly, then holds an inquiry and recovers from officers found to have acted in bad faith. Section 16 of the NSA protects only good-faith action, and that protection should be tested, not assumed. 4. The same day, another bench asked for more preventive detention, and both can be right — Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, hearing a suo motu case on illegal sand mining across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, observed that preventive detention should be used after forest ranger Pratap Singh Chundawat was dragged by a dumper truck carrying illegally dug soil. Organised mining networks that repeatedly evade prosecution and endanger officials are close to the classic case for detention to protect public order. A student alleged to have incited a workers' protest sits at the other end, where ordinary criminal law and bail conditions suffice. The law's line should turn not on who is detained, but on whether ordinary law has demonstrably failed and whether the threat is to the life of the community. 5. The case shows why detention review must come earlier and more openly than a High Court ruling — The detention order is dated May 12, according to Mr. Rohatgi, and the High Court ruled on September 2, nearly four months later — beyond the three-month point at which Article 22(4) requires an Advisory Board's opinion to continue detention. If the Board approved it, the High Court was reviewing a detention already cleared by a quasi-judicial body; if it did not act in time, that is a serious failure of its own. The papers do not report what the Board found, and that silence reflects the design of the law: proceedings are closed, the report except its opinion is confidential, and the detainee cannot appear through a lawyer. Publishing anonymised Board outcomes and permitting legal representation would move scrutiny to the stage where it can still protect liberty.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Preventive detention is meant to be an exceptional power, yet its use against protesters and journalists repeatedly draws judicial censure. Examine the safeguards under Article 22 and the National Security Act, 1980, and discuss whether officers who pass unlawful detention orders should be held personally liable. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Start with the Supreme Court's September 23 stay of the Allahabad High Court judgment that had quashed a Delhi University student's NSA detention, castigated the Noida DM and ordered ₹5 lakh from her salary. 2. Body — constitutional and statutory safeguards — Set out Article 22(3) to (7), the legislative entries, and the NSA's grounds, 12-day approval rule, Advisory Board timelines, twelve-month maximum and Section 16 good-faith protection; cite A K Roy (1982). 3. Body — judicial review — Explain the procedure-versus-merits line, Lohia and Arun Ghosh on public order, and Rekha and Banka Sneha Sheela on detention as a substitute for prosecution. Apply them to the disputed 'instigation' ground and the State's 'public order, not law and order' argument. 4. Body — liability — Discuss Rudul Sah and Nilabati Behera on State liability, recovery from officers after inquiry (Lucknow Development Authority v M K Gupta), and the Mohammad Naim requirement of a hearing. Contrast the mining-mafia case as a legitimate use of detention. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the State should pay first and recover from officers who acted in bad faith after inquiry, and that faster, more transparent Advisory Boards are the real safeguard of liberty.
ADMINISTRATOR'S	Q1. As District Magistrate, the police ask you to detain a protest organiser under the

BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

NSA before a planned march. What do you check before signing?

Approach: I would ask whether there is specific, recent and relevant material showing a threat to public order — the life of the community — rather than a law-and-order problem that ordinary criminal law, prohibitory orders or bail conditions can handle. I would verify each ground against the record, including where the person actually was on the dates alleged, because a factually wrong ground vitiates the order. I would ensure the grounds can be served within the statutory time in a language the person understands, and that any representation reaches the State promptly. If the material is thin, I would decline and record my reasons; the signature is mine, not the police's.

Q2. You are the Chief Secretary. A High Court has ordered compensation from a DM's salary and condemned her without a hearing. How do you respond?

Approach: I would challenge the personal penalty and the strictures because she was not heard, as the State has done, since officers cannot function if they can be condemned unheard. But I would not treat the case as only about the DM: I would order a review of how this detention was proposed, approved and placed before the Advisory Board, and of all pending NSA detentions in the State. If the detention is finally held unlawful, the State should pay compensation promptly and then decide, after inquiry, whether anyone acted in bad faith. Standing by officers and protecting citizens are both my duties.

Q3. An interview board asks: is preventive detention compatible with a democratic Constitution?

Approach: The framers included it knowingly, amid the violence of Partition, but surrounded it with Article 22's safeguards, and India declared on ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that its Article 9 would be applied consistently with Article 22. It can be justified against organised threats that ordinary law cannot contain, such as networks that kill officials. It becomes incompatible with democracy when used to pre-empt dissent or to avoid the effort of prosecution. The test is exceptionality in practice, not only on paper, which requires faster review and real consequences for misuse.

1.5 Tulu Becomes Second Additional Administrative Language in Coastal Karnataka; SC Presses Centre on Class 6 Relief

THE NEWS Bengaluru and New Delhi. The Indian Express today explains a decision taken last week and carded here on September 21: Karnataka's D K Shivakumar-led Congress government, at a special Cabinet meeting in Mangaluru, accorded Tulu the status of "second additional administrative language" in the coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi. Government offices in the two districts can now use Tulu for official communication alongside Kannada, and the Cabinet has provided ₹82 lakh every year for translation, training and related activities. New in today's report: Tulu is classified with Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam as one of the five Dravidian languages; it is spoken mainly in the two districts and in parts of northern Kerala, has about 1.8 to 2 million native speakers despite migration to Mumbai and Bengaluru, and carries traditions such as Yakshagana and Bhoota Kola. It once had its own script but is now largely written in Kannada script. Speakers argue that Tulu was denied the status given to regional languages such as Konkani or Kodava, and that, unlike other Dravidian languages, it did not get a linguistic State in the 1956 reorganisation. The obstacles are practical: few people know the Tulu script, the language is not taught in schools and colleges, and only a few signs in the region are in Tulu. The report also reads the move politically: coastal Karnataka is a BJP bastion, and the Mangaluru meeting is seen as an appeal to voters' cultural heritage. In New Delhi, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta asked the Supreme Court for more time for the Union government to decide on a suggestion to spare the current batch of Class 6 students from the three-language policy, under which school students must learn three languages. Justice Joymalya Bagchi, on a three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India, replied: "Take your time, but see that the Class 6 students get some relief. We did not make this suggestion on a point of legality, but after considering the comfort and convenience of Class 6 students." At the previous hearing, the Court had proposed that the scheme be mandatory for Class 6 only from January 1, 2027, continuing

the language-in-schools thread carded on September 18. Syllabus: GS1 on diversity and regionalism, GS2 on federalism and the Constitution's language provisions.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 1956 reorganisation divides the Tulu-speaking South Kanara belt between Mysore and Kerala, with no Tulu unit → Kannada becomes the State's official language under the 1963 Act, and Tulu stays outside the Eighth Schedule → decades of demands from coastal legislators and speakers → the Cabinet meets in Mangaluru and grants Tulu administrative use in two districts with ₹82 lakh a year → success now depends on script, schooling and a legal basis, even as the Supreme Court asks the Centre to go easy on a three-language mandate for Class 6

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Constitution lets States choose their official languages, and lets the President protect sizeable minorities** — Article 343 makes Hindi in Devanagari script the official language of the Union, with English continued under the Official Languages Act, 1963. Article 345 allows a State legislature, by law, to adopt one or more languages in use in the State, or Hindi, for all or any of its official purposes, and Karnataka did so for Kannada through the Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963. Article 347 adds a protective route: on a demand, the President may direct that a language spoken by a substantial proportion of a State's population be officially recognised throughout the State or any part of it. Several States already use second official languages statewide or regionally — Urdu in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Punjabi and Urdu in Delhi — so district-level status for Tulu follows an established pattern.
- 2. Linguistic minorities have their own constitutional safeguards** — Article 29(1) protects any section of citizens with a distinct language, script or culture in conserving it, and Article 30 lets linguistic as well as religious minorities establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Article 350 entitles every person to submit a representation for redress of a grievance in any language used in the Union or the State. Article 350A, inserted by the Seventh Amendment in 1956, directs States and local authorities to provide instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage for children of linguistic minority groups, and Article 350B provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President, whose reports are laid before Parliament. Article 351 directs the Union to promote the spread of Hindi, drawing on the languages of the Eighth Schedule.
- 3. The Eighth Schedule has grown from 14 to 22 languages without fixed criteria, and Tulu is not in it** — The Eighth Schedule began with 14 languages; Sindhi was added by the 21st Amendment (1967), Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali by the 71st (1992), and Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali by the 92nd (2003), making 22. The Union government has stated that attempts to evolve objective criteria for inclusion, through the Pahwa Committee (1996) and the Sitakant Mohapatra Committee (2003), did not bear fruit, so inclusion remains a political decision. Inclusion has practical value; for instance, candidates in the Civil Services Main Examination may write their answers in any Eighth Schedule language. Classical-language status is a separate recognition, now held by 11 languages from Tamil (2004) to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali (2024); Tulu has neither status, although Karnataka has a Tulu Sahitya Academy.
- 4. Linguistic States and the three-language formula were both compromises of the early Republic** — After Potti Sriramulu's death led to the creation of Andhra State in 1953, the States Reorganisation Commission of Fazl Ali, K M Panikkar and H N Kunzru led to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, which created 14 States and six Union Territories on broadly linguistic lines. The Tulu-speaking South Kanara district of Madras State went to Mysore, except Kasaragod, which went to Kerala; Mysore was renamed Karnataka in 1973. The three-language formula was recommended in modified form by the Education Commission (1964-66) chaired by D S Kothari and adopted in the National Policy on Education, 1968, while Tamil Nadu has followed a two-language policy since 1968. The National Education Policy 2020 keeps the formula with 'greater

	flexibility', requires at least two of the three languages to be native to India and promises that no language will be imposed on any State; education has been on the Concurrent List since the 42nd Amendment, 1976.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Language sits at the junction of GS1 and GS2 — GS1 covers the 'salient features of Indian society, diversity of India' and regionalism, and GS2 covers federalism and the constitutional scheme. Mains questions on linguistic States and regionalism can now use Tulu as a live example of recognition below the level of the State rather than through a new State. 2. Prelims tests the articles and the Schedule precisely — Statement questions on Articles 343 to 351, the languages of the Eighth Schedule, the amendments that added them and the list of classical languages recur. Articles 347, 350A and 350B are easily confused with each other and deserve careful revision. 3. Education and language federalism is a live Mains theme — The three-language formula has been debated in every national education policy since 1968, and the NEP 2020 version has prompted Centre-State friction. Questions on cooperative federalism in education, a Concurrent List subject, can cite the Supreme Court's Class 6 hearing as an instance of courts mediating implementation rather than striking down policy.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 345 empowers the legislature of a State to adopt, by law, one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi for its official purposes. - Under Article 347, the President may, on a demand being made, direct that a language spoken by a substantial proportion of a State's population be officially recognised throughout the State or any part of it. - Article 350A, inserted by the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1956, provides for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage for children belonging to linguistic minority groups. - Article 350B provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President. - Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were added to the Eighth Schedule by the 71st Amendment Act, 1992; Tulu is not included in the Eighth Schedule. - The three-language formula was recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66) chaired by D S Kothari and adopted in the National Policy on Education, 1968. - The States Reorganisation Commission, whose report led to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, was chaired by Fazl Ali.
ANALYSIS	1. District-level status is the right scale for Tulu, but official use without literacy produces signboards, not service — Tulu is concentrated in two districts, so statewide status would be symbolic, whereas district status lets citizens deal with offices in the language they speak at home. The Indian Express identifies the binding constraint: few people know the Tulu script, and the language is not taught in schools or colleges. Unless applications, notices and replies can be written in the Kannada script that Tulu speakers already read, the status will change little in a taluk office. ₹82 lakh a year can pay for translators and a glossary for two districts, but not for a literacy programme. The test in two years will be whether a farmer can submit an application in Tulu and receive the reply in it. 2. The legal form of the decision matters more than the ceremony in Mangaluru — Article 345 speaks of a State legislature adopting languages 'by law', and Kannada's status rests on the Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963. The report describes a Cabinet decision and an 'administrative' status; it does not say whether the 1963 Act

will be amended. An executive order can permit the use of Tulu in office communication, but a statutory basis would make the status durable across governments and enforceable by citizens, as Delhi's second official languages are under an Act of its legislature. This is the question to watch, especially because the region votes differently from the party that took the decision, and a future government could quietly let an executive order lapse.

3. Recognition is also electoral arithmetic, and that does not make it illegitimate — The Indian Express reads the Mangaluru meeting as the Congress's attempt to reach voters in a BJP bastion through cultural heritage, after efforts to consolidate castes had failed. Democratic politics is supposed to respond to identity claims, and a demand raised in the legislature for years by coastal members is not made less just by being met before an election. The risks lie elsewhere: other coastal communities, such as Konkani, Beary and Kodava speakers, may seek similar status, and Kannada organisations may fear a dilution of the State language. Because Tulu is written in Kannada script and the status is additional rather than substitutive, the risk of a language conflict is low and the benefit of recognising a living language is real.

4. In the Class 6 hearing, the Court chose fairness over legality, and was right to — Justice Bagchi was explicit that the suggestion to spare the current Class 6 batch was made not 'on a point of legality' but for the children's 'comfort and convenience'. That is the principle of transitional fairness: a new requirement should apply to cohorts who can prepare for it, not to children already midway through a school year. The counter-argument is separation of powers — curriculum is policy, and courts should not manage timetables. But the Court has only proposed a start date of January 1, 2027 and left the decision to the Union, which is restraint, not overreach. The government's request for more time is reasonable only if relief actually reaches these students this academic year.

5. Both stories test the same bargain: language policy works when it is made close to the speaker — The NEP 2020 promises that no language will be imposed on any State and that the three languages will be the choice of States, regions and students. Tulu's recognition shows the demand for such choice below the level of the State; the Class 6 dispute shows the cost when a requirement arrives quickly from above. The three-language formula has been implemented unevenly since 1968 precisely because it asked States to teach languages their students saw little use for. India's linguistic settlement since 1956 has survived by devolving these choices, and both the Karnataka Cabinet and the Supreme Court are, in different ways, applying that lesson.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"India's constitutional language policy balances unity with the recognition of diversity." In the light of Karnataka's grant of official status to Tulu in two coastal districts and the debate over the three-language formula in schools, examine the constitutional provisions on language and how well they have worked. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction —** Open with the Karnataka Cabinet's Mangaluru decision making Tulu a second additional administrative language in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, and the Supreme Court's Class 6 hearing on the three-language policy.
- 2. Body — the constitutional scheme —** Set out Articles 343 to 351 with emphasis on Articles 345 and 347, the minority safeguards in Articles 29, 30, 350A and 350B, and the Eighth Schedule with its amendments and the absence of fixed criteria.
- 3. Body — how it has worked —** Credit linguistic reorganisation in 1956 and second official languages in several States with defusing conflict; use Tulu's case — no State, no Eighth Schedule place, a script few can read — to show gaps; note the legal-form question under Article 345.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

4. **Body — language in schools** — Trace the three-language formula from the Kothari Commission and the NPE 1968 to the NEP 2020; mention Tamil Nadu's two-language policy, education on the Concurrent List, and the Court's transitional-fairness approach to Class 6.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that India's language settlement works best through choice and devolution, and that recognition must be backed by law, script literacy and schooling to become real.

Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of Dakshina Kannada. How would you make Tulu's new status real in your offices?

Approach: I would start at the citizen interface: help desks, application forms, public notices and grievance counters where Tulu can be used, written in the Kannada script that speakers already read. I would use part of the ₹82 lakh to prepare a standard glossary of administrative terms with the Tulu Sahitya Academy and to train frontline staff, and I would place Tulu-speaking translators in district and taluk offices. I would track how many applications and replies are in Tulu each month. Official status that never reaches a village accountant's desk is only a press release.

Q2. As a State Education Secretary, you learn that Class 6 students must suddenly study a third language in the middle of a year. What do you do?

Approach: I would first protect the current cohort by letting it continue under the earlier scheme or by making the third language non-examined this year, while teachers and materials are arranged. I would map teacher availability school by school, because a third language without teachers is only a paper requirement. I would communicate a clear timeline to parents and schools and begin the mandate with a cohort that can plan for it, as the Supreme Court has suggested. Where possible I would offer real choice, including regional and minority languages, in keeping with the NEP's promise that no language will be imposed.

Q3. An interview board asks: should Tulu be included in the Eighth Schedule?

Approach: Tulu has a large speaker base, a rich oral and performance tradition and a historic script of its own, which together make a strong case, and inclusion would bring recognition and practical benefits such as use in national examinations. The difficulty is that there are no fixed criteria and many languages have pending claims, so each inclusion invites others. A principled approach would define transparent criteria — number of speakers, literary tradition, use in education — and apply them to every claimant. On any reasonable criteria, Tulu would be a strong candidate.

2. Economy

Every story today asks who carries the cost of a policy that is right in principle. India opens its market to Europe but keeps dairy and carbon outside the tariff schedule; quality orders meant to protect buyers are taxing the small firms that use regulated inputs; IRDAI wants distributors rather than policyholders to absorb the cost of selling insurance; the PMO warns that capital, supply chains and technology can be switched off from abroad; and in Delhi's bus depots and the country's bank branches, workers test how far a strike can go when the service is essential. In each case the policy is only as good as its answer to the question of who pays.

2.1 India–EU FTA to Be Signed in Brussels on December 16, Without Member-State Ratification

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union (EU) will be signed on December 16, two diplomatic sources have separately confirmed to The Hindu; one said the signing will take place in Brussels in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The date and the ratification route are what is new today; this magazine has earlier covered the EU steel quota and a draft copyright chapter of the deal. Negotiations on the pact, dubbed the “mother of all deals” by leaders on both sides, restarted in June 2022 after a long hiatus and were concluded in January 2026. The EU will drop tariffs on 99.5% of the items India exports to it, most of them to zero once the agreement takes effect, while India has given tariff concessions on 97.5% of the traded value between the two economies. Because the deal has “majority approval” in Europe, it will not need separate ratification — the formal act by which a signed treaty becomes binding — by each EU country once the European Council gives its go-ahead; The Hindu attributes this support to the two sides’ decision to leave contentious issues out and not make “the best the enemy of the good”. After signing, the European Parliament must pass the deal, which will take another one to two months, paving the way for a roll-out in “early 2027”. The visit is part of Mr. Modi’s back-to-back December trips to Canada, the U.S. and Belgium, where three separate FTAs are being negotiated or awaiting approval; he is expected in Canada around December 12, before the G-20 Summit in Miami, and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said trade talks had made “good progress”. A PIB FAQ of January 29 puts India–EU trade at \$136.54 billion in 2024-25, with Indian exports of \$75.85 billion. In an editorial, The Hindu argues that the India–New Zealand FTA, in force from October 20, shows why small deals complement big ones: bilateral goods trade of \$1.1 billion is under 1% of India’s total, yet India won duty-free access for 100% of its exports, kept dairy and nearly 30% of its import lines out of tariff concessions, and secured a commitment to facilitate \$20 billion of investment over 15 years. The syllabus link is GS3 on trade and liberalisation, and GS2 on agreements affecting India’s interests.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India–EU talks on a Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement, launched in 2007, stall by 2013 → India leaves RCEP in 2019 and turns to bilateral deals with sensitive sectors ring-fenced → talks relaunch in June 2022 and conclude in January 2026, with contentious issues kept out → the narrower scope wins majority support in Europe, so no member state needs to ratify separately → signing in Brussels on December 16, European Parliament approval in one to two months, roll-out in early 2027

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Trade is an exclusive EU competence, which is what makes an ‘EU-only’ agreement possible** — Article 3(1)(e) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) makes the common commercial policy an area where only the Union may act, and Article 207 extends it to goods, services, the commercial aspects of intellectual property and foreign direct investment. Under Article 218, the European Commission negotiates, the Council of the EU — ministers of the member states — authorises signature and concludes the agreement, generally by qualified majority (55% of member states representing at least 65% of the EU’s population), and the European Parliament must give its consent. An agreement confined to these areas binds all 27 member states without any national parliament voting on it. The Hindu’s sources speak of the European Council, the heads of state or government who set political direction; the formal decisions are taken by the Council of the EU.
- 2. Mixed agreements need every member state’s ratification, and that is where EU trade deals stall** — In Opinion 2/15 of May 2017 on the EU–Singapore FTA, the Court of Justice of the EU held that the Union alone could conclude almost the whole

agreement, but that non-direct (portfolio) investment and investor-state dispute settlement were competences shared with the member states. An agreement containing such shared elements is a 'mixed agreement' that every member state must also ratify, in some cases through regional parliaments. The EU therefore now splits its deals: the EU-Singapore trade agreement entered into force in November 2019 as an EU-only pact, while its investment protection agreement follows the slower national route. The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement shows the danger of the mixed route: Wallonia's regional parliament briefly blocked Belgium's signature in October 2016, and the pact has been applied only provisionally since September 2017.

- 3. WTO law permits FTAs only if they cover substantially all trade, whatever name India gives them** — Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) allows free trade areas and customs unions as an exception to most-favoured-nation treatment, provided duties are eliminated on "substantially all the trade" between the parties; Article V of the General Agreement on Trade in Services is the parallel rule for services. Indian practice uses several labels: an FTA usually refers to goods, while a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) or a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) adds services, investment and other disciplines, as in the India-Singapore CECA (2005), the India-Japan CEPA (2011) and the India-UAE CEPA (2022). The labels are political choices; WTO law looks only at the coverage of trade.
- 4. CBAM, rules of origin and sensitive-sector carve-outs decide what a tariff cut is really worth** — The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), created by Regulation (EU) 2023/956, charges importers for the carbon emitted in producing iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen; after a reporting-only phase from October 2023, financial liability applies to imports from January 1, 2026. It is a unilateral measure, not a customs duty, so an FTA's zero tariff does not remove it, as this magazine noted on September 18. Rules of origin decide whether a good counts as made in a partner country; per the PIB FAQ, the India-EU deal allows bilateral cumulation (inputs from either partner count as originating) and self-declaration of origin through a Directorate General of Foreign Trade platform. The same FAQ says India safeguarded dairy, beef and poultry, fish and seafood, cereals, fruits and vegetables, nuts and edible oils, while the EU excluded meat, dairy, honey, rice, sugar and tobacco.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. The BTIA has already appeared in Prelims; the signed FTA will follow** — UPSC Prelims 2017 asked in which negotiations the term 'Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)' appears; the answer was India and the European Union. The signed deal, its EU-only route and CBAM are natural successors, and distinctions such as the European Council versus the Council of the EU are exactly the traps UPSC sets.
- 2. GS2 and GS3 both claim this story** — The GS2 syllabus covers bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India or affecting its interests, and GS3 covers the effects of liberalisation on the economy. Trade questions in Mains typically turn on trade deficits with FTA partners and the RCEP exit; the EU deal shows India negotiating with the ring-fencing its earlier agreements lacked.
- 3. Trade-and-climate is a rising theme** — CBAM links trade with environment in GS3; whether carbon border taxes are protectionism in green clothing is the natural question, and India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, notified in 2023 under the amended Energy Conservation Act, 2001, is the domestic half of the answer.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Under Article 3(1)(e) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the common commercial policy is an area of exclusive EU competence.

- Under Article 218 of the TFEU, the Council of the EU signs and concludes international agreements, and trade agreements require the consent of the European Parliament.
- In Opinion 2/15 (2017) on the EU–Singapore FTA, the Court of Justice of the EU held that portfolio investment and investor–state dispute settlement are competences shared with member states, so agreements containing them are ‘mixed’ agreements needing member-state ratification.
- The European Council consists of the heads of state or government of the member states together with its President and the President of the European Commission; it is distinct from the Council of the European Union, which is composed of national ministers.
- Article XXIV of GATT permits free trade areas and customs unions as an exception to the most-favoured-nation principle, provided duties are eliminated on substantially all trade between the parties.
- The EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism covers imports of iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

ANALYSIS

- 1. What the deal leaves out is the price of its speed** — The Hindu’s source is explicit that majority support came because contentious issues were left out, and EU law explains why that matters. Any chapter touching portfolio investment or investor–state arbitration would have made the deal ‘mixed’ and exposed it to 27 national, and some regional, parliaments. Keeping it EU-only is a deliberate design choice, and a sound one after the CETA experience. The cost is that investment protection, on which India and the EU opened separate negotiations in 2022 alongside a geographical indications agreement, stays outside and faces the slower mixed route. The counter-view is that goods and services carry the bulk of the value, and a narrower deal signed now beats a complete one stuck in parliaments for a decade.
- 2. The tariff asymmetry favours India on paper, but the real gain is parity with competitors** — EU cuts on 99.5% of Indian export items against Indian concessions on 97.5% of trade value, many phased over five, seven or ten years per the PIB FAQ, look like a clear win. But the EU’s average tariffs are already low, so the gain concentrates in labour-intensive goods such as textiles, apparel, leather and footwear. There, rivals already enjoy preferences — Vietnam through its FTA with the EU, in force since August 2020, and Bangladesh through the EU’s Everything But Arms scheme for least developed countries. For these sectors the deal restores a level field rather than creating an advantage, so gains will depend on matching competitors on scale and compliance.
- 3. Europe’s Parliament will scrutinise a deal that India’s Parliament will never vote on** — The European Parliament must consent before the deal takes effect, and it has used that power to press partners on labour, environment and human rights; the one-to-two-month estimate assumes smooth passage. In India, treaty-making is an executive power: Entry 14 of the Union List covers entering into and implementing treaties, and Article 253 lets Parliament legislate to implement them, but no law requires Parliament to approve an FTA. European stakeholders thus get a formal public debate that Indian farmers, small firms and unions do not. The counter-view is that executive flexibility lets India negotiate faster; a middle path is to table each signed FTA in Parliament with an impact assessment.
- 4. The New Zealand editorial is right on diversification but silent on complexity** — The Hindu’s case is that small deals give exporters, nearly half of them MSMEs, alternative channels when 100% U.S. tariffs loom and a U.S. deal remains elusive. Textiles, about 14% of India’s exports to New Zealand, and pearls and semi-precious stones, about 5%, are labour-intensive lines that gain from zero duty. But the EU relationship is more

	than a hundred times larger than the \$1.1 billion New Zealand one, and small deals cannot substitute for it. Each agreement also brings its own origin rules, and for a small exporter compliance can cost more than the tariff saved, one reason utilisation of India's FTAs has been low; diversification needs simple digital procedures such as the origin self-declaration the EU deal allows. 5. CBAM will test whether market access on paper becomes market access in practice — Indian steel and aluminium will enter the EU at zero duty but pay for embedded carbon under CBAM, which the FTA does not touch. The CBAM regulation allows a deduction for a carbon price effectively paid in the country of origin, which gives India's own Carbon Credit Trading Scheme strategic value: a credible domestic carbon price would keep that money in India rather than send it to Brussels. The counter-view is that India should resist CBAM as a unilateral barrier at odds with common but differentiated responsibilities, as it has argued internationally. Both can be done at once — object in principle, prepare in practice — because small foundries that cannot measure their emissions will lose European buyers first.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The India-EU Free Trade Agreement owes its speed as much to what it leaves out as to what it includes." Discuss with reference to the EU's treaty procedure, India's protection of sensitive sectors and the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — The FTA, concluded in January 2026, will be signed in Brussels on December 16, with EU tariff cuts on 99.5% of Indian export items, Indian concessions on 97.5% of trade value and a roll-out in early 2027. 2. Body — what it leaves out — Explain exclusive EU competence under Articles 3 and 207 of the TFEU, the Article 218 procedure and Opinion 2/15. Show that leaving out contentious issues keeps the deal EU-only and avoids 27 national ratifications, citing CETA's Walloon episode. Note the exclusions on both sides: dairy, cereals and edible oils for India; meat, dairy, rice and sugar for the EU. 3. Body — what remains unresolved — CBAM applies regardless of tariffs; investment protection sits outside the treaty; the European Parliament may press on labour and environment. Suggest the CBAM deduction for carbon prices paid at home and India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme as a response. 4. Body — India's wider strategy — Place the deal alongside the UAE, Australia, EFTA, UK and New Zealand agreements and the December trips to Canada and the U.S.; use The Hindu's editorial to argue that small and large deals complement each other if origin procedures are simple enough for MSMEs. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that a narrower deal signed now beats a comprehensive one stalled for a decade, provided India uses the months before roll-out to prepare exporters for CBAM and origin compliance.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry. Members of the European Parliament signal they will question labour conditions in Indian textile units before the consent vote. How do you respond? Approach: I would treat the vote as a stakeholder process to engage, not a threat to resent. I would share evidence on the labour codes in force since November 2025 and on factory inspections, and arrange visits to compliant clusters through the Embassy in Brussels. I would not reopen negotiated text, because the deal's speed rests on keeping contentious issues out. Where real gaps exist, such as informal subcontracting, I would present domestic reforms rather than new treaty commitments. Q2. As District Collector of a textile and garment cluster, how would you prepare local

exporters for the EU market from early 2027?

Approach: I would map units that already export to Europe and those that could, through the District Export Promotion Committee and the export promotion councils. The priority would be compliance rather than subsidy: origin self-declaration on the DGFT platform, product standards and, for units using steel or aluminium inputs, the emission records that European buyers will increasingly ask for. Success would be measured by the number of first-time exporters claiming the preference in 2027, not by meetings held.

Q3. An interview board asks: should Parliament have to approve free trade agreements before India signs them?

Approach: Constitutionally, treaty-making is an executive function under Entry 14 of the Union List, and Parliament legislates only where implementation requires it under Article 253. A mandatory vote could slow negotiations and let partners exploit domestic politics. But FTAs change the livelihoods of farmers and small firms, and tabling a public impact assessment before signing would add legitimacy without giving Parliament a veto. The European Parliament's role in this very deal shows scrutiny and speed can coexist.

2.2 Input QCOs Tied to 47.6% Profitability Fall in Small Firms as 600-Plus Products Await Reassessment

THE NEWS New Delhi. India's mandatory product-standards regime needs a second round of reform aimed at inputs, argue Prerna Prabhakar, Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), and Nancy Gupta, Visiting Fellow at the Crawford School of Public Policy, in The Hindu. A Quality Control Order (QCO) is a government order that makes a Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standard compulsory for a product, so that it cannot be made, imported or sold without BIS certification. Products covered by QCOs rose from 88 in 2019 to 765 by the end of December 2024, but the pace slowed considerably towards the end of 2025 as several QCOs were revoked or suspended, particularly those on intermediate goods, because mandatory certification had raised concerns over input availability, costs and supply-chain disruption. Concerns over India's QCOs and other non-tariff barriers were raised at the WTO's eighth Trade Policy Review of India in July 2026, not only by the EU and the United States but also by fellow BRICS members Brazil, China and Indonesia. On June 25, 2026, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) notified the Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026, which lets eligible firms unable to obtain BIS Scheme-I certification temporarily source from BIS Scheme-II-licensed suppliers in specified sectors, including toys, footwear and air conditioners, subject to eligibility criteria and approval by a DPIIT committee. More than 600 QCO-covered products remain to be reassessed, including critical inputs in chemicals, steel, textiles, machinery, electronics, and rubber and plastics. The authors cite a CSEP study of chemical-using firms: the first chemical QCO came in 2018 and 52 chemical products were covered by 2024, so the share of chemical-using firms exposed to regulation on the input side rose from 11.8% in 2019 to 56.6% in 2024. Among larger firms, input QCOs are associated with a 9.6% rise in production but a 37% fall in gross value added (GVA), which is the value of output minus the cost of inputs. Among smaller firms, they have no statistically significant effect on output or GVA but are associated with a 47.6% fall in profitability. The authors want supply-chain effects built into QCO design, dedicated help and transition periods for MSMEs, and success judged by quality gained rather than products covered. The syllabus link is GS3 on industrial policy and MSMEs, and GS2 on the WTO.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The government turns to mandatory BIS standards to curb substandard imports and push domestic quality → QCOs expand from 88 products in 2019 to 765 by December 2024, many of them on intermediate inputs → downstream users face costlier and scarcer inputs, and trading partners object → several input QCOs are revoked or suspended by late 2025, criticism surfaces at the WTO's July 2026 review, and a transition order follows on June 25, 2026 → more than 600 products await reassessment amid evidence that input QCOs cut value addition and small-firm profits

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. Section 16 of the BIS Act, 2016 is the legal root of every QCO — The Bureau of Indian

Standards Act, 2016 replaced the BIS Act of 1986 and made BIS the National Standards Body of India, functioning under the Department of Consumer Affairs. Section 16 empowers the Central Government, after consulting the Bureau, to direct that the Standard Mark be used compulsorily on any goods, article, process, system or service in the public interest, for the protection of human, animal or plant health, the safety of the environment, the prevention of unfair trade practices, or national security. Once such an order is issued, making, importing, selling or storing the product without a valid BIS licence or certificate is an offence under the Act. QCOs are issued by the ministry or department that administers the product — DPIIT, the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals, the Ministries of Steel and Textiles and others — while BIS runs the certification.

2. Conformity assessment is where a standard turns into a cost — A standard is a technical specification; conformity assessment is the process of proving that a product meets it. The BIS (Conformity Assessment) Regulations, 2018 set out several certification schemes, of which Scheme-I is the familiar ISI mark licence, granted after product testing and inspection of the factory, including factories abroad for foreign manufacturers. Per the PIB release on the June 2026 order, Scheme-II is an alternative licensing scheme under the same regulations, which the order accepts as a temporary substitute in specified sectors. The time and cost of certifying a factory, above all a foreign supplier's, is what creates input shortages when a QCO is imposed faster than certification capacity can grow.

3. The WTO's TBT Agreement accepts mandatory standards but polices their trade effect — The Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) distinguishes voluntary standards from mandatory technical regulations, of which QCOs are an example. Article 2.1 requires national treatment and most-favoured-nation treatment for imports, and Article 2.2 requires that technical regulations not be more trade-restrictive than necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective such as national security, the prevention of deceptive practices, or the protection of human health, safety or the environment. Members must notify draft regulations to the WTO and allow time for comments, and a 2001 Doha Ministerial decision says there should normally be at least six months between publication and entry into force. Other members raise 'specific trade concerns' in the TBT Committee, the usual route by which QCOs are questioned before any formal dispute.

4. A Trade Policy Review is peer scrutiny, not a trial — The Trade Policy Review Mechanism, set out in Annex 3 of the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO, subjects every member's trade policies to periodic collective review by the Trade Policy Review Body, which is the General Council meeting in another capacity. Each review rests on two reports, one by the WTO Secretariat and one by the government under review. Since 2019 the four largest traders are reviewed every three years, the next sixteen every five years and the rest every seven years. The mechanism is expressly not a basis for enforcing obligations or for dispute settlement, so the criticism voiced at India's eighth review in July 2026 is diplomatic pressure rather than a legal finding.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. GS3 asks about industrial policy and the MSME squeeze — The syllabus covers changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth, and Mains keeps returning to why Indian manufacturing has not scaled and why MSMEs stay small. QCOs are a concrete, evidence-backed case of a well-meant regulation raising costs for small firms, which examiners reward over generic lines about 'ease of doing business'.

2. Prelims tests institutions and WTO agreements — BIS, its parent Act, its ministry and its marks are standard Prelims material, as are the WTO agreements on technical barriers to trade and on sanitary and phytosanitary measures. The Trade Policy Review Mechanism and the difference between tariff and non-tariff barriers are natural

	question stems. 3. The trade-negotiation angle links this to the EU and U.S. talks — Partners in FTA talks raise India's QCOs as non-tariff barriers, so a Mains answer on India's trade strategy can cite QCO rationalisation as domestic reform that strengthens India's hand when it objects to others' barriers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Bureau of Indian Standards is the National Standards Body of India, established under the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 2016, and functions under the Department of Consumer Affairs. • Section 16 of the BIS Act, 2016 empowers the Central Government, after consulting BIS, to make the use of the Standard Mark compulsory for goods on grounds including health, safety, environment, prevention of unfair trade practices and national security. • Quality Control Orders are issued by the ministry or department that administers the product, while certification under them is carried out by BIS. • Article 2.2 of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade requires that technical regulations not be more trade-restrictive than necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective. • The WTO's Trade Policy Review Mechanism is set out in Annex 3 of the Marrakesh Agreement, and reviews are conducted by the Trade Policy Review Body, which is the General Council. • Gross value added is the value of output minus the value of intermediate consumption. • The Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026 was notified by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade on June 25, 2026.
ANALYSIS	1. An input QCO works like an inverted duty structure without any duty — An inverted duty structure hurts domestic manufacturers when inputs are taxed more heavily than the finished goods made from them. An input QCO produces the same effect through certification: foreign suppliers without BIS licences drop out, the few certified suppliers can charge more, and the finished good may face no matching barrier. The CSEP finding that larger firms raised production by 9.6% while their GVA fell 37% is the signature of this squeeze — more output, but less value added on it. The counter-view is that uncertified chemical inputs can be genuinely unsafe or substandard, and in such cases a QCO protects downstream buyers and consumers; the case is for targeting, not abolition. 2. The small-firm result is the more dangerous because it hides in profits, not output — For smaller firms, input QCOs had no significant effect on production or GVA but were associated with a 47.6% fall in profitability. Small firms, in other words, keep producing to hold on to buyers while swallowing the cost, which does not show up in industrial production data and surfaces later as stressed loans, delayed wages or quiet closures. They cannot pass costs on as large firms can, because they sell into crowded markets or to large buyers who set prices. The study covers only chemical-using firms and reports associations rather than proven causation, but its direction matches what industry reported before the 2025 revocations. 3. Counting products covered was the wrong target, and the authors propose the right one — A rise from 88 to 765 products in about five years suggests QCOs were being produced as outputs of a programme rather than as answers to specific quality failures. The authors' test — whether quality improves without constraining scale, efficiency and competitiveness — needs evidence before and after each order: test-failure rates, recalls, input prices and lead times. India has no statutory requirement of

	regulatory impact assessment, which is why more than 600 products are being reassessed after the fact. Building such an assessment into every new QCO, with a mandatory review date, would turn an ad hoc correction into a routine discipline. 4. The WTO criticism matters less as law than as leverage — A Trade Policy Review cannot find India in breach, but concerns voiced by the EU, the United States and BRICS partners Brazil, China and Indonesia show that QCOs are now seen abroad as non-tariff barriers. That costs India in negotiations, because it is harder to call the EU's carbon border measure or U.S. tariffs disguised protectionism while one's own certification regime is described the same way. The counter-view is fair: China's compulsory certification system and many other standards regimes also restrict trade, and India is entitled to regulate quality. The difference lies in procedure — notification, reasonable transition periods and certification capacity — and that is exactly where India's QCOs have drawn fire. 5. The transition order is a useful valve but a discretionary one — Letting firms source temporarily from Scheme-II suppliers when Scheme-I certification is stuck relieves real bottlenecks in toys, footwear and air conditioners. But access depends on eligibility criteria and a DPIIT committee's approval, and the PIB release lists conditions such as three continuous years of QCO compliance without default, which favour established firms over new entrants and the smallest units. Discretionary relief also invites the perception of favouritism, however carefully it is run. A rule-based alternative would be automatic transition periods for MSMEs, published certification timelines for BIS, and recognition of accredited foreign test reports for inputs.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Quality Control Orders were intended to raise product standards and curb substandard imports, yet evidence suggests that orders on intermediate inputs can hurt the very manufacturers they were meant to help. Critically examine this statement and suggest principles for the ongoing reassessment of QCOs. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Define a QCO as an order under Section 16 of the BIS Act, 2016 making BIS certification mandatory, and give the growth from 88 products in 2019 to 765 by December 2024, followed by revocations in 2025 and the transition order of June 25, 2026. 2. Body — the case for QCOs — Consumer safety, curbing substandard and dumped imports, building a quality culture for domestic manufacturing, and the TBT Agreement's recognition of legitimate objectives such as health, safety and environment. 3. Body — the evidence of harm — Use the CSEP findings: exposure of chemical-using firms rising from 11.8% to 56.6%; a 9.6% rise in output but a 37% fall in GVA for large firms; a 47.6% fall in profitability for small firms. Add input shortages, certification delays for foreign suppliers, and criticism at the WTO's July 2026 Trade Policy Review. 4. Body — principles for reassessment — Prioritise the 600-plus products that are intermediate inputs; build supply-chain impact assessment into design; give MSMEs exemptions or longer transitions; build certification capacity before enforcement; prefer rule-based to discretionary relief, improving on the June 2026 order. 5. Conclusion — End with the authors' test: standards should be judged by whether they improve quality without constraining scale, efficiency and competitiveness, which is what manufacturing must deliver for Viksit Bharat 2047.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You chair the DPIIT committee that approves applications under the transition order. How do you keep it fair and free of rent-seeking? Approach: I would publish the eligibility criteria, a checklist of documents and a fixed

timeline for decisions, and process applications online in the order received. Every rejection would carry written reasons and a route for review. I would publish monthly data on applications, approvals and sectors, so that any pattern of favouritism would be visible. I would also recommend converting the most common approvals into automatic, time-bound exemptions for MSMEs, which removes discretion altogether.

Q2. As District Collector, plastic-moulding units in your district complain that certified raw material has become scarce and costly. What can you do at the district level?

Approach: Standards policy is made centrally, but the district can gather evidence and ease local friction. I would ask the District Industries Centre to survey units on input prices, lead times and the availability of certified suppliers, and send the findings to DPIIT and the administering ministry as input to the reassessment. I would link units with BIS-recognised testing laboratories and help the cluster association form buying groups for certified inputs. I would also ask the lead bank to consider working-capital support for units facing temporary cost stress, so that viable firms are not pushed into default.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it better to have fewer, strictly enforced standards than many loosely enforced ones?

Approach: Yes, for mandatory standards. A mandatory standard is a legal prohibition, and every one issued without testing capacity or supplier readiness invites shortages, evasion and discretion at the border. Voluntary standards and consumer information can cover most products, while mandatory orders should be reserved for genuine risks to health, safety and the environment. A standards regime earns respect when it is predictable and enforced, not when it is large.

2.3 IRDAI Proposes Product- and Channel-Wise Commission Caps and a Glide Path to Lower Expense Limits

THE NEWS Mumbai. The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) on Wednesday, September 23, proposed a major overhaul of how insurers pay commission to distributors, The Economic Times and The Indian Express report. Its consultation paper — a draft put out for public comment before rules are finalised — replaces a single cap across products with limits linked to segment, line of business, distribution channel, product complexity, policy size and the effort needed to sell and service a product; feedback is due by October 25. It also proposes a 'glide path', a phased reduction, in insurers' expense of management (EoM), the total an insurer may spend on commission, salaries, marketing and other operating costs as a share of premium. Life insurers' EoM would fall to 15% of premium in two years and 12.5% in five; general insurers' limit would fall from 30% now to 25% in two years and 20% in five. In general insurance, the proposed first-year commission on individual health policies is 15% for distribution entities and 20% for individual agents, with renewal and portability commissions of 5% and 10% respectively; portability is a policyholder's right to move to another insurer without losing continuity benefits. Retail property insurance carries the same 15% and 20% limits, and large property and engineering risks with a sum insured above ₹2,500 crore 5% and 5.5%. Insurance sold with loans or credit would have separate, lower limits, including 5% for motor own-damage, personal accident and liability cover and 5% for first-year health insurance. In life insurance, commission would depend on the premium payment term: for individual non-linked and linked policies paying premiums for 10 years or more, first-year commission is capped at 20% for distribution entities and 25% for agents, and for six-to-eight-year terms at 14% and 17.5%. For non-linked and unit-linked plans (whose returns track market-linked funds) with a policy term of up to five years, The Indian Express reports first-year caps of 6.25% for agents and 5% for corporate agents, brokers and composite brokers. An extra 10% of the applicable limit is proposed for individual policies sold in towns with populations below 10 lakh, and 20% for business from towns below 50,000 and rural areas. IRDAI says the aim is to cut distribution and operating costs and improve value for policyholders. The syllabus link is GS3 on financial-sector regulation and inclusive growth, and GS2 on regulatory bodies.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Until 2015 the Insurance Act itself capped commission, and the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Act, 2015 moves commission and expense limits into IRDAI regulations → in 2023 IRDAI replaces product-wise caps with an overall

expense ceiling and lets insurers' boards set commission within it → the regulator judges that distribution and operating costs remain too high for the value policyholders receive → the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Act, 2025 expressly empowers IRDAI to specify limits on commission → IRDAI proposes product- and channel-wise caps and a glide path to lower expense limits, with comments due by October 25

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. IRDAI is a statutory regulator whose mandate begins with the policyholder** — The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority was created by the IRDA Act, 1999, following the Malhotra Committee's 1994 recommendation to open insurance to private players under an independent regulator; it is headquartered in Hyderabad. Under Section 4 of the Act, it consists of a Chairperson, not more than five whole-time members and not more than four part-time members, all appointed by the Central Government. Section 14 charges it to regulate, promote and ensure the orderly growth of the insurance and re-insurance business, and to protect the interests of policyholders. It usually makes rules through regulations and master circulars preceded by exposure drafts or consultation papers such as this one.
- 2. The Insurance Act, 1938 decides who may be paid for selling insurance and how much insurers may spend** — Section 40 of the Insurance Act, 1938 prohibits paying commission or any reward for soliciting or procuring insurance business to anyone other than an insurance agent or intermediary. Sections 40B and 40C limit the expenses of management of life and general insurers respectively, and since the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Act, 2015 the actual limits have been set by IRDAI regulations rather than by the statute. Per PRS, the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025, passed by Parliament on December 16-17, 2025, empowers IRDAI to specify regulations on remuneration, commission or reward payable to agents and intermediaries, including limits, the manner of payment and disclosures. The same law raised the foreign direct investment limit in Indian insurance companies from 74% to 100% of paid-up equity and created a Policyholders' Education and Protection Fund administered by IRDAI.
- 3. Agents, corporate agents and brokers stand in different legal relationships to the buyer** — An individual agent and a corporate agent — typically a bank selling insurance, known as bancassurance — represent the insurers they are tied to, and commission is their income. An insurance broker, including a composite broker that handles both insurance and reinsurance, is licensed to act for the client and is expected to compare products across insurers. That is why the proposal separates 'agents' from other 'distribution entities': it is pricing the effort, and the conflict of interest, in each channel. Mis-selling means selling a product unsuited to the buyer or misrepresenting its terms, and complaints go first to the insurer and then to the Insurance Ombudsman under the Insurance Ombudsman Rules, 2017, framed by the Central Government.
- 4. Penetration and density measure different kinds of under-insurance** — Insurance penetration is total premium as a percentage of GDP, while insurance density is premium per head of population, usually expressed in U.S. dollars. A country can see rising density with flat penetration if incomes grow faster than insurance buying. IRDAI's stated goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047' aims at both, and distribution cost is central because the commission and expense load is part of the premium a buyer pays. General insurance in India has been de-tariffed since January 1, 2007, so insurers set most premiums themselves, which means lower expenses can in principle reach buyers through competition.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 asks about financial inclusion beyond bank accounts** — The syllabus covers inclusive growth and mobilisation of resources, and insurance is both a social-protection tool and a source of long-term savings. Mains answers on financial inclusion are expected to move from bank accounts to insurance and pensions, and this

	proposal supplies the regulatory detail — commission, expenses, channels — that marks out a strong answer. 2. Prelims tests regulators, their parent Acts and FDI caps — UPSC regularly asks which body regulates which financial sub-sector and what the FDI limits are in sensitive sectors. The 2025 amendment raising the insurance FDI cap to 100%, IRDAI's composition, the Insurance Ombudsman and the definitions of penetration and density are all Prelims-ready. 3. Regulatory design is a GS2 theme — GS2 covers statutory and regulatory bodies. The swing from product caps to board-set commissions in 2023 and back towards caps now is a live example of the debate between rules and principles in regulation, useful in answers on how regulators balance market freedom with consumer protection.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India was established under the IRDA Act, 1999, on the recommendation of the Malhotra Committee, and is headquartered in Hyderabad. ● Under the IRDA Act, 1999, IRDAI consists of a Chairperson, not more than five whole-time members and not more than four part-time members, appointed by the Central Government. ● Section 40 of the Insurance Act, 1938 prohibits payment of commission for soliciting or procuring insurance business to anyone other than an insurance agent or intermediary. ● The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025 raised the FDI limit in Indian insurance companies from 74% to 100% of paid-up equity capital. ● Insurance penetration is premium as a percentage of GDP, while insurance density is premium per capita. ● An insurance broker represents the policyholder, whereas an insurance agent represents the insurer. ● The Insurance Ombudsman functions under the Insurance Ombudsman Rules, 2017, framed by the Central Government.
ANALYSIS	1. Product-wise caps return to micro-management, but for a better reason than before — In 2023 IRDAI gave insurers a single overall expense ceiling and let their boards decide commission within it, on the logic that firms know their costs better than a regulator. The risk of that freedom was that insurers could concentrate payouts on high-margin products and powerful channels, such as bank branches, rather than on products that suit buyers. Linking caps to product, channel and effort ties pay to the work actually done, which is a sounder rationale than the old uniform caps. The counter-view is that price controls on intermediaries shrink distribution where selling is hardest, which is why the proposal adds 10% and 20% top-ups for small towns and rural areas. 2. The structure of life-insurance caps targets the incentive behind mis-selling — A first-year commission of up to 25% for agents on policies with a payment term of 10 years or more, against 6.25% on plans of up to five years, recognises that long-term products take more effort to sell. But front-loaded commission also rewards selling long policies to buyers who cannot keep paying; when such a policy lapses in its early years, the buyer loses most of what he paid while the distributor keeps the first-year commission. The proposal lowers the ceilings but keeps the front-loading. A stronger design would shift more pay into renewal, or trail, commission, so that distributors earn only as long as the policy survives. 3. The glide path squeezes distribution first, and policyholders gain only if competition

passes it on — Cutting general insurers' expense ceiling from 30% to 20% of premium in five years, and life insurers' to 12.5%, forces insurers to economise, and commission is usually their largest cost. They will push digital and direct sales and renegotiate with banks and brokers. In general insurance, where premiums have been largely market-determined since 2007, lower costs can reach buyers through competition; in life insurance, where products bundle protection with savings, the gain depends on IRDAI scrutinising product pricing so that savings show up as lower premiums or better returns rather than higher margins. The regulator should publish, after two years, whether expense ratios fell and whether premiums or benefits moved.

4. Lower caps on credit-linked insurance address coercion at the loan counter —

Insurance sold with a loan is often bought because the borrower fears the loan will otherwise be delayed, not because he compared products. Separate, lower limits — 5% for motor own-damage, personal accident and first-year health cover sold with credit — reduce the lender's incentive to push its partner insurer's policy. The counter-view is that credit-linked life cover protects families from inheriting debt, and thinner commission could make lenders less willing to offer it. The balance is to keep the cover available while guaranteeing the borrower's right to choose any insurer and to buy the policy separately.

5. Cheaper distribution is necessary for 'Insurance for All by 2047', but not sufficient —

Commission and expenses are loaded into premiums, so lower costs make insurance cheaper for first-time buyers. But under-insurance in India is as much about trust, claim settlement and product complexity as about price. If distributors earn less, some will abandon small-ticket rural policies altogether, and the proposed top-ups may not compensate. The durable route to penetration combines low-cost channels — digital platforms such as IRDAI's Bima Sugam marketplace, self-help groups and post offices — with simple standard products whose value a buyer can understand without a salesperson.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

IRDAI's proposal to cap commissions by product and channel reverses its 2023 move towards letting insurers set commissions within an overall expense limit. Examine whether such caps can reduce mis-selling and improve value for policyholders without slowing the spread of insurance. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — State the September 23 consultation paper: caps by segment, channel, product complexity, policy size and effort, and a glide path lowering the expense of management to 12.5% of premium for life insurers and 20% for general insurers over five years, with comments due by October 25.
- 2. Body — why caps now** — Explain the 2015 shift of limits into regulations, the 2023 move to board-set commissions, and the problem of commission-driven mis-selling. Use the payment-term structure (25% versus 6.25% for agents) and the lower caps on credit-linked insurance as examples, and note the 2025 amendment's express power to cap commission.
- 3. Body — the risks** — Price controls may shrink distribution in thin markets; front-loaded commissions remain; savings may not reach buyers in life products; agents' and banks' incomes fall, which may slow outreach.
- 4. Body — safeguards** — Rural and small-town top-ups; a shift towards renewal commission; published expense ratios; strong ombudsman and claim-settlement monitoring; low-cost channels such as Bima Sugam, self-help groups and post offices.
- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that caps are a tool for aligning distributor incentives with policyholder interest, and that Insurance for All by 2047 needs lower costs together with trust in claims.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As an IRDAI member, you receive a strong representation from banks that the caps will make bancassurance unviable. How do you respond?

Approach: I would ask for data rather than assertions: each bank's actual cost of selling and servicing policies, persistency rates and complaint ratios by product. Where costs are genuinely higher for some products, the effort-based design can reflect that. But bancassurance draws strength from the bank's hold over its customers, and commission should not reward the leverage of a loan desk. I would also ask banks to demonstrate that customers are free to choose their insurer, since that freedom is the justification for their role.

Q2. As District Collector, you receive complaints that bank branches are forcing borrowers to buy insurance with crop and vehicle loans. What do you do?

Approach: I would raise the complaints in the District Level Consultative Committee and with the Lead District Manager, and ask banks to confirm in writing that insurance is optional and that borrowers may choose any insurer. I would set up a simple complaint channel and forward cases to the banks' grievance officers and, where needed, to the Insurance Ombudsman and the RBI's ombudsman. Awareness camps through self-help groups and gram panchayats would explain borrowers' right to choose and to cancel. Repeated violations by a branch would be reported to its controlling office and the regulators.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India ban commissions altogether and move to fee-based advice?

Approach: A ban works where buyers are willing to pay for advice, as in the United Kingdom, which banned commission on retail investment advice from 2013. In India most buyers of small policies will not pay an upfront fee, so a ban would push them out of insurance altogether. A better route is lower, effort-linked commissions, more pay through renewal commission, full disclosure of commission to the buyer, and simple products that can be bought directly online. Fee-based advice can then grow alongside for wealthier buyers.

2.4 PM's Principal Secretary Names Four Risks — Weaponised Supply Chains, Import Dependence, Fickle Capital and AI

THE NEWS Mumbai. India must prepare its economy to manage the risks of geopolitical upheaval, Pramod Kumar Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, said on Wednesday, September 23, at the State Bank of India Banking & Economics Conclave, The Economic Times and The Hindu report. He named four risks: fragmented global alliances, dependence on imports, pressure on the external accounts, and artificial intelligence (AI). "Alliances are fragmented, supply chains are being used as weapons. Capital can be switched on and off. Trade barriers, both tariff and non-tariff, are rising again. We cannot count on friendly tailwinds," he said. Import dependence is not about energy alone: "we have a significant merchandise trade deficit. We must make things at home and competitively." "In a world where capital is fickle, we need to focus on foreign direct investment," he said, which calls for stable tax policy and contracts, reliable logistics and "clearances that actually clear". Of AI: "We do not yet know its full shape. We need to prepare for it." The financial system, he said, must move "from accommodating growth to enabling growth", mobilising very large capital over two decades: long-tenure capital for long-gestation assets, risk capital for innovation, equity for high-growth firms, patient capital — money willing to wait years for returns — for infrastructure, and new financial structures for cities. The Hindu reports that he cautioned banks against reviving aggressive lending driven by short-term optimism, noting that the gross non-performing asset (NPA) ratio fell below 1% in the first quarter of 2026-27. At an SBI event in Mumbai, RBI Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta noted balance-of-payments deficits of \$5 billion in 2024-25 and \$23.6 billion in 2025-26, as the capital account surplus fell short of the current account deficit. The AI risk is already visible in jobs: ET reports that Global Capability Centres (GCCs) — offshore units that multinationals run in India — could cut 25,000-30,000 jobs this fiscal, about 1% of their 2.6 million workforce, even as some 150,000 new roles are created; Pareekh Jain of EII RTrend attributes two-thirds of the cuts to global headcount reductions and leaner AI-enabled models and one-third to weaker demand.

Meanwhile S&P Global Ratings, Fitch Ratings, the OECD and the Asian Development Bank all raised India's 2026-27 growth forecasts on Wednesday, the OECD to 7.1% from 6.3%. The syllabus link is GS3 on growth, investment and employment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Covid-19, the Ukraine war and the West Asia conflict show how supply chains and energy can be disrupted → alliances fragment and tariff and non-tariff barriers rise again → a large merchandise trade deficit meets fickle capital, producing balance-of-payments deficits in 2024-25 and 2025-26 → AI starts to reshape services work, with leaner GCCs cutting 25,000-30,000 jobs → the PMO calls for competitive domestic manufacturing, investor-friendly stability and a financial system that supplies patient and risk capital

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The current account shows how India pays its way in the world** — The current account records trade in goods (the merchandise balance), trade in services, primary income such as interest and dividends, and secondary income, chiefly remittances. India runs a large merchandise trade deficit that is partly offset by a surplus on services and by remittances, leaving a current account deficit (CAD). The CAD must be financed through the capital and financial account — foreign direct investment, portfolio flows, external commercial borrowings and NRI deposits. When those inflows fall short, the overall balance of payments is in deficit and the RBI's foreign exchange reserves fall, which is what the 2024-25 and 2025-26 figures describe.
- 2. FDI and FPI differ in threshold, in control and in how fast they can leave** — Under the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019, an investment by a person resident outside India of 10% or more of the post-issue paid-up equity of a listed Indian company is foreign direct investment, while a holding below 10% is foreign portfolio investment. The 10% line follows the recommendation of the Arvind Mayaram Committee of 2014. FDI usually brings management involvement, technology and a long horizon, while portfolio holdings can be sold on a stock exchange in a day — the 'capital switched on and off' Mr. Mishra described. That is why economists regard FDI as the more stable way to finance a current account deficit.
- 3. Long-gestation assets need long-tenure money that banks cannot safely supply** — Banks fund themselves largely with deposits that can be withdrawn at short notice, so lending for 15-to-20-year infrastructure projects creates an asset-liability mismatch. When that mismatch combined with over-optimistic project appraisal in the 2000s boom, the result was the 'twin balance sheet problem' — stressed corporate borrowers and weakened banks at once — highlighted in the Economic Survey 2016-17. The response included the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, bank recapitalisation and mergers, and the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), set up under a 2021 Act as a development finance institution. The natural holders of patient capital are pension funds, insurers and infrastructure investment trusts, which is why a deeper corporate bond market matters.
- 4. GCCs are captive units, not outsourcing firms** — A Global Capability Centre is an offshore unit owned by a multinational that performs work for its parent, from IT support and finance operations to engineering, analytics and research and development. Unlike an IT services company, it does not sell to outside clients, so its fortunes track the parent's global strategy. GCC earnings count as services exports in the balance of payments and help offset the merchandise deficit. Economic security, in the sense Mr. Mishra used, means reducing exposure to deliberate disruption of supply, capital or technology by others, a condition scholars have called 'weaponised interdependence'.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 is built around exactly these words** — The syllabus covers growth, development and employment, mobilisation of resources, investment models and infrastructure. Mains questions have repeatedly asked about the causes and financing of India's current account deficit, the merits of FDI over portfolio flows and the need for long-

	term infrastructure finance; a senior official's four risks form a ready structure for such answers. 2. AI and jobs is an Essay and GS3 favourite — Questions on automation, the future of work and the demographic dividend recur in Mains and in the Essay paper. The GCC data supply a rare Indian number — 25,000-30,000 cuts against 150,000 new roles — to anchor an otherwise abstract debate. 3. Prelims tests the balance-of-payments vocabulary — UPSC has often asked which items belong to the current account and which to the capital account, and what separates FDI from FPI. The 10% threshold, the treatment of remittances and the definition of a non-performing asset are the kind of facts that appear.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019, a foreign investment of 10% or more of the post-issue paid-up equity of a listed Indian company is classified as FDI; a holding below 10% is FPI. ● Remittances by Indians working abroad are recorded as secondary income in the current account of the balance of payments. ● External commercial borrowings, NRI deposits and foreign portfolio investment are recorded in the capital and financial account, not the current account. ● A loan is classified as a non-performing asset when interest or an instalment of principal remains overdue for more than 90 days. ● The gross NPA ratio is gross non-performing assets expressed as a percentage of gross advances. ● The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development was established under the NaBFID Act, 2021 as a development finance institution for infrastructure. ● The 'twin balance sheet problem', highlighted in the Economic Survey 2016-17, refers to simultaneous stress on the balance sheets of corporate borrowers and banks.
ANALYSIS	1. The four risks are one risk seen from four sides: the cost of depending on others — Weaponised supply chains, import dependence, fickle capital and AI share a structure — each is a channel through which decisions taken abroad can hurt India at short notice. AI belongs on the list because the frontier models, chips and cloud capacity on which Indian firms increasingly rely are controlled by a handful of foreign companies and governments. Read this way, the answer is resilience — diversified sources, buffers and domestic capability — rather than self-sufficiency. Mr. Mishra's own qualifier, "make things at home and competitively", is the crucial part: import substitution behind high walls would raise costs, as today's evidence on input Quality Control Orders shows on a small scale. 2. Preferring FDI is sound, but FDI follows predictability, not appeals — Balance-of-payments deficits of \$5 billion in 2024-25 and \$23.6 billion in 2025-26 show that other inflows have not reliably covered the CAD. FDI is stickier, but investors price policy risk, and India's record — the retrospective tax amendment of 2012 after the Vodafone judgment, withdrawn only by the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021, and frequent changes in tariffs and product rules — is what Mr. Mishra implicitly addresses when he asks for stable tax policy, contracts and "clearances that actually clear". The counter-view is that FDI is not costless: profits are repatriated, and net FDI can shrink even when gross inflows are healthy. The goal should be a larger share of export-oriented FDI that earns the foreign exchange it later remits. 3. The warning on aggressive lending is the speech's most concrete instruction — A gross NPA ratio below 1% and banks flush with liquidity are exactly the conditions in

	which the lending boom of the 2000s began. Mr. Mishra's line that credit must be appraised against "the economics of the project rather than the enthusiasm of the moment" applies above all to the infrastructure push he also calls for. There is a tension in wanting the financial system to 'enable' growth and to lend cautiously at once. The resolution is a division of labour — banks for working capital and shorter loans, and bond markets, NaBFID, pension funds and insurers for long-gestation projects — which makes his call for patient capital and new financial structures for cities the more important half of the speech. 4. The GCC numbers are small, but they show where AI bites first — Cuts of 25,000-30,000 against about 150,000 new roles leave the GCC sector a net creator of jobs this year. The more revealing figure is that centres once planned for 5,000 employees are now being designed for about 3,000, a 40% reduction in hiring per new centre, according to ANSR's Vikram Ahuja. The pressure falls on small GCCs doing routine, commoditised work — Hy-Vee and Opendoor have shut their Indian centres, affecting about 400 people between them — and these are the entry points for graduates from smaller colleges. The counter-view is that productivity gains may draw more multinationals to India, so total employment could still grow; but the skill mix will shift towards fewer, more specialised roles, and training has to adjust faster than it has so far. 5. Upgraded forecasts are a reason for ambition, not complacency — Four agencies raised India's 2026-27 growth forecasts on the same day, the OECD to 7.1% from 6.3%. Yet the rupee depreciated 13.1% between March 31, 2025 and September 16, 2026, and Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta spoke of a disconnect between the real economy and parts of the financial markets. That gap is the point of Mr. Mishra's warning: a one-year forecast says little about structural exposure over two decades. Growth makes reform easier to fund, but past cycles show that good years are when vulnerabilities are quietly built.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Alliances are fragmented, supply chains are being used as weapons, and capital can be switched on and off." In this context, examine the structural risks to India's external sector and discuss how the financial system can move from accommodating growth to enabling it. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Quote the Principal Secretary's four risks from the September 23 SBI conclave and note the balance-of-payments deficits of \$5 billion in 2024-25 and \$23.6 billion in 2025-26. 2. Body — the external-sector risks — Weaponised supply chains and rising tariff and non-tariff barriers; a merchandise trade deficit that goes beyond energy; reliance on volatile portfolio capital; AI's effect on services exports, with GCC restructuring of 25,000-30,000 jobs as evidence. 3. Body — responses in the real economy — Competitive manufacturing rather than import substitution; FDI attracted through stable tax policy, contracts and clearances; trade diversification through FTAs with the EU, New Zealand and others. 4. Body — the financial system — Long-tenure and patient capital for infrastructure through bonds, NaBFID, pension and insurance funds; risk capital and equity for innovation; municipal finance for cities; prudent bank credit, recalling the twin balance sheet problem and today's gross NPA ratio below 1%. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that resilience, not autarky, is the goal, and that a period of upgraded growth forecasts is the time to build buffers rather than relax.
ADMINISTRATOR'S	Q1. As Secretary, DPIIT, how would you deliver 'clearances that actually clear' for

BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

investors?

Approach: I would map every approval an investor needs across the Centre and the States, drop those that serve no purpose, and set statutory timelines with deemed approval for the rest. The National Single Window System should become the single interface, with every pending file visible to the investor and to my office. I would publish department-wise clearance times every month, because public data changes behaviour faster than circulars. Stability also means consulting industry before changing rules and giving transition periods when change is unavoidable.

Q2. You are the Labour Commissioner in a State with many GCCs. Two centres announce closures affecting about 400 employees. What do you do?

Approach: I would first ensure that statutory dues — notice pay, retrenchment compensation, gratuity and provident fund — are paid on time, since technology employees often assume labour law does not protect them. I would convene the companies, the State skill mission and other GCCs to place workers quickly, since the sector as a whole is still hiring. I would ask for data on the roles being cut and those being added, so that skilling programmes are redesigned around jobs that are actually growing. The aim is to make transitions fast, not to block restructuring.

Q3. An interview board asks: is 'make things at home' a return to import substitution?

Approach: It need not be. Pre-1991 import substitution protected domestic producers regardless of cost, and consumers and exporters paid for it. The Principal Secretary added 'competitively', which means domestic production that can survive without permanent protection and can export. The test for any measure — a tariff, a quality order or a subsidy — is whether it is time-bound, tied to performance and withdrawn when it fails.

2.5 HC Asks Why ESMA Is Not Invoked Against Delhi Bus Drivers; Bank Unions Call Three-Day Strike

THE NEWS New Delhi. In the second week of a strike by contractual bus drivers, at least 37 drivers at the Delhi Transport Corporation's (DTC) Wazirabad depot were issued show-cause notices on Wednesday, September 23, for allegedly obstructing bus operations between September 16 and 22, according to the depot manager, The Hindu reports. A show-cause notice asks an employee to explain why disciplinary action should not follow; the drivers must reply within 24 hours or face an internal inquiry and an ex parte decision, one taken without hearing them. Eight drivers have been blacklisted. The strike began on September 15 for better pay, paid leave and social security; the drivers, employed by seven private companies that operate Delhi's cluster buses, earn ₹862 a day with no paid leave or social security net. The DTC Karamchari Ekta Union has called a full strike of all contractual employees on September 28; DTC has made attendance compulsory. Police have detained hundreds of drivers after FIRs over alleged vandalism, which the drivers deny. A Delhi High Court Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia sought the Delhi government's reply on why the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), a law that lets government ban strikes in notified essential services, has not been invoked, and asked it to ensure DTC buses keep plying. Delhi Metro added eight to 10 trains and 20 to 50 daily trips from September 16 to 22. Separately, the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), which The Hindu says claims to represent 90% of the banking workforce, has called a nationwide strike from September 28 to 30, primarily for a five-day banking week; the Finance Ministry said public sector and regional rural banks will function normally on Sunday, September 27, with RBI approval for all branches, offices and currency chests to stay open. The EPFO wage-ceiling rise from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 a month was carded on September 18-19; new is the case made in ET by Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran and Shruti Singh. Because people prefer a smaller reward sooner to a larger one later — 'hyperbolic discounting' — payroll-deducted saving works where willpower fails. For a worker earning ₹22,000, the employer's 12% contribution is ₹2,640 a month, ₹31,680 a year, or ₹6,33,600 for 20 such workers, but coverage also helps attract and retain workers, they argue. The syllabus link is GS3 on employment and GS2 on rights.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Delhi runs part of its bus fleet through private operators who employ drivers on contract → the drivers earn ₹862 a day with no paid leave or social security → a strike begins on September 15; depots issue show-cause notices and blacklist drivers, and police register FIRs → commuters suffer and the High Court asks why ESMA has not been invoked → the dispute shows why mandatory social security, now widened by the higher EPF ceiling, matters most for workers at the margins

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Constitution protects the right to form unions, not a right to strike** — Article 19(1)(c) guarantees the right to form associations or unions, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(4). In *All India Bank Employees' Association v. National Industrial Tribunal* (1962), the Supreme Court held that this right does not carry with it a guaranteed right to strike or to bargain collectively. In *Kameshwar Prasad v. State of Bihar* (1962), it struck down a ban on demonstrations by government servants but upheld the ban on strikes. In *T.K. Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu* (2003), which arose from the dismissal of striking State employees under Tamil Nadu's Essential Services Maintenance Act of 2002, the Court held that government employees have no fundamental, statutory or equitable right to strike.
- 2. ESMA turns a strike in a notified service into an offence** — Parliament enacted Essential Services Maintenance Acts in 1968 and 1981, several States have their own, such as Tamil Nadu (2002), Karnataka (2013) and Maharashtra (2023), and the Essential Defence Services Act, 2021 covers defence production units. The common design is that the government declares a service essential — typically transport, power, water, health, posts or communications — and issues an order prohibiting strikes in it for a specified period. A strike after such an order is illegal, and those who take part in it, instigate it or finance it face arrest, prosecution and disciplinary action. Because it suspends workers' main bargaining weapon, an ESMA order is normally time-bound and is itself open to judicial review.
- 3. The Industrial Relations Code extends strike-notice rules to every industrial establishment** — The four labour codes — on wages (2019), and on industrial relations, social security, and occupational safety, health and working conditions (all 2020) — were made effective from November 21, 2025, consolidating 29 central labour laws, per a PIB release. Under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, no worker may strike without giving notice within 60 days before striking, within 14 days of giving notice, during conciliation proceedings and seven days after them, or during proceedings before a tribunal and 60 days after them. Under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, which the Code replaced, such notice rules applied only to public utility services; the Code applies them to all industrial establishments. It also treats concerted casual leave by 50% or more of the workers on a given day as a strike.
- 4. Contract workers and EPF coverage now sit inside the labour codes** — The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 has been subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, and a PIB release says principal employers will provide health and social security benefits to contract workers. In *Steel Authority of India v. National Union Water Front Workers* (2001), a Constitution Bench held that abolition of contract labour does not automatically make contract workers regular employees of the principal employer. The Code on Social Security, 2020 subsumes nine laws, including the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, under which the EPF, the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 and the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme, 1976 run. Of the employer's 12% contribution, 8.33% of wages up to the ceiling goes to the pension scheme and the rest to the worker's provident fund account.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS2 and GS3 meet in the right to strike** — The syllabus covers fundamental rights in GS2 and employment and labour reforms in GS3. Mains questions on the labour codes typically ask whether they balance flexibility for employers with protection for

	workers; the Delhi strike, the bank strike call and the EPF ceiling together make a three-part illustration of that balance. 2. Essential services are a GS4 case-study staple — Ethics case studies often place a candidate between striking workers and a public that depends on them. The Delhi dispute — ₹862 a day, blacklisting, FIRs and a High Court asking about ESMA — is the template: fairness to workers, continuity of service and restraint in using coercive power. 3. Behavioural economics has entered the official vocabulary — The Economic Survey 2018-19 devoted a chapter to behavioural economics and the ‘nudge’, and the CEA’s op-ed extends that logic to compulsory saving. Terms such as hyperbolic discounting, default options and present bias are now fair game in GS3 answers and in the Essay paper.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● In All India Bank Employees’ Association v. National Industrial Tribunal (1962), the Supreme Court held that the right to form unions under Article 19(1)(c) does not include a guaranteed right to strike. ● In T.K. Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu (2003), the Supreme Court held that government employees have no fundamental or statutory right to strike. ● Under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, a worker in any industrial establishment may not strike without giving notice within 60 days before the strike, or within 14 days of giving such notice. ● The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 treats concerted casual leave taken by 50% or more of the workers on a given day as a strike. ● The four labour codes came into effect on November 21, 2025, consolidating 29 central labour laws. ● The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 has been subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. ● Hyperbolic discounting, a concept of behavioural economics, describes the tendency to prefer smaller immediate rewards over larger future ones, which weakens voluntary saving.
ANALYSIS	1. The Delhi dispute is a contracting problem the State created, not only a law-and-order problem — The buses are public, the service is essential and the routes are planned by the government, yet the drivers are employed by seven private companies at ₹862 a day without paid leave or social security. At 26 working days, that is about ₹22,400 a month — almost exactly the CEA’s example of a worker now brought under mandatory EPF by the higher ceiling. The State has outsourced employment but not responsibility: as principal employer under the labour codes, it must see that contractors extend health and social security benefits. Invoking ESMA would restore buses but leave the cause untouched. The counter-view is that commuters — daily wagers, domestic workers and students — should not bear the cost of a wage dispute, and that vandalism is a crime whatever the grievance. 2. ESMA is a blunt instrument, and using it would signal that bargaining has failed — The High Court asked why ESMA has not been invoked; it did not order its use. To compel contract workers of private operators, the government must first declare their work essential, which in turn strengthens their claim that essential work deserves decent terms. In People’s Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India (1982), the Supreme Court held that labour paid less than the minimum wage amounts to forced labour under Article 23, so a government that compels work must also be sure the pay is lawful. The better sequence is conciliation under the Industrial Relations Code, an interim settlement with the operators on leave and social security enrolment, and

ESMA only if violence or a total shutdown persists.

- 3. The bank strike shows mitigation replacing confrontation** — The government's response to the UFBU call was not ESMA but an extra working Sunday, with RBI approval for branches, ATM-linked branches and currency chests to stay open. Digital payments have also reduced a bank strike's bite, since UPI, cards and net banking continue; the main losers are those who depend on branches, such as pensioners and cash-using small traders. The union's central demand, a five-day banking week, concerns working conditions and is the kind of issue best settled in the industry-level negotiations between unions and the Indian Banks' Association. The counter-view is that three days without branch services still harm rural customers most, so mitigation should include priority for pension and benefit withdrawals.
- 4. The CEA's case is right about workers and incomplete about employers** — Hyperbolic discounting explains why voluntary saving fails, and payroll deduction is the proven remedy: money set aside before it reaches the worker is money not spent. The employer arithmetic is real too — ₹2,640 a month for a ₹22,000 worker, ₹6,33,600 a year for 20 such workers — and for a thin-margin small firm it can decide whether a job is created formally at all. The CEA's answer, that coverage signals quality and improves retention, holds for skilled workers in competitive labour markets, less so for low-wage work where employers hold the bargaining power. Firms may also try to shift pay into allowances; the labour codes' uniform definition of wages, which adds back allowances exceeding half of total remuneration, limits that escape route.
- 5. A higher ceiling helps only workers who are actually on a payroll** — The 51 lakh workers newly brought under mandatory coverage are employees of establishments already within EPFO's net whose wages lie above the old ceiling. The Delhi drivers show the harder frontier: contract workers of private operators with no social security net at all. For them the binding constraint is not the ceiling but enforcement against contractors, which provident fund law addresses by holding the principal employer liable for contract workers' contributions and letting it recover them from the contractor. The trampoline the CEA describes needs springs at the bottom as well as the top, so audits of contractors in publicly funded services should come before the next increase in the ceiling.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

The right to strike is not a fundamental right in India, yet strikes remain the principal bargaining tool of workers in essential services. Examine the legal framework governing strikes and discuss how the State should balance workers' claims with citizens' access to essential services. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Open with the Delhi bus drivers' strike since September 15 — ₹862 a day, no paid leave, show-cause notices, the High Court's question on ESMA — and the UFBU's call for a bank strike from September 28 to 30.
- 2. Body — the law** — Article 19(1)(c) and the 1962 and 2003 judgments; ESMA at the Centre and in the States; the Industrial Relations Code's notice rules for all establishments and its 50% mass casual leave rule; the labour codes in force from November 21, 2025.
- 3. Body — why strikes still happen** — Contractualisation of public services, absence of social security and weak bargaining forums; use the contractual drivers and the CEA's case for mandatory EPF to show how coverage gaps feed disputes.
- 4. Body — the balance** — Conciliation first, a time-bound ESMA order only as a last resort, principal-employer responsibility for contract workers, mitigation of the kind seen in the bank Sunday opening, and alternatives for commuters such as extra Metro services.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

5. Conclusion — Conclude that essential services need both continuity and decent terms, and that the State as principal employer must fix the cause rather than only prohibit the symptom.

Q1. You are the Delhi Transport Secretary. The High Court has asked why ESMA has not been invoked. What do you advise the government?

Approach: I would advise that ESMA be kept ready but not used first. The immediate steps are a tripartite meeting of the government, the seven operators and the union through the conciliation machinery, an interim settlement on paid leave and social security enrolment, and a firm line against vandalism through the police. I would report to the Court the contingency measures — extra Metro trips, DTC's own staff and a timeline for talks. If services collapse or violence continues, a time-bound order limited to bus operations would be defensible because milder options would have been exhausted.

Q2. As Labour Commissioner, how would you ensure the contractors' drivers get the social security the law requires?

Approach: I would inspect the seven operators' records for provident fund and ESI registration, wage payments and leave, and check EPFO and ESIC contribution data against the number of drivers actually on the buses. Where contractors default, I would invoke the principal employer's liability so that the transport authority pays and recovers from the contractor. I would publish compliance status operator by operator. Future contracts should make social security compliance a condition of every monthly payment.

Q3. An interview board asks: the CEA says compulsion corrects hyperbolic discounting. Isn't that paternalism?

Approach: It is paternalism, but of a limited and justified kind. The State does not choose how the worker lives; it only ensures that a small share of wages is saved for old age, emergencies and death cover, which people systematically under-provide for themselves. The cost of failure falls on the State anyway, through old-age poverty. The design should respect autonomy where it can, through portability via the Universal Account Number, easy partial withdrawals for emergencies and transparent returns.

3. Agriculture & Food

Both stories show the state using its fastest tool when the monsoon fails, and show that the fastest tool rarely helps the farmer. A tariff on imported cooking oil can be cut overnight by notification and helps every urban kitchen from the next morning. A drought declaration that would help a Marathwada soybean grower must wait for October 5, a field survey and a Central team. The same soybean farmer sits in both stories, and today he loses in both.

3.1 Centre Halves Duty on Crude Palm and Soybean Oil to 5%, Scraps Crude Sunflower Oil Duty

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Centre has cut the basic customs duty on crude and refined edible oils, including palm, soybean and sunflower oil, with effect from Thursday, September 24, 2026, to reduce import costs and potentially ease domestic prices, The Economic Times reports. Basic customs duty is the core tariff charged on goods entering India. The duty on crude soybean oil and crude palm oil has been halved to 5%, and the duty on refined soybean and palm oils cut to 27.5% from 32.5%. For sunflower oil, the government has scrapped the 10% duty on crude imports altogether, while the duty on refined sunflower oil has been lowered to 22.5% from 32.5%. Crude oil here means unrefined oil that Indian refineries process into the packaged cooking oil sold in shops; refined oil arrives ready for packing. The paper says the move is expected to reduce the landed cost of edible oils (the price of an import once it reaches an Indian port, including freight and duty), which could pass into lower domestic prices and give some relief on food inflation. India is among the world's largest edible oil importers, so global commodity prices, freight costs and the exchange rate are important determinants of domestic edible oil inflation. The report does not say whether any cess on these imports has changed, and it gives no estimate of the revenue given up. The cut comes as price pressure builds. In a separate report the ET notes that retail inflation rose to 4.8% in August from 4.5% in July, that the Asian Development Bank expects inflation to average 5% in FY27 and names El Niño-related disruptions as a key risk, and that the OECD sees a weaker monsoon as a threat to farm output. It also comes as the kharif oilseed crop reaches the market in a bad year: The Indian Express reports that soybean and cotton are the worst-hit crops of Maharashtra's drought. On the ET's figures, the gap between the crude and refined duty is 22.5 percentage points for all three oils, exactly as it was before the cut. The syllabus link is GS3: agricultural pricing, food security, inflation and the effect of trade policy on farmers and consumers.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

A strong El Niño weakens the monsoon and pushes up food and energy prices → retail inflation rises to 4.8% in August and forecasters expect a rate hike → India, which imports more than half its edible oil, feels every swing in world prices, freight and the rupee in the kitchen → the Centre halves crude palm and soybean oil duty to 5%, scraps crude sunflower duty and trims refined-oil duties, keeping the crude-refined gap at 22.5 points → cheaper imports arrive just as a drought-hit soybean harvest reaches the mandis, reopening the conflict between the consumer's price and the oilseed farmer's price

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Customs duty is a Union levy whose effective rate the executive can change overnight** — "Duties of customs including export duties" fall under Entry 83 of the Union List, so only the Union can levy them. The charging provision is Section 12 of the Customs Act, 1962, and the statutory rates are in the First Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act, 1975. Section 25(1) of the Customs Act lets the Union government, in the public interest, exempt goods wholly or partly from duty by notification, which is how the rate actually charged is cut without Parliament amending the Schedule. The Finance Act, 2021 added a separate Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess on imports that included crude palm, soybean and sunflower oils; as a cess, its proceeds stay outside the divisible pool that Article 270 shares with the States.
- 2. India buys more than half its cooking oil abroad, and the gap has lasted three decades** — According to a PIB note on the National Mission on Edible Oils, India's import dependence for edible oil was 56.25% in 2023-24, down from 63.2% in 2015-16, with imports of 15.66 million tonnes in 2023-24. Palm oil, mostly from Indonesia and Malaysia, is the largest single import; soybean oil comes mainly from Argentina and Brazil, and sunflower oil from the Black Sea region, chiefly Russia and Ukraine. India grows nine annual oilseeds: groundnut, rapeseed-mustard, soybean, sunflower,

sesamum, safflower and niger, which are edible, and castor and linseed, grown mainly for industrial use. Most are grown on rain-fed land by small farmers, which keeps yields low and output volatile.

- 3. Self-sufficiency was won once through the Yellow Revolution and lost when imports were opened** — The Technology Mission on Oilseeds, launched in 1986, combined better seed, extension, processing support and price assurance, and the resulting 'Yellow Revolution' made India nearly self-sufficient in edible oils in the early 1990s; a PIB note credits price support and import substitution. Once imports were liberalised in the 1990s, cheaper palm and soybean oil displaced domestic oil and dependence climbed again. The National Mission on Edible Oils–Oil Palm (NMEO-OP), approved in 2021 with ₹11,040 crore (₹8,844 crore Central share), targets 6.5 lakh hectares of new oil palm by 2025-26 with a special focus on the North-East and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and guarantees farmers a viability price for fresh fruit bunches against swings in world crude palm oil prices. The National Mission on Edible Oils–Oilseeds, approved in October 2024 for 2024-25 to 2030-31 with ₹10,103 crore, aims to raise primary oilseed output from 39 million tonnes in 2022-23 to 69.7 million tonnes by 2030-31; per the PIB, the two missions together aim to meet about 72% of projected edible oil requirement by then.
- 4. MSP protects the oilseed farmer only where the state actually buys** — Minimum support prices are recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), a non-statutory attached office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, and approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs; since 2018-19 they have been set at no less than one and a half times the A2+FL cost of production. The oilseeds covered are groundnut, soybean, sunflower seed, sesamum and nigerseed in kharif, rapeseed-mustard and safflower in rabi, and copra. An MSP works only where an agency procures. The Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanraksha Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) of 2018 has three parts: the Price Support Scheme, under which agencies such as NAFED buy pulses, oilseeds and copra at MSP; the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme, which pays the gap between MSP and the market price, on the model of Madhya Pradesh's Bhavantar scheme; and a pilot Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme. A lower import duty therefore lowers the market price that PM-AASHA must then make up.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. The GS3 syllabus puts MSP, subsidies and food security in one line** — The GS3 syllabus lists "issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices" alongside the public distribution system, buffer stocks and food security, and separately asks about the effects of liberalisation. Mains questions keep returning to import dependence in pulses and edible oils and to crop diversification away from rice and wheat. A duty cut on edible oil is a clean case study because it forces the answer to weigh the consumer against the producer.
- 2. Prelims tests the legal route and the scheme design, not today's rate** — UPSC will not ask this week's duty on crude palm oil. It can ask how the rate is changed (an exemption notification under the Customs Act), whether a cess is shared with States, which regions NMEO-OP targets, what a viability price is, and what PM-AASHA contains. The status of the CACP, the crops covered by MSP and the colour-coded 'revolutions' remain favourite formats.
- 3. Inflation control now uses trade tools as much as the policy rate** — Duty cuts, stock limits and export curbs have become a routine part of inflation management; this magazine's September 19 card covered reworked sugar and onion stock limits. A GS3 answer on food inflation should show that monetary policy works on demand while these tools work on supply, and that each has a cost: a duty cut gives up revenue and depresses farm prices.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Duties of customs, including export duties, are levied by the Union under Entry 83 of the Union List in the Seventh Schedule.
- Basic customs duty is levied under Section 12 of the Customs Act, 1962, at rates in the First Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act, 1975, and the Union government can lower the rate actually charged through exemption notifications under Section 25 of the Customs Act.
- The Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess was introduced by the Finance Act, 2021; as a cess, its proceeds are not part of the divisible pool shared with the States under Article 270.
- The National Mission on Edible Oils–Oil Palm, approved in 2021, has a special focus on the North-Eastern States and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and provides oil palm farmers a viability price for fresh fruit bunches.
- The National Mission on Edible Oils–Oilseeds covers the period 2024-25 to 2030-31.
- PM-AASHA consists of the Price Support Scheme, the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme and the Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme.
- The Technology Mission on Oilseeds, launched in 1986, is associated with the 'Yellow Revolution' in edible oilseeds.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The cut protects Indian refiners as carefully as it helps Indian consumers** — On the ET's figures, the gap between the crude and refined basic customs duty was 22.5 percentage points for all three oils before the cut (10% against 32.5%) and is still 22.5 points after it (5% against 27.5% for palm and soybean, zero against 22.5% for sunflower). The government has lowered the whole ladder without shortening the step, so refined imports gain nothing relative to crude. That is deliberate: per a PIB release, when the Centre cut crude-oil duty from 20% to 10% in 2025, it said the aim was to use domestic refining capacity and discourage refined imports, and it widened the effective gap from 8.75 to 19.25 percentage points. Keeping the step keeps refining jobs and value addition in India. The counter-view is that consumers would gain more if refined oil were cheaper too, but a country that imports over half its oil has good reason not to import the processing as well.
- 2. A duty cut is a transfer whose final destination is uncertain** — The ET is careful to say the cut "could" give relief and is "expected" to lower landed cost, and it names world prices, freight and the exchange rate as other drivers. When a buyer as large as India cuts its tariff, world demand rises, and part of the benefit can go to exporters who raise prices; Indonesia and Malaysia have in the past adjusted their own palm oil export duties to suit their markets. Another part can stay with importers and refiners who do not cut wholesale and retail prices. This is why, per PIB, the 2025 cut came with an advisory asking edible oil associations to pass the benefit on and report maximum retail prices weekly. The test of today's measure is the price of a one-litre pack a month from now.
- 3. The timing lands on the soybean farmer at the worst moment** — Soybean reaches the mandis in October, and The Indian Express reports it is among the worst-hit crops of Maharashtra's drought. A farmer who loses half a crop is usually partly compensated by a higher price for what remains, because shortages raise prices. Cheaper imported oil caps the price of soybean oil and so of the bean, leaving the drought-hit farmer with a low yield and a capped price at once. The episode also repeats a cycle: the same PIB release refers to a September 2024 duty hike, which came when soybean prices were below MSP, followed by cuts in 2025 and now 2026. A farmer cannot plan around a tariff that changes direction every year, and that uncertainty undercuts the self-sufficiency NMEO-Oilseeds is paying for.

	4. The right tool for protecting the farmer is procurement, not the tariff — If consumer relief is the priority, the honest way to protect oilseed growers is to pay them directly rather than tax every kitchen. PM-AASHA's Price Support Scheme lets NAFED and other agencies buy oilseeds at MSP, and the price-deficiency route pays farmers the gap without the state storing the crop. A tariff protects everyone who sells oilseeds, including large traders, and every consumer pays for it; procurement targets the producer and its cost appears openly in the budget. The counter-view is that oilseed procurement has been thin outside a few States, and Madhya Pradesh's Bhavantar scheme was criticised because traders pushed prices down during the payment window. Both criticisms argue for better procurement, not for using the customs tariff as price support. 5. Import dependence is a strategic risk, and oil palm is not a free answer — India's edible oil comes from a few countries, and the shocks have been real: Indonesia's temporary ban on palm oil exports in 2022 and the war in Ukraine, which disrupted Black Sea sunflower oil, both pushed up Indian prices. That is the case for NMEO-OP's push into oil palm, which yields far more oil per hectare than annual oilseeds. The counter-case is ecological: oil palm needs a lot of water, and planting it in the biodiversity-rich North-East risks repeating the forest loss seen in South-East Asia. A balanced strategy would push harder on the yields of soybean, mustard and groundnut on existing farmland, where Indian yields remain well below world averages.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's edible-oil policy swings between protecting the oilseed farmer and protecting the consumer." In the light of the recent cut in import duties on crude and refined edible oils, critically examine whether customs tariffs are the right instrument for managing this trade-off, and suggest a durable path to self-reliance in edible oils. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that from September 24, 2026 the duty on crude palm and soybean oil was halved to 5%, crude sunflower oil duty was scrapped and refined-oil duties cut to 27.5% and 22.5%, in a country whose edible-oil import dependence was 56.25% in 2023-24 per the PIB. 2. Body — the consumer case — Explain how landed cost falls and food inflation (4.8% in August) may ease. Note that the crude-refined gap is kept at 22.5 points to protect domestic refining, and that pass-through depends on world prices, the rupee and industry behaviour, citing the 2025 advisory on MRPs. 3. Body — the farmer case — Point out that the cut coincides with the soybean harvest in a drought year, that the 2024 hike and the 2025 and 2026 cuts show volatile policy, and that NMEO-Oilseeds' target of 69.7 million tonnes by 2030-31 needs predictable prices. 4. Body — better instruments — Argue for PM-AASHA procurement and price-deficiency payments to protect farmers, a published rule-based duty band instead of ad hoc changes, a yield-focused oilseed mission, oil palm with ecological safeguards, and diversified import sources. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the tariff is a legitimate short-term inflation tool but a poor farm-support tool, and that self-reliance will come from yields and assured procurement, not from moving the duty up and down.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Department of Food and Public Distribution. How do you ensure the duty cut reaches the consumer? Approach: I would repeat the 2025 approach of asking edible oil associations to cut distributor prices and MRPs and report MRPs weekly, and I would publish the comparison. I would track retail prices of the main oils against landed costs so any gap

between import price and shelf price is visible. Large brands would be asked to explain delays. If prices do not move within a few weeks, the ministry should say so publicly, because transparency is the main enforcement tool in a market without price control.

Q2. As Collector of a soybean-growing district, you find market prices falling below MSP as the harvest arrives. What do you do?

Approach: I would press for Price Support Scheme procurement centres to open on time through NAFED and the State agency, with farmer registration and quality testing done before arrivals peak. I would secure storage and quick payment, because delayed payment pushes farmers back to traders. I would watch mandi auctions for collusion and publicise the MSP and the centres widely. Where procurement cannot absorb the crop, I would help farmers use warehouse receipts to borrow against stored produce instead of selling in distress.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India aim for complete self-sufficiency in edible oils?

Approach: Complete self-sufficiency would need a large shift of land and water away from cereals and pulses, and could make oil much costlier for poor households. A more sensible goal is the NMEO aim of meeting about 72% of requirement domestically, with yields raised on existing land. The remaining imports should come from several countries so that no single export ban or war can hit Indian kitchens hard. Self-reliance here means resilience, not autarky.

3.2 Maharashtra Must Wait Till October 5 for Drought Assessment as Fadnavis Warns of 'Worse Than 1972'

THE NEWS Mumbai. Maharashtra cannot yet declare the drought its Chief Minister now compares to 1972, because the rules that release Central money set the calendar. Under National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) rules, The Indian Express explains, drought assessment for kharif (the monsoon cropping season, June to October) can begin only from October 5, once the monsoon starts to withdraw; for rabi (the winter season, October to April) it can be held in March 2027. India has no single accepted definition of drought: States may declare one on local conditions, but their report must conform to NDRF norms for the Centre to release funds. As the paper lists them, the criteria cover crop loss, the moisture adequacy index (how well soil moisture meets crop needs), rainfall deficit, falling food production and labour migration, with conditions on sowing, drinking water, groundwater and fodder. Maharashtra will seek Central assistance after October 5; meanwhile it has begun surveys and panchanamas (on-the-spot loss records drawn up by revenue officials), and a Central team will make its own assessment before funds are released. On Wednesday, September 23, touring Latur, Dharashiv and Solapur, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the State is heading for a severe drought "likely to be worse than that of 1972", which is remembered for massive crop loss and an acute foodgrain shortage. He promised a Government Resolution (a State executive order) before Saturday, relief credited directly to farmers' bank accounts from the State treasury without waiting for Central funds, and continuation of the ₹40,385-crore loan waiver announced in July. Latur and Dharashiv received only half their normal rainfall; he blamed a "Super El Niño". Per the IMD, 31 of 36 districts are rain-deficient, 20 of them by 25% to 58% (the news report says 25 to 60 per cent). Sowing began on July 15 instead of June 10, and the kharif crop on 147 lakh hectares has withered, soybean and cotton worst. As of September 20, the 138 major dams held 85% and 2,630 small dams 43%, against 96% and 57% a year ago; Marathwada has 46% against 81%. Nationally, The Hindu reports, the rainfall deficit was about 15% below normal up to September 22. This magazine covered Maharashtra's preparations on September 22; the 1972 comparison, the GR and the procedure are new. The link is GS3 disaster management and GS2 fiscal federalism.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

A 'Super El Niño' weakens the southwest monsoon, leaving a national deficit of about 15% by September 22 → in rain-fed Maharashtra, with under 20% irrigation, sowing slips to July 15 and 40-60-day dry spells wither the kharif crop on 147 lakh hectares → small dams fall to 43% and Marathwada's storage to 46%, and the Opposition demands a drought declaration → NDRF rules allow kharif assessment only from October 5, so the State runs panchanamas and prepares a

proposal → the CM calls it worse than 1972 and promises a Government Resolution and State-funded relief before Central money arrives

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. India declares drought by a manual, not by a single number** — Drought is conventionally classed as meteorological (a shortfall of rain), agricultural (a shortfall of soil moisture for crops) and hydrological (a shortfall of surface and ground water). The Manual for Drought Management of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, issued in 2016 and updated in 2020, sets a two-step test. First come mandatory indicators: rainfall deviation, the Standardised Precipitation Index or dry spells. Then the State picks three impact indicators from four groups: crop sown area (below 85% of normal is moderate, below 75% severe), satellite vegetation indices such as NDVI, soil moisture (the Moisture Adequacy Index, actual evapotranspiration divided by potential evapotranspiration, as a percentage) and hydrology (reservoir, groundwater or streamflow). Drought is 'severe' if at least two of the three are severe and one moderate, and 'moderate' if at least two are moderate. Field verification in 10% of villages follows; crop loss of 33% or more qualifies, above 50% for severe. The State declares by notification, normally by 31 October for kharif and 31 March for rabi, valid for up to six months.
- 2. The State fund pays first and the national fund tops up severe calamities** — The Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides for a National Disaster Response Fund under Section 46 and a State Disaster Response Fund under Section 48. Drought is a notified disaster for these funds, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, not the Home Ministry, is the nodal ministry for it. Under the 2020 Manual, moderate drought is handled from the SDRF, while severe drought makes a State eligible for NDRF help: the State submits a memorandum within a week of declaring drought, an Inter-Ministerial Central Team is to visit within a week of receiving it, and the Centre is to decide within a month of the team's report. Final approval rests with a High Level Committee chaired by the Union Home Minister. The Finance Commission of the period fixes each State's SDRF, to which the Centre contributes the larger share.
- 3. The Supreme Court turned the drought manual from advice into a benchmark** — In *Swaraj Abhiyan v. Union of India* (2016), a public interest petition over drought in several States, the Supreme Court criticised the reluctance and delay of some States in declaring drought and the outdated tools used to assess it. It directed the Union to revise the Drought Management Manual with modern indicators and timelines, and to constitute the National Disaster Response Fund and National Disaster Mitigation Fund that the Disaster Management Act provides for. The 2016 Manual followed later that year. The ruling made declaration a matter of evidence and time-bound procedure, because rights to food and work depend on it.
- 4. The 1972 drought gave India the idea of a legal right to work** — Mass relief works during the 1972 drought grew into Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme, conceived by V.S. Page, which promised work on demand to rural adults and was given statutory form by the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, 1977. It was financed partly by a tax on professions, trades and employments paid by urban earners, which States may levy under Article 276, so that the city helped pay for the village in bad years. The scheme became the model for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, which guaranteed 100 days of wage work a year to every rural household whose adults volunteered for unskilled manual work. The Drought Prone Areas Programme of 1973-74, which shifted attention from relief to building water and soil assets in chronically dry blocks, came out of the same period.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. Drought sits where GS3 disaster management meets agriculture** — UPSC has asked candidates to discuss drought as a disaster "in view of its spatial expanse, temporal duration, slow onset and lasting effects on vulnerable sections", with a focus on the

	National Disaster Management Authority's September 2010 drought guidelines and preparedness for El Niño and La Niña. Such a question tests the declaration procedure, the funding chain from SDRF to NDRF, and the climate driver; Maharashtra this year supplies all three with current numbers. 2. Prelims tests the vocabulary of drought and the monsoon — Prelims has repeatedly asked about El Niño, the Indian Ocean Dipole and the monsoon, and about the funds and authorities under the Disaster Management Act. IMD's rainfall categories, the Moisture Adequacy Index, the NDRF and SDRF sections and the agriculture ministry's nodal role for drought are all fair game, as is the lineage from Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme to the 2005 national law. 3. GS2 reads drought as a question of fiscal federalism — Relief money moves through a Centre-State chain, and disputes over it have reached the courts: Karnataka went to the Supreme Court in 2024 over delay in Central drought assistance. A GS2 answer on cooperative federalism or the Finance Commission can use the SDRF-NDRF design and the gap between a State's declaration and the Centre's release as evidence of friction in federal finance.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under the Manual for Drought Management (updated 2020), drought is declared by the State Government through a notification, normally by 31 October for kharif and 31 March for rabi, and the notification is valid for up to six months unless withdrawn earlier. ● The Moisture Adequacy Index is the ratio of actual evapotranspiration to potential evapotranspiration, expressed as a percentage. ● The National Disaster Response Fund and the State Disaster Response Fund are constituted under Sections 46 and 48 respectively of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. ● The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare is the nodal Central ministry for drought management, unlike most other natural disasters, for which the Ministry of Home Affairs is nodal. ● In IMD's classification, seasonal rainfall within 19% of the long period average either way is 'normal', 20% to 59% below is 'deficient', and 60% to 99% below is 'large deficient'. ● The Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, 1977, which grew out of relief works during the 1972 drought, is regarded as the forerunner of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. ● Under the 2020 drought Manual, crop loss of 33% or more, established through field verification, qualifies an area for drought declaration, and loss above 50% is required for the 'severe' category.
ANALYSIS	1. The October 5 rule is sound science and poor timing for the farmer — Drought is a slow-onset disaster: a late spell of rain can rescue a crop that looked lost in August, so the rules wait for the season to end before counting losses. That protects the public purse from early or inflated claims. But the farmer's needs do not wait: rabi seed, fertiliser and fodder must be bought now, and loans fall due. Mr. Fadnavis's promise to pay from the State treasury without waiting for Central funds is the right bridge, because it separates relief, which is urgent, from reimbursement, which can follow procedure. The risk is that the Central team may assess less damage than the State has already paid for, leaving the State budget to absorb the difference. 2. 'Worse than 1972' is true of the crop and not yet true of the water — The comparison holds where 1972 hurt most, in rain-fed farming. Latur and Dharashiv have half their normal rain, the kharif crop on 147 lakh hectares has withered, and the State's

irrigation potential is under 20%. But the 138 major dams still hold 85%, and the CM says drinking water is reserved until December, a buffer the Maharashtra of 1972 did not have. The distress is concentrated where the poorest farmers depend on small tanks and rain: small and micro dams are at 43% and Marathwada at 46% against 81% last year. Large reservoirs have turned this into a crisis of rural livelihoods and small-scale water rather than of State-wide thirst, and relief should be targeted on that basis.

3. Declaring drought is a fiscal decision, which is why the rules try to remove discretion

— A declaration commits a State to input subsidies and other relief, paid first from its own SDRF. States therefore have reasons both to delay, to save money, and to inflate, to draw Central funds; the Supreme Court in Swaraj Abhiyan noted the reluctance of some States to declare drought at all. The Manual's satellite indices, soil-moisture measures and village verification exist to make the decision rest on evidence rather than politics. Yet indices can miss what farmers see: The Indian Express reports that where rain did fall this year it came in short, intense bursts that damaged soil and caused erosion, so a rainfall total can look better than the crop it produced. The answer is better data, with satellite readings matched to panchanamas and published district by district, not more discretion.

4. A loan waiver is a blunt drought instrument — The ₹40,385-crore waiver announced in July, before the drought's full extent was known, helps farmers with outstanding formal loans. It does nothing for tenants, sharecroppers and farm workers, who have no crop loan in their names and are hit hardest when there is no work in the fields. Input subsidy per hectare of damaged crop, insurance claims and wage work reach these groups better. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana provides for an on-account payment of up to 25% of likely claims when a mid-season adversity such as a long dry spell is expected to cut yield below half of normal, the quickest insured route to cash. The counter-view is that a waiver clears farmers' credit records so they can borrow for rabi, which matters when two seasons are at risk.

5. The lesson of 1972 was assets, not only transfers — The 1972 response is remembered because relief work built percolation tanks, roads and bunds that outlasted the drought and then became a legal right to work. Today's announcements are almost all transfers: direct bank credits, a loan waiver, water and fodder. Transfers are faster and less leaky than old relief works, and direct benefit transfer is a real advance. But Marathwada's 46% storage and a farm economy with under 20% irrigation are structural problems, and a drought year is the cheapest time to mobilise labour for watershed and small-storage work. A response that ends in cash alone prepares the ground for the next comparison with 1972.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"There is no single definition of drought accepted across India." In this context, explain how drought is assessed, declared and financed in India, and examine whether this framework responds adequately to slow-onset agrarian distress, with reference to the current situation in Maharashtra. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Open with Maharashtra: 31 of 36 districts rain-deficient, the kharif crop on 147 lakh hectares withered, the CM's 'worse than 1972' warning, and the rule that kharif assessment can begin only from October 5. Note the national deficit of about 15% up to September 22.
- 2. Body — assessment and declaration** — Explain the 2016 Manual as updated in 2020: mandatory rainfall and dry-spell indicators, three of four impact indicators, moderate and severe categories, field verification, the 33% crop-loss threshold, and declaration by 31 October or 31 March. Cite Swaraj Abhiyan (2016) as the origin of the modern Manual.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

3. Body — financing — Describe the SDRF and NDRF under Sections 48 and 46 of the DM Act, the State memorandum, the Inter-Ministerial Central Team, the High Level Committee and the agriculture ministry's nodal role. Use Maharashtra's decision to pay from its own treasury first to show the timing gap.

4. Body — adequacy — Argue both ways: end-of-season assessment avoids premature claims, but farmers need rabi inputs now; indices miss intense but useless rain; loan waivers miss tenants and labourers; insurance mid-season payments and wage work are better targeted; and the 1972 lesson of asset-building relief is being lost.

5. Conclusion — Conclude that the framework is sound in design but slow in delivery, and suggest early relief triggered by satellite and dry-spell data, faster Central team visits, and drought works focused on watersheds and small storage.

Q1. You are the Collector of Latur. Drought cannot be formally assessed before October 5, but distress is visible now. What do you do in the next fortnight?

Approach: I would first secure drinking water: reserve sources, plan tanker routes for the worst villages and track them daily. I would complete panchanamas quickly with geo-tagged photographs cross-checked against satellite crop maps, so the later memorandum rests on evidence, and ensure insured farmers report crop loss under the crop insurance scheme. I would set up fodder depots before distress sales of cattle begin and open public works on demand to reduce migration. A daily public dashboard of water, fodder and work would keep the administration honest and farmers informed.

Q2. As Secretary, Relief and Rehabilitation, how would you make Maharashtra's memorandum to the Centre credible?

Approach: I would build it strictly on the Manual's indicators: rainfall deviation and dry spells first, then three impact indicators, backed by field verification in the prescribed share of villages. I would use remote-sensing assessments from the Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre alongside our panchanamas and reconcile differences before submission. I would claim only what the evidence supports, because an inflated memorandum invites a sceptical Central team and delays money for everyone. I would also record every rupee the State pays in advance so it can be reconciled against the Centre's release.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it right for a Chief Minister to call a drought 'worse than 1972' before any formal assessment?

Approach: A leader who signals the scale of a crisis early mobilises the administration and reassures farmers that help is coming, and here the rainfall and crop data do show severe distress. But a strong historical comparison sets expectations the State may not meet, and it can run ahead of the evidence the Central team will demand. The responsible course is to pair the warning with published data and a clear relief timetable. Political language should open the way for administrative action, not replace it.

4. International Relations

This UN General Assembly week showed how much of India's fate is now settled in rooms India does not control. A missile off Oman killed an Indian sailor on a ship flying another country's flag, a U.S. law aimed at Russia and Iran threatens Indian exports, and two superpowers meeting in Washington may fix the rules on minerals and artificial intelligence that India will have to follow. India's answer, visible in New York and in the BRICS tax track in Delhi, is to build coalitions that write rules — the Global South, the G4, BRICS — while flatly refusing forums such as the OIC that presume to rule on its internal affairs.

4.1 Missile Off Oman Kills Indian Seafarer on Foreign-Flagged Ship as Hormuz War Reaches India's Crews

THE NEWS Muscat and New Delhi. Suraj Yadav, a young seafarer from Uttar Pradesh, died of head injuries hours after the bulk carrier MV Cape Dao was hit by a missile off the coast of Oman, The Indian Express reports. The Hindu, citing AFP, places the attack in the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday, September 23, about 2.5 nautical miles off Oman's coast; The Economic Times says off Oman's east coast. No paper says who fired. The ship flies the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, meaning it is registered in that Caribbean state, but it carried 20 Indian seafarers. Ports and Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said the 19 survivors had been evacuated by the Royal Navy of Oman and were ashore, and that Mr. Yadav's remains would be brought home "with full dignity". The Ministry of External Affairs condemned the attack. New since this magazine's September 22 and 23 cards: the war has now killed an Indian on a merchant ship. At the UN General Assembly the same day, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian answered President Donald Trump's threat to "annihilate" Iran: "Yes they did hit us, but we did not bend the knee." Holding up photographs of more than 150 schoolchildren killed by U.S. strikes early in the nearly seven-month war (AP, in The Hindu), he said it "cannot be the case that everyone benefits from the Strait of Hormuz while we are denied access". Before the war the strait carried a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas shipments; Reuters reports that Iran wants to control it and collect fees from ships, which Washington rejects. The first U.S.-Iran shuttle talks since an interim ceasefire collapsed in July ran through a Qatari mediator. Washington has also said it will impose secondary sanctions — penalties on third countries — on any country that allows Iranian flights after Wednesday; Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, replied that Iran would ensure neighbours' airports "could not function" if they stopped Iranian flights, and said Hormuz would not reopen until Iran's conditions are met. Houthi adviser Abed Mohammed al-Thawr threatened U.S. interests if Washington tries to unblock Bab el-Mandeb; The Economic Times notes that the Houthi Red Sea blockade, cutting off Saudi crude, comes on top of the Hormuz blockade. The syllabus link is GS2 on the diaspora and the effect of other countries' policies on India, and GS3 on maritime security.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The U.S. and Israel go to war with Iran on February 28, 2026 → the Strait of Hormuz is blockaded and the U.S. imposes a naval blockade on Iranian ports → an interim ceasefire collapses in July and the Houthis block the Red Sea route at Bab el-Mandeb → merchant ships inside the strait come under fire, and a missile hits the Antigua and Barbuda-flagged MV Cape Dao 2.5 nautical miles off Oman → an Indian seafarer dies as Washington and Tehran open shuttle talks at the UN, with Iran demanding control of the strait

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **UNCLOS guarantees transit passage through international straits, and no coastal state may suspend it** — The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS) lets a coastal state claim a territorial sea of up to 12 nautical miles (Article 3), in which foreign ships enjoy only the weaker right of innocent passage. In straits used for international navigation, Part III creates the stronger right of transit passage: ships and aircraft may pass continuously and expeditiously, and Article 44 says bordering states shall not hamper it and there shall be no suspension. Article 26 bars charges on foreign ships merely for passing through the territorial sea; only specific services rendered can be billed, which is why an Iranian toll on Hormuz collides with the convention. Hormuz is narrow enough that the territorial seas of Iran and Oman overlap, so the whole shipping lane lies in one state's waters or the other's. Iran signed UNCLOS in 1982 but never ratified it, and declared that treaty rights such as transit passage belong only to parties; the United States has not ratified it either, while India ratified it in 1995.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS
(TREND)

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- 2. The flag state, not the crew's country, carries legal responsibility for a merchant ship** — Under Article 91 of UNCLOS, a ship has the nationality of the state whose flag it is entitled to fly, and there must be a “genuine link” between the two. Article 94 makes the flag state responsible for effective jurisdiction and control over the ship's administrative, technical and social matters, including labour conditions on board. Open registries, popularly called flags of convenience, register ships owned and managed from elsewhere for low fees and light regulation; Antigua and Barbuda runs one such registry. The result is a legal split: the MV Cape Dao is an Antigua and Barbuda ship in law, though its crew was Indian, so India's role is consular and diplomatic — repatriation, compensation and support to families — rather than the direct protection it owes an Indian-flagged vessel.
 - 3. The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 makes repatriation and death compensation the shipowner's duty** — The International Labour Organization's Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC), often called the seafarers' bill of rights, consolidated dozens of older maritime labour conventions and entered into force in 2013; India ratified it in 2015. Regulation 2.5 entitles seafarers to repatriation at no cost to themselves, and Regulation 4.2 makes shipowners liable for the costs of sickness, injury and death arising from employment. Amendments in force since 2017 require shipowners to carry financial security so that abandoned crews are repatriated and claims for death or long-term disability are actually paid. In India, the Directorate General of Shipping, under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, is the maritime administration that certifies seafarers, licenses the agencies that recruit and place them, and enforces these obligations.
 - 4. Operation Sankalp shows the Navy's escort role in the Gulf, and also its limits** — The Indian Navy launched Operation Sankalp in June 2019, after attacks on tankers in the Gulf of Oman, to provide presence and escort for Indian-flagged merchant ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. From late 2023 the Navy widened its deployments in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden against Houthis missile and drone attacks and a revival of Somali piracy, answering distress calls from ships of several flags with Indian crew aboard. The Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region at Gurugram, set up in 2018, shares maritime threat information with partner navies and industry. Naval protection is strongest for Indian-flagged ships; for Indian crews on foreign-flagged vessels it depends on proximity, requests and the consent of coastal states — in this case it was Oman's navy that rescued the survivors.
- 1. GS2 names the diaspora and the effect of other states' policies on India's interests** — The GS2 syllabus lists the “effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests” and the Indian diaspora. Questions on West Asia have repeatedly tied India's energy security to the safety of Indians working in the region; a seafarer killed on a foreign-flagged ship is a precise case study of where that protection runs thin.
 - 2. Prelims has already tested the law of the sea** — Prelims 2022 asked a statement-based question on UNCLOS covering the 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, innocent passage and the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone. Transit passage through straits, flag-state duties and the Maritime Labour Convention are the natural next layer, and today's story explains each with a real ship.
 - 3. Map-based questions on chokepoints are a staple** — UPSC regularly pairs water bodies with the countries that border them. Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, now closed at once, are likely material for both Prelims maps and a GS3 answer on maritime security.
- Under UNCLOS, a coastal state may establish a territorial sea not exceeding 12

nautical miles measured from its baselines.

- Part III of UNCLOS provides for transit passage through straits used for international navigation, and states bordering such straits may not suspend it.
- Under Article 91 of UNCLOS, a ship has the nationality of the state whose flag it is entitled to fly, and there must be a genuine link between that state and the ship.
- The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 was adopted under the International Labour Organization and entitles seafarers to repatriation at no cost to themselves; India has ratified it.
- 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 separates Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula from Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa.
- Operation Sankalp was launched by the Indian Navy in 2019 to ensure the safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels through the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf region.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The flag on the stern decided who could protect Suraj Yadav, and it was not India —** Indian seafarers mostly work on foreign-flagged ships because India's own merchant fleet is small relative to the crews it trains. That means the state with the strongest interest in the crew's safety has the weakest legal standing over the ship, while the flag state — here a small Caribbean registry — has neither a navy in the Gulf nor much reason to use one. Operation Sankalp was designed around Indian-flagged tonnage, so it leaves this group exposed. The counter-view is that no navy can escort every ship carrying its nationals, and an escort does not stop a missile anyway. The realistic answer lies upstream: war-zone designation, the right to refuse passage and enforced insurance, which are levers India controls through its licensing of recruiters.
- 2. An attack 2.5 nautical miles off Oman carries the war into a neutral state's waters —** At 2.5 nautical miles, the MV Cape Dao was well inside Oman's 12-mile territorial sea, whether it was in the strait itself, as The Hindu reports, or off Oman's east coast, as The Economic Times puts it. Oman is not a party to the war, has long served as a go-between for Washington and Tehran, and its navy evacuated the crew. If ships are not safe even in a neutral state's waters, the idea of a protected corridor hugging the Omani coast weakens. The location also tests the pitch this magazine reported on September 19 for Oman's Sohar port, on the Gulf of Oman outside the strait, as India's gateway to the Gulf: an attack inside the strait strengthens Sohar's case, while one off the east coast undercuts it. The papers' differing locations therefore matter for policy, not just for the record.
- 3. Iran's fee demand would turn a chokepoint into a toll gate, and UNCLOS is India's best shield —** Reuters reports that Iran wants to control Hormuz and charge ships fees. Accepting that even tacitly would create a precedent that any littoral state with enough missiles can monetise a strait, and the same logic could one day be applied at Malacca or in the South China Sea, where India argues for freedom of navigation. Mr. Jaishankar told Global South ministers in New York the same week that they must "not accept or legitimise" chokepoints, so consistency requires India to say so about Hormuz as well. The honest counter-view is that the law is weakened when the United States itself has not ratified UNCLOS and Iran never did, leaving both sides to argue from custom rather than treaty. India, a party since 1995, is better placed than either to speak for the rule.
- 4. Sanctions on flights and threats to airports widen the war's reach to bystanders —**

	Washington's threat to sanction any country that allows Iranian flights, and Mr. Rezaei's threat to shut neighbours' airports if they comply, put the Gulf states between two coercive demands. These are the states that host the largest Indian communities abroad and serve as air hubs for Indian travellers, so disruption there reaches Indian households faster than any oil price does. The episode also shows that secondary sanctions are moving from commodities to logistics — flights, ports, shipping — the same tool the U.S. is using against buyers of Russian oil. The counter-view is that maximum pressure on both sides may hasten a deal, since the shuttle talks began the same week; but India cannot plan on an outcome it does not influence. 5. Two closed chokepoints turn an energy problem into a freight, insurance and labour problem — With Hormuz blockaded and the Red Sea route threatened by the Houthis, as The Economic Times notes, India faces higher war-risk insurance premiums, longer voyages and crews demanding danger pay or refusing to sail. That is why one seafarer's death is a policy signal rather than a consular incident: the supply of willing crews is itself a limit on how long Gulf trade can continue under fire. The counter-view is that shipping markets adapt quickly with higher pay and rerouting, but the adjustment is paid for by exporters and by the crews who take the risk.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Attacks on merchant shipping in the Strait of Hormuz have now killed an Indian seafarer serving on a foreign-flagged vessel. Examine the legal and institutional gaps in protecting Indian seafarers in conflict zones, and suggest the measures India should take. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the death of Suraj Yadav on the Antigua and Barbuda-flagged MV Cape Dao, hit by a missile about 2.5 nautical miles off Oman with 20 Indian seafarers aboard, and note that the strait carried a fifth of global oil and LNG shipments before the war. 2. Body — the legal framework — Explain transit passage under Part III of UNCLOS, the flag-state duties of Articles 91 and 94, and the shipowner's obligations on repatriation and death compensation under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, which India has ratified. 3. Body — the gaps — Point out that most Indian seafarers sail under foreign flags, that Operation Sankalp is built around Indian-flagged ships, that flag states of open registries have little capacity to protect crews, and that Iran and the U.S. both stand outside UNCLOS. Mention the recruitment chain and the difficulty families face in claiming compensation. 4. Body — measures — Suggest DG Shipping advisories designating high-risk areas with a right to refuse passage and danger pay, verification of insurance before sign-on, faster compensation through the recruiting agency, information sharing through the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region, coordination with Oman, and a firm diplomatic position against tolls on straits. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India supplies the crews of world shipping but not its flags, so its protection must work through law, licensing and diplomacy as much as through warships.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Director General of Shipping. A day after this death, recruiting agencies report that Indian seafarers on ships bound for the Gulf want to sign off. What do you do? Approach: I would issue an advisory designating the Hormuz approaches as a high-risk area and make clear that seafarers who refuse to sail there cannot be penalised and must be repatriated at the owner's cost, as the Maritime Labour Convention requires. I

would direct licensed agencies to confirm that every vessel carrying Indian crew has valid insurance for death and injury claims. A round-the-clock helpline with the MEA would track every Indian seafarer in the region by ship. Agencies that conceal risk or fail to pay would lose their licences.

Q2. As District Magistrate of Mr. Yadav's home district in Uttar Pradesh, what is your role?

Approach: I would be the family's single point of contact with the MEA, the Embassy in Oman and DG Shipping, so that the body reaches home quickly and the family is not left chasing officials. I would ensure the family's claim against the shipowner and its insurer is filed through the recruiting agency and followed up, and that any State ex gratia is paid without delay. I would also use the moment to warn young people in the district against unlicensed maritime recruiters, since families often discover too late that an agent was not registered.

Q3. An interview board asks: should the Indian Navy escort every ship with Indian crew through Hormuz?

Approach: No, not as a blanket rule. The Navy does not have the ships for it, escorts inside Omani or Iranian territorial waters need consent, and a warship escorting foreign-flagged vessels in an active war risks drawing India into it. A better approach is risk-based: escort Indian-flagged ships and energy cargoes bound for India, share threat information widely, and coordinate with Oman. The larger protection comes from diplomacy and from rules that let seafarers refuse unsafe voyages.

4.2 Trump Hosts Xi in Washington: A US–China Truce and AI Dialogue Risk Making India a 'Rule-Taker'

THE NEWS Washington and Beijing. U.S. President Donald Trump hosts Chinese President Xi Jinping at the White House on Thursday, September 24, Xi's return visit after Mr. Trump's state visit to Beijing in May; The Economic Times calls it a three-day summit. New since this magazine's September 23 card on the AI dialogue is the summit itself. From Beijing, The Hindu's Ananth Krishnan reports that in May both sides committed to a "constructive relationship of strategic stability", a Chinese coinage Mr. Trump readily accepted, and that he will personally welcome Mr. Xi at Joint Base Andrews, a courtesy extended to no other leader. Expectations are modest — a floor under the relationship rather than a grand bargain — but Mr. Trump's stated fondness for a "G2", a two-power arrangement in which Washington and Beijing manage world affairs between them, has concerned countries in the region, including India. Since May the Pentagon has listed Alibaba and BYD for "civil military fusion"; tariffs, semiconductor restrictions and Chinese export controls on rare earths remain unresolved, and China wants U.S. arms sales to Taiwan stopped. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Vice Premier He Lifeng have discussed a dialogue mechanism for AI cooperation. Da Wei of Tsinghua University argues that China now views the relationship "from a position of greater equality"; Li Kai, Vice President of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, says regional affairs should be "led and managed by Asian countries themselves". In The Economic Times, Subimal Bhattacharjee writes that China controls roughly 70% of rare-earth mining, 85% of refining and close to 90% of magnet production, and that magnet shipments to the U.S. fell 21% in August — timed to a tariff truce expiring on November 10 and a Pentagon rule barring rare-earth magnets, tungsten, tantalum and molybdenum sourced from China, Russia, Iran and North Korea from January 1, 2027. China signed AI partnerships with 28 mostly developing nations in Shanghai in July to establish the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO); the U.S. relies on export controls — legal limits on selling sensitive technology abroad — and paid access to its strongest models. His worry is a two-power deal on AI standards that leaves India, BRICS chair and G7 partner, a "rule-taker". An ET editorial expects the real barter to be rare earths for tariff relief. The syllabus link is GS2 on groupings affecting India and GS3 on technology and critical minerals.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The U.S. uses tariffs and chip export controls to slow China's technological rise → China answers with export controls on rare earths, where it dominates refining and magnets → both sides declare a "constructive relationship of strategic stability" in Beijing in May, under a tariff truce that expires on November 10 → Bessent and He Lifeng set up an AI

cooperation dialogue while Beijing cuts magnet shipments by 21% in August → Trump hosts Xi in Washington, reviving talk of a G2 that could leave India to accept rules written by two

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The G2 idea imagines a U.S.-China condominium, which middle powers have always feared** — The term G2 was coined by the American economist C. Fred Bergsten in the 2000s for joint U.S.-China leadership of the world economy, and was later urged as an informal arrangement by the strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski. In international relations a condominium means joint management of a territory or system by two powers, usually at the expense of those left out. Xi Jinping's own formula, first pressed in 2013, was a "new type of major-country relations" between the two. India's declared preference has always been a multipolar world and a multipolar Asia, and its doctrine of strategic autonomy — keeping freedom of decision rather than joining a bloc — assumes that no two powers can settle the region's affairs over its head.
2. **Rare earths are China's chokepoint because it dominates processing, not just mining** — Rare earth elements are a group of 17 metals: the 15 lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium. Their most strategic use is in high-strength permanent magnets for electric-vehicle motors, wind turbines, electronics and missiles, and the hard part of the chain is separation, refining and magnet making rather than digging. China formalised its tools through an Export Control Law that took effect in December 2020. India's rare earths come mainly from monazite in coastal beach sands, handled by IREL (India) Limited under the Department of Atomic Energy. The 2023 amendment to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 let the Centre auction critical minerals and opened exploration to private firms, and the National Critical Mineral Mission was launched in 2025.
3. **Export controls are the new tariffs, and India sits inside most of the regimes that govern them** — Export controls restrict the transfer of sensitive or dual-use goods and technology — items with both civilian and military uses. The multilateral regimes are the Missile Technology Control Regime (which India joined in 2016), the Wassenaar Arrangement on conventional arms and dual-use goods (2017), the Australia Group on chemical and biological items (2018), and the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which India has not been able to join. India's own control list is SCOMET (Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies), administered under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992. A U.S. rule of January 2025 on the export of advanced AI chips, later rescinded, placed India in a middle tier with capped access — a reminder of how "trusted partner" lists can treat even a strategic partner.
4. **India's AI strategy rests on the IndiaAI Mission and a seat at multilateral tables** — The Union Cabinet approved the IndiaAI Mission in March 2024 with an outlay of about ₹10,372 crore over five years. Its pillars include subsidised access to computing capacity, indigenous foundation models, a datasets platform, startup financing, skills and "safe and trusted AI", and it is implemented by the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. India is a founding member of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, launched in 2020, and hosted its summit in New Delhi in December 2023. India co-chaired the AI Action Summit in Paris in February 2025, and ET notes it hosted an AI Impact Summit in February this year where it pushed for a body giving emerging markets a real seat in rule-making.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS2 asks how the policies of great powers affect India's interests** — The syllabus asks about "bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests" and the effect of the policies of developed countries on India. A U.S.-China summit is the purest example of a relationship India is not party to that shapes its choices on trade, technology and security in Asia.
2. **Prelims tests technology-control regimes and critical minerals** — India's membership

	of export-control regimes — the MTCR, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group, and its exclusion from the Nuclear Suppliers Group — fits the membership-question format Prelims favours. Rare earths, critical minerals and their uses are a rising theme, and today's numbers on mining, refining and magnet shares explain why the examiner cares. 3. AI has moved from a science topic to a governance topic — GS3 covers awareness in information technology and GS2 covers global governance; AI now sits in both. An answer that can place India between a U.S. model of controlled access and a Chinese model of open distribution, with India's own mission and summit diplomacy, will stand out.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Rare earth elements are a group of 17 elements comprising the 15 lanthanides together with scandium and yttrium. ● IREL (India) Limited, a public sector undertaking under the Department of Atomic Energy, processes beach sand minerals including monazite, a source of rare earths. ● India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2016, the Wassenaar Arrangement in 2017 and the Australia Group in 2018; it is not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. ● SCOMET is India's list of dual-use items — Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies — whose export is regulated under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992. ● The IndiaAI Mission, approved in March 2024, is implemented by the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. ● The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence was launched in 2020 with India as a founding member. ● In November 2024, the Presidents of the United States and China affirmed that humans, not artificial intelligence, should retain control over decisions to use nuclear weapons.
ANALYSIS	1. A G2 need not be a treaty to hurt India; a pattern of bilateral bargains is enough — The ET editorial expects the real exchange to be rare earths for tariff relief, the same menu as in May. Each such bargain fixes prices, licences and standards that third countries then live with, without being consulted. India does not need to fear a formal U.S.-China condominium to be affected; it needs only a habit of the two settling issues by phone. The counter-view is strong: the Pentagon's listing of Alibaba and BYD, the chip curbs and the Taiwan dispute show that structural rivalry persists, and Mr. Krishnan's sources describe a floor, not a grand bargain. The risk to India is therefore episodic rather than permanent, but episodes on minerals and AI can be decisive. 2. Beijing's "Asian solutions" line is an argument for a China-centred Asia — Li Kai's call for regional affairs to be "led and managed by Asian countries themselves" echoes Xi Jinping's 2014 statement at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia that it is for the people of Asia to run Asia's affairs. Read with the view in Beijing that Mr. Trump has already begun reducing American interest in Asia, it describes an order in which the largest Asian power sets the terms. For India, which faces an unsettled border with China, a smaller U.S. role raises the cost of balancing alone; The Hindu separately notes that India has failed to host the Quad summit for a third year. The counter-view is that a thinner American presence could raise India's value to Southeast Asian states looking for a second partner — but only if India brings capacity, not just rhetoric.

	3. Magnets, not models, are India's most immediate vulnerability — China's share of refining and magnet production means it can squeeze supply at will, as the 21% fall in August shipments to the U.S. shows. India's electric-vehicle, electronics and defence manufacturers depend on the same magnets, and India's own processing is small. The Pentagon rule barring Chinese-sourced magnets from January 2027 cuts both ways: it creates a non-Chinese market that India could supply if it builds separation and magnet capacity quickly. Auctions under the 2023 amendment and the National Critical Mineral Mission are the start, but processing needs years of investment and technology partners. Until then, any U.S.-China deal on rare earths is a deal India must read for its own supply. 4. On AI rules, India's leverage is as the swing constituency, not as an equal author — Mr. Bhattacharjee sketches two models: the U.S. sells a "paid ladder" with export controls and trusted-partner lists, while China "offers an open door" with cheap downloadable models and WAICO's 28 partners. India sits in both camps, as BRICS chair and G7 partner, and both need its market, talent and endorsement to make their model global. That swing status is real bargaining power if India uses it to demand compute access and a place in standard-setting. The counter-view is that leverage without capacity is thin: the January 2025 U.S. chip rule showed how easily India could be placed in a middle tier. The IndiaAI Mission's compute and model pillars are what turn a swing vote into a seat. 5. The narrow AI safety agenda is good for stability and bad for inclusion — The achievable ground, Mr. Bhattacharjee writes, is "not to collide by accident": a notification mechanism for AI incidents at the national-security level and a reaffirmation of the 2024 consensus on keeping AI out of nuclear command. These are crisis-management tools, like Cold War hotlines, and a world with them is safer than one without. But what stays off the table — data-centre energy demand, lithography chokepoints, open-weight models setting de facto standards, gallium and germanium — is where rules are really being made. Dhiraj Nayyar adds that neither side will slow down, since the AI race is this rivalry's arms and space race. India's interest is to back multilateral efforts such as the Norway-Finland call for control of frontier models, so that a bilateral floor does not become a private club.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A U.S.-China understanding on trade, critical minerals and artificial intelligence may stabilise great-power rivalry, but it risks turning middle powers into rule-takers." Discuss with reference to India's interests, and suggest how India should position itself. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Introduce the Trump-Xi summit in Washington from September 24, the "constructive relationship of strategic stability" declared in May, the AI dialogue set up by Bessent and He Lifeng, and the concern over a "G2" in India and the region. 2. Body — why stability helps India — Argue that a floor under U.S.-China ties lowers the risk of conflict in the Indo-Pacific, reduces tariff shocks to global trade, and makes crisis-management tools on AI more likely, such as incident notification and keeping AI out of nuclear command. 3. Body — why it risks making India a rule-taker — Use the rare-earth figures (about 70% of mining, 85% of refining, close to 90% of magnets), the 21% cut in August, the November 10 truce expiry and the Pentagon's 2027 rule; contrast U.S. controlled access with China's open distribution and WAICO; cite Chinese views on "Asian solutions to Asian problems". 4. Body — India's positioning — Recommend building rare-earth processing under the National Critical Mineral Mission, expanding compute under the IndiaAI Mission, using India's dual position in BRICS and the G7 outreach to push inclusive AI rule-making,

supporting multilateral verification initiatives, and reviving the Quad.

- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that strategic autonomy in a two-power world depends on capacity: India will be consulted on rules only in the sectors where it produces something others need.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Mines. Indian electric-vehicle makers warn that their rare-earth magnet stocks will run out within weeks. What do you do?

Approach: I would first map stocks and requirements firm by firm, so the shortage is measured rather than rumoured. I would work with the MEA and Commerce to pursue pending export licences and identify alternative suppliers among partner countries, and explore a small strategic stockpile for critical sectors. In parallel I would fast-track critical-mineral auctions and processing partnerships, and support recycling of magnets from scrap electronics. The long-term fix is domestic processing, and every crisis is a chance to push it.

Q2. As Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, how would you respond if a U.S.-China AI arrangement set standards that Indian firms must meet to sell services abroad?

Approach: I would engage early in international standard-setting bodies, including the joint ISO-IEC committee on artificial intelligence, so that Indian concerns shape the text before it hardens. I would build domestic testing and evaluation capacity so that Indian firms can certify compliance at home. I would work with other middle powers to seek mutual recognition, so that a bilateral standard becomes one of several accepted routes. And I would make sure small Indian firms, not only large ones, get guidance on what compliance requires.

Q3. An interview board asks: is strategic autonomy still possible when two superpowers can strike deals over India's head?

Approach: Yes, but it has to be redefined. Strategic autonomy was never equidistance; it is the freedom to decide India's interests case by case and to have partners on each side. That freedom now depends on capacity in minerals, chips and AI, because a country is consulted only where it matters. India's presence in both BRICS and the G7 outreach, and its partnerships with Japan, Europe and Australia, give it options that a smaller state lacks.

4.3 Jaishankar Raises SRIA With Rubio, Pushes UNSC Reform as India Rejects OIC on Kashmir

THE NEWS New York and New Delhi. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the 81st UN General Assembly on Wednesday, September 23, in what The Indian Express calls the first official discussion between the two capitals since President Trump signed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act (SRIA) on Friday. New since this magazine's September 18 and 21 cards is India's direct protest. Mr. Jaishankar posted that he had "reiterated India's interests and concerns with regard to SRIA". The law provides for tariffs of up to 100% on countries that buy Russian oil and extends sanctions on Iran trade; The Hindu says it could hit India after a stipulated one-month period. These are secondary sanctions: penalties on third countries for trading with a target. The papers differ on the stake: The Hindu says Russian Urals crude "currently makes up 51%" of India's crude imports, while ET reports India bought 2.08 million barrels a day from Russia in August, 45% of the total. Mr. Rubio sidestepped the issue, posting that the two were "building on the U.S.-India strategic partnership"; he visits India next month. Trump-Modi meetings are being prepared, possibly at the ASEAN Summit in November and at the G20 Mr. Trump hosts in Miami in mid-December; for a third year, India has not hosted the Quad summit. On Tuesday, chairing a High-Level Meeting of Like-Minded Global South Countries and Friends, Mr. Jaishankar said the Global South is "in the front row of the global crises, but is in the back row of decision-making", urged it to "not accept or legitimise" chokepoints in supply chains, finance or connectivity, and said energy availability and prices "should not be manipulated for political ends." G4 Foreign Ministers — India, Brazil, Germany and

Japan — met on a more representative Security Council. On Wednesday the MEA “categorically rejected” references to Jammu and Kashmir by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s Contact Group on J&K, whose communique called India’s May 2025 strikes on terror targets in Pakistan “unlawful”. The Hindu lists the group as Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye; the Express also names Niger. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had raised Kashmir at the UNGA on Tuesday. “The OIC has no locus standi to pronounce on matters that are strictly internal to India,” the MEA said. The syllabus link is GS2 on India–U.S. relations, global groupings and the UN.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Russia’s war on Ukraine enters its fifth year and discounted Russian crude grows to roughly half of India’s imports → the U.S. Congress passes SRIA and President Trump signs it, providing for tariffs of up to 100% on buyers of Russian energy → India warns of “implications” for ties and for the energy market → Jaishankar raises SRIA with Rubio at the UNGA while rallying the Global South and the G4 for a voice in the institutions that make such rules → the OIC Contact Group uses the same week to internationalise Kashmir, and India rejects its locus standi

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Secondary sanctions reach third countries, and CAATSA is the precedent India has already navigated** — Primary sanctions bar a country’s own citizens and firms from dealing with a target; secondary sanctions penalise third-country entities that deal with the target, usually by cutting them off from the sanctioning country’s market or financial system. India has consistently said it is bound only by sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, which acts under Article 41 of the Charter for measures not involving armed force. The U.S. Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, 2017 (CAATSA), through Section 231, targets significant transactions with Russia’s defence and intelligence sectors. The U.S. used it against Türkiye in December 2020 over its S-400 purchase, but did not act against India despite India’s 2018 contract for the same system. SRIA goes further by linking a country’s access to the U.S. market, through tariffs, to its energy purchases.
- 2. Security Council reform needs a Charter amendment that the five permanent members can block** — Article 23 of the UN Charter fixes the Security Council at 15 members: five permanent members and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. It has been enlarged only once, from 11 to 15 members, by an amendment that came into force in 1965. Under Article 108, any amendment must be adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members, giving each of them a veto over reform. Since 2009, reform has been discussed in the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) in the General Assembly, which still work without an agreed negotiating text. India has served eight terms as a non-permanent member, most recently in 2021–22.
- 3. Three blocs define the reform debate: the G4, Uniting for Consensus and the African Union** — The G4 — India, Brazil, Germany and Japan — formed in 2004 to support each other’s bids for permanent seats and to expand both categories of membership. Uniting for Consensus, a group led by Italy and including Pakistan, Argentina, Mexico and South Korea, opposes new permanent seats and proposes longer-term non-permanent seats instead. The African Union’s Ezulwini Consensus of 2005 demands at least two permanent seats for Africa with all the privileges of current members, including the veto, and five non-permanent seats. The G4’s 2005 draft offered that new permanent members would not exercise the veto until a review fifteen years later, a flexibility that separates it from the African position.
- 4. The OIC speaks for 57 states, and India denies it any role on Kashmir** — The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation was founded in 1969 at a summit in Rabat after an arson attack on the Al-Aqsa mosque, and is headquartered in Jeddah; with 57 member states it is the second-largest intergovernmental organisation after the UN. Its Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir, set up in the 1990s, issues statements that Pakistan uses to internationalise the issue. India is not a member, though it was invited as guest of honour to the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in Abu Dhabi in 2019. India’s position

	rests on the Simla Agreement of 1972, which commits India and Pakistan to settle differences bilaterally, and on the changes of August 2019, when Article 370 ceased to operate and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 created the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh; the Supreme Court upheld the abrogation of Article 370 in December 2023.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	GS2 lists international institutions, their structure and mandate — Mains has asked candidates to discuss the impediments India faces in its pursuit of a permanent seat on the Security Council. Article 108, the IGN and the positions of the G4, Uniting for Consensus and the African Union are the core of any such answer, and the G4 meeting in New York refreshes them. India-U.S. relations are examined through the lens of sanctions and strategic autonomy — The CAATSA episode over the S-400 became a standard example in answers on India's strategic autonomy. SRIA, which ties energy purchases to tariffs on exports, is the sharper sequel, and an examiner can frame it as a question on economic coercion or on India's energy security. Prelims asks about memberships and groupings — Who is in the G4, who leads Uniting for Consensus, whether India is an OIC member and where the OIC is headquartered are classic Prelims formats. The two papers' different lists of the Contact Group are a reminder to rely on the permanent facts, not a day's reporting.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, amendments come into force when adopted by two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all five 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 G4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support each other's bids for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. - The African Union's Ezulwini Consensus seeks at least two permanent seats, with veto, and five non-permanent seats for Africa on the Security Council. - The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation was founded in 1969, has 57 member states and is headquartered in Jeddah; India is not a member. - Section 231 of the U.S. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, 2017 targets significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors. - Article 41 of the UN Charter empowers the Security Council to decide on measures not involving the use of armed force, including economic sanctions.
ANALYSIS	SRIA makes India's exporters pay for its refiners' choices, which is what makes it coercive — A tariff on India's exports to the U.S. as a penalty for buying Russian oil does not fall on the refiners who gain from discounted crude; it falls on textile, gem and engineering exporters who have nothing to do with oil. That mismatch is the point of the design: it creates a domestic lobby for compliance. The Hindu says the law "mandates" the President to act while the Express says it "empowers" him, and the difference matters, because discretion is what India can negotiate over during the one-month window and Mr. Rubio's visit. India's record, as this magazine noted on September 19, is to trim purchases quietly when sanctions bite and return when they ease. Expect that pattern, not a public break. The 45% versus 51% gap measures what compliance would now cost — ET puts Russia's share at 45% in August; The Hindu says 51% "currently". Either way, Russian

crude has grown precisely because Hormuz is blockaded and the Red Sea route is under Houthi threat, as ET notes the same day. A sanctions law that penalises Russian oil at the moment Gulf supply is choked asks India to pay twice — once in lost discounts and once in scarce replacements. That is the substance of India's warning about "implications" for the international energy market. The counter-view from Washington, voiced by State Department spokesperson Thomas Pigott (PTI, in the Express), is that countries supporting Russia's war effort should ask whether they are "actually making the situation worse"; India's reply is that energy security for 1.4 billion people is not a lever it can hand to another capital.

3. **The "chokepoints" line is aimed at Washington and Beijing alike** — When Mr. Jaishankar asked the Global South to "not accept or legitimise" chokepoints in supply chains, finance or connectivity, each word had a target: China's rare-earth controls, the dollar-based sanctions system, and closures of straits. Framing all three as one problem lets India lead the Global South without choosing a camp, and pairs naturally with the line that energy prices "should not be manipulated for political ends". The honest counter-view is that India has itself used export curbs — on wheat in 2022 and non-basmati white rice in 2023 — that importing countries described in similar terms. India's credibility as the Global South's voice depends on accepting that the principle binds it too.
4. **UNSC reform is stuck on the arithmetic of Article 108, not on the weakness of India's case** — The G4 meets every September and every September the IGN produces no negotiating text, because any change needs all five permanent members to ratify and Uniting for Consensus, including Pakistan, works to prevent a text from emerging. China has never endorsed permanent seats for India or Japan. India's practical route is to align with Africa's Ezulwini demand, since a reform that ignores 54 African states cannot pass, and to press for text-based negotiations that expose who is blocking. The counter-view is that India should settle for a longer-term or semi-permanent seat now; the risk is that an interim formula becomes permanent, which is exactly what Uniting for Consensus wants.
5. **Rejecting the OIC is routine, but Saudi Arabia's name on the list is the real signal** — Contact Group communiqués on Kashmir are an annual ritual, and India's rejection is equally ritual. What deserves attention is the content — calling India's May 2025 strikes on terror targets "unlawful" — and the membership, which includes Saudi Arabia, a close partner, and Türkiye, whose President raised Kashmir in his UNGA address on Tuesday, the day the group met. The MEA's line that such statements raise "serious questions on the credibility of OIC" signals a harder tone than the old formula of simple rejection. The counter-view is that over-reacting gives the communique publicity it would otherwise not get. The sound approach is to keep bilateral ties with Gulf states insulated from OIC boilerplate while answering each statement briefly and firmly.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

Unilateral secondary sanctions and the stalled reform of multilateral institutions together constrain India's strategic autonomy. Examine this statement with reference to the U.S. Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act and India's campaign for reform of the UN Security Council. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — Begin with Mr. Jaishankar raising SRIA with Mr. Rubio at the 81st UNGA, and his remark that the Global South is in the front row of crises but the back row of decision-making.
2. **Body — the sanctions squeeze** — Explain secondary sanctions, SRIA's tariffs of up to 100% and the one-month window, India's stake (45% of crude imports in August per ET, 51% per The Hindu), and the CAATSA precedent. Show that the cost falls on

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

exporters and that Gulf supply is itself blocked.

3. **Body — the multilateral deficit** — Explain Article 108, the IGN without a text, and the three positions of the G4, Uniting for Consensus and the African Union's Ezulwini Consensus. Link this to why unilateral tools fill the space left by weak multilateral ones.
4. **Body — India's response** — Cover bilateral negotiation with the U.S. through the trade deal and summit meetings, diversification of crude sources, Global South coalition-building against chokepoints, alignment with Africa on reform, and firm rejection of the OIC's attempt to internationalise Kashmir.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that strategic autonomy is exercised through many partnerships rather than defended alone, and that India's credibility as a reformer depends on applying its own principles consistently.

Q1. You are Joint Secretary (Americas) in the MEA preparing Mr. Rubio's visit to India next month. What goes into the brief on SRIA?

Approach: The brief should set out India's crude mix with the two sets of figures reconciled, and show that Gulf supply is constrained by Hormuz and the Red Sea, so that Russian barrels are not easily replaced. It should argue that India's purchases have helped hold global prices down, which serves U.S. consumers too. It should seek a waiver or a phased path using the President's discretion, and link progress to the trade deal and the Quad summit India wants to host. It must also state plainly what India will not accept, so the conversation does not drift.

Q2. As Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, how would you prepare exporters for the possibility that SRIA tariffs are imposed after the one-month window?

Approach: I would identify the sectors and clusters most dependent on the U.S. market and model the impact of a tariff at different levels. I would work with export promotion councils on market diversification, using existing and new trade agreements. I would prepare credit and interest support options with the Finance Ministry so that small exporters do not collapse in the first quarter. And I would keep a channel open with the Petroleum Ministry, since the decision that triggers the tariff sits outside my ministry.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India respond to every OIC statement on Kashmir?

Approach: India should respond, but briefly, because silence can be read as acceptance in multilateral records. The response should restate the legal position — that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are integral to India and the matter is bilateral under the Simla Agreement — without amplifying the communique. The real work lies in bilateral relations with Gulf and other Muslim-majority states, where India's ties are strong. A calm, consistent line is more persuasive than a louder one.

4.4 BRICS as 'Plausible Multilateralism': India Leads Two New BRICS Tax Working Groups After Delhi Summit

THE NEWS New Delhi. Two pieces today take India's BRICS year beyond this magazine's September 17 card on post-summit diplomacy. In The Hindu, Varghese K. George and Stanly Johny argue that the 18th BRICS summit, held in New Delhi on September 12-13, 2026, succeeded because New Delhi forged a consensus among 11 member-countries, including the UAE and Iran, which are "involved in an undeclared conflict", and produced the Delhi Declaration. It was the first BRICS summit since the U.S. and Israel launched their war on Iran on February 28, 2026, and brought the Presidents of Iran, Russia and China to Delhi. They note that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Israel two days before the bombing began and that India at first did not condemn the strikes or the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but then "strongly endorsed" the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Bishkek resolution condemning the strikes and hosted President Masoud Pezeshkian. BRICS, they argue, keeps India and China engaged without high-level visits, and its members agree that unilateralism by any bloc is harmful. Citing the Russia sanctions Bill passed by the U.S. House on September 16, they say Washington is

pushing Delhi into a “more subordinate relationship”, and conclude that India must never become “a frontline in the U.S.-China competition”. The Economic Times reports the practical side. At the BRICS Heads of Tax Authorities meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said “transfer pricing disputes cost developing-country administrations disproportionately”, and that revenue frameworks that don’t fit “our fiscal realities distort how we are seen and how we see ourselves.” Transfer pricing is the price at which companies within one multinational group trade with each other across borders; setting it wrongly shifts profits to low-tax countries. India will lead two proposed working groups: one on International Taxation and Transfer Pricing, to share experience on treaty interpretation, transfer-pricing audits, advance pricing agreements and the Mutual Agreement Procedure, and one on Revenue Statistics, to measure fiscal performance in a way that reflects BRICS economies’ own structures. The meeting also approved the terms of reference of the BRICS Tax Support Network. Revenue Secretary Arvind Shrivastava said the groups are proposed as longer-term mechanisms that will also help coordinate positions in talks on the proposed UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation; ET notes India wants continuity beyond its current chairship. The syllabus link is GS2 on global groupings and GS3 on taxation.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Western-led institutions leave emerging economies under-represented in global rule-making → BRIC holds its first summit in 2009, adds South Africa and then expands from 2024 → the U.S.-Israel war on Iran and U.S. tariff threats test the grouping’s unity → India, as 2026 chair, secures the Delhi Declaration by consensus among 11 members in September → India turns the chairship into standing machinery, starting with two tax working groups tied to the UN tax convention talks

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. BRICS has grown from four economies into a bloc of about a dozen with no secretariat** — The acronym BRIC was coined by the Goldman Sachs economist Jim O’Neill in 2001, and the four countries held their first summit at Yekaterinburg in 2009; South Africa joined in 2010. At the Johannesburg summit of 2023, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates were admitted and joined from January 2024, while Saudi Arabia’s status has remained ambiguous since its invitation; Indonesia joined in January 2025, and the Kazan summit of 2024 created a category of partner countries. The Hindu counts 11 member-countries at the Delhi summit. BRICS works by consensus under a rotating chair, with no charter or permanent secretariat, and India previously chaired it in 2012, 2016 and 2021.
- 2. The New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement are BRICS’s only hard institutions** — Both were agreed at the Fortaleza summit in Brazil in 2014. The New Development Bank, headquartered in Shanghai, had an initial authorised capital of \$100 billion and a subscribed capital of \$50 billion shared equally among the five founders, who therefore hold equal votes — unlike the IMF and World Bank, where votes follow quotas. Its first President was India’s K.V. Kamath, and its membership has since widened to include Bangladesh, the UAE and Egypt. The Contingent Reserve Arrangement is not a fund but a \$100 billion framework of currency-swap commitments, with China committing \$41 billion, Brazil, India and Russia \$18 billion each and South Africa \$5 billion; only 30% of a member’s access is available without an IMF programme, so it complements rather than replaces the Bretton Woods system.
- 3. Transfer pricing, APAs and MAP are the everyday tools of cross-border tax disputes** — Transfer-pricing rules require transactions between related companies in different countries to be priced at arm’s length — the price unrelated parties would agree on. India introduced its rules in 2001 under the Income-tax Act, 1961, the law replaced from April 2026 by the Income-tax Act, 2025. An Advance Pricing Agreement, introduced in India in 2012, fixes in advance the method for pricing a company’s international transactions for up to five years and, since 2014, can be rolled back to four earlier years; it may be unilateral, bilateral or multilateral. The Mutual Agreement Procedure, found in Article 25 of the OECD and UN model tax conventions and in India’s tax treaties, lets the competent authorities of two countries negotiate to remove double taxation.

	4. The UN tax convention and the OECD's two pillars are rival venues for global tax rules — In October 2021 the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework agreed a two-pillar solution: Pillar One would reallocate a share of the residual profits of the largest, most profitable multinationals to the countries where their customers are, and Pillar Two sets a 15% global minimum effective tax rate for groups with annual revenue of at least €750 million. Pillar One has stalled, while Pillar Two has been adopted by many countries. In December 2023 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 78/230, moved by Nigeria for the African Group, starting a process toward a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, and negotiations on its text are under way. Developing countries favour the UN route because every state has an equal vote there.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. BRICS and its institutions are staple Prelims material — Prelims has asked about the New Development Bank, including who set it up and where it is headquartered, and about the membership of groupings. The 2024 and 2025 expansions and the CRA's structure are the obvious next questions. 2. Global tax governance joins GS2 and GS3 — The term Base Erosion and Profit Shifting has appeared in Prelims, and Mains questions on the global minimum tax and taxation of the digital economy fit GS3. A BRICS tax track tied to the UN convention lets a candidate connect international institutions in GS2 with revenue mobilisation in GS3. 3. Examiners expect the lens of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment — Questions on India's place in groupings that pull in different directions — the Quad and BRICS, the G7 outreach and the SCO — recur in GS2. The Hindu's argument gives a ready thesis: internal divisions within BRICS stop any one member dominating, while shared dissatisfaction with the post-war order holds it together.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The New Development Bank was set up under an agreement signed at the BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014, and is headquartered in Shanghai. ● Each founding member of the New Development Bank holds an equal share of its subscribed capital and therefore equal voting power. ● The BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement is a \$100 billion framework of currency-swap commitments, most of whose drawings are linked to an IMF programme. ● Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates joined BRICS as members from January 2024, and Indonesia joined in January 2025. ● An Advance Pricing Agreement fixes in advance the method of determining the arm's length price of international transactions between associated enterprises for a specified period. ● The Mutual Agreement Procedure in tax treaties allows the competent authorities of two countries to resolve disputes over taxation not in accordance with the treaty, including double taxation. ● Pillar Two of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework sets a global minimum effective tax rate of 15% for multinational groups with annual revenue of at least €750 million.
ANALYSIS	1. "Plausible multilateralism" defends BRICS as a hedge, and understates the cost of expansion — George and Johny argue that BRICS's internal divisions are a feature, since they stop any one country dominating. That is persuasive for the original five, but expansion has added states such as Iran and the UAE whose quarrels with each other and with the West raise the risk that BRICS is read as an anti-Western bloc. China's economy is larger than those of the other four founders combined, so each new

member courted by Beijing dilutes India's relative weight. The image of Mr. Modi hand in hand with Mr. Pezeshkian, which the authors say will not fade soon in Washington, is a cost as well as a signal. BRICS works for India as a hedge only if India keeps setting the agenda, which is why its chairship deliverables matter.

2. **The tax working groups show India turning a summit year into standing machinery —** Rotating chairs usually leave behind a declaration and little else. By proposing two working groups as longer-term mechanisms and seeking continuity beyond its chairship, India is converting a one-year role into an institutional footprint in a technical field where it has real expertise. Tax cooperation is also low-drama, so members that disagree on Iran or Ukraine can still agree on audit practice. The counter-view is that BRICS tax interests diverge: China is a large capital exporter whose multinationals gain from residence-based taxation, while India, as a large market, wants more taxing rights at source. A common BRICS position at the UN may therefore be thinner than the announcement suggests, and India must be ready to lead a smaller coalition within the group.
3. **Transfer pricing is where developing countries lose revenue and years —** Ms. Sitharaman's point that transfer-pricing disputes cost developing-country administrations disproportionately is about capacity as much as law. A multinational can hire global advisers to defend its intra-group prices, while a tax officer must find comparable transactions and audit complex chains alone. Sharing audit experience, advance pricing agreements and mutual agreement practice among BRICS administrations narrows that gap and reduces litigation. The counter-view is that investors may read coordinated audits as a new source of risk, and India's own reputation still carries the memory of retrospective taxation, withdrawn only by the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021. The working group will earn trust only if it produces faster settlements, not merely tougher audits.
4. **Revenue statistics are a quiet fight about how the world grades developing economies —** When Ms. Sitharaman says frameworks that ignore "fiscal realities distort how we are seen and how we see ourselves", she is objecting to comparisons such as tax-to-GDP ratios drawn against rich-country benchmarks. Those comparisons shape the judgments of rating agencies and multilateral lenders but ignore large informal sectors, exempt farm incomes and federal revenue-sharing. A BRICS framework could produce fairer measures and a common language for arguing with lenders. The counter-view is that home-made statistics can look like a country grading its own exam; credibility requires that any new framework remain transparent and reconcilable with the IMF's Government Finance Statistics standards.
5. **The UN tax convention is the Global South's venue, and India must decide how much to invest in it —** Ms. Sitharaman says the next few years' negotiations "will shape cross-border taxation for a generation". The UN process offers one country, one vote, whereas the OECD framework was designed around the concerns of capital-exporting economies; Pillar One, which would have given market countries like India more taxing rights, has stalled. India's interest as a large consumer market aligns with source-based taxation, which the UN route favours. The counter-view is that a convention negotiated without the full commitment of major capital exporters risks becoming a declaration among source countries with little bite. India's best position is to use BRICS to shape the UN text while staying inside the OECD framework, so that it is a bridge rather than a camp.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

BRICS is often dismissed as a talk-shop divided by internal rivalries. In the light of India's 2026 chairship, examine whether BRICS serves India's interests in strategic autonomy and in reshaping global economic governance, with particular reference to international taxation. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Introduce the 18th BRICS summit in New Delhi on September 12-13, 2026, the Delhi Declaration reached by consensus among 11 members including the UAE and Iran, and the new tax working groups India will lead.
- 2. Body — strategic value** — Explain BRICS as a hedge against pressure such as the U.S. Russia-sanctions Bill, as a channel to stay engaged with China when bilateral visits stall, and as a platform for India to restore its balancing posture in West Asia after the war on Iran.
- 3. Body — institutional value** — Cover the NDB's equal voting and the CRA's IMF link, then the new International Taxation and Transfer Pricing and Revenue Statistics working groups, the BRICS Tax Support Network, APAs, MAP and the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation versus the OECD's two pillars.
- 4. Body — limits** — Discuss China's economic weight, the risk of an anti-Western image after expansion, divergent tax interests between capital exporters and market economies, and the absence of a secretariat to carry decisions forward.
- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that BRICS serves India when India sets its agenda — through technical, rule-making work such as taxation — and that its value lies in widening India's options rather than choosing a camp.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are a senior officer of the Central Board of Direct Taxes who will convene the first meeting of the new transfer-pricing working group. What would you aim to deliver in its first year?

Approach: I would aim for a compendium of each member's practice on advance pricing agreements and mutual agreement cases, with timelines, so that slow procedures are visible. I would run joint training for transfer-pricing auditors on sectors such as digital services and commodities, where disputes are frequent. I would prepare a short common paper on issues in the UN convention talks where BRICS interests genuinely converge. Success would be measured by faster case resolution among members, not by the number of meetings held.

Q2. A foreign investor tells you, as Revenue Secretary, that BRICS tax cooperation means coordinated aggressive audits. How do you reassure them?

Approach: I would point out that the working group's mandate includes advance pricing agreements and the mutual agreement procedure, which exist to give taxpayers certainty and remove double taxation. I would cite India's withdrawal of retrospective taxation in 2021 as evidence of a commitment to stability. Information exchange among tax authorities already happens under treaties with confidentiality safeguards, and this group does not change those rules. I would invite the investor to use the APA route for its own transactions.

Q3. An interview board asks: does India's active role in BRICS undercut its partnership with the United States?

Approach: Not necessarily. BRICS lets India pursue its interests without championing an anti-U.S. agenda, and the strategic partnership with Washington remains central to India's growth, as the Hindu writers themselves say. The danger is perception, especially when Iran and Russia are prominent in the grouping, so India must say clearly what BRICS is not. Keeping BRICS focused on development finance, taxation and reform of institutions, rather than on confrontation, protects both relationships.

5. Environment & Ecology

Both stories today are about a risk the state has chosen to manage from above, and about who pays while it does. A model says an El Niño India cannot control will kill thousands in months when no heatwave alert is designed to fire, while the grid that keeps the fans running is short of coal. In Arunachal Pradesh, a dam defended as insurance against China's upstream engineering is being pushed through the villages that would pay for it first. In both cases the numbers are strongest where the institutions are weakest.

5.1 Super El Niño Projected to Add 15,800 Heat Deaths in India as Coal Stocks Run Low

THE NEWS New Delhi. India could see an estimated 15,800 additional heat-related deaths, give or take 1,600, between September 2026 and February 2027 as the current “Super El Niño” drives unusually high temperatures, according to a report made public on Wednesday by the Climate Impact Lab, The Hindu reports. New since this magazine’s September 19 card on the monsoon deficit and the power peak is a mortality number for the same event. It is a projection, not a count: the deaths are those expected above what average conditions in the corresponding months of 1996-2025 would produce. The Lab applies previously estimated temperature-mortality relationships across 24,378 regions to seasonal temperature forecasts, accounting for local climate, vulnerability and adaptive capacity, but the report does not spell out the coefficients linking a given temperature rise to a number of deaths. Globally, it projects 451,000 additional heat-related deaths in the first six months of the event, including 239,000 in the September-February period, a split the paper does not explain; its estimates include 19,300 in Indonesia, 19,400 across the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia, 13,300 in Brazil and 66,800 across the Sahel, a 5,000-kilometre belt of about 10 African countries. El Niño is the periodic warming of the central and eastern tropical Pacific that shifts rainfall and temperature patterns worldwide; “Super El Niño” is an informal label for an exceptionally strong one. Forecasts earlier this month gave a greater than 90% chance of a very strong event through the northern hemisphere autumn and winter, with eastern equatorial Pacific waters already more than 3°C above normal. Michael Greenstone of the University of Chicago, the Lab’s co-founder, said the report lets decision-makers see “exactly where emergency actions can be taken now to save tens of thousands of lives in the coming months.” A press statement called this El Niño a “postcard from our future”, bringing temperatures climate change is projected to deliver 20 years later. At home, the monsoon is withdrawing with a national rainfall deficit of about 15% up to September 22, larger in the south and east, and nearly 40% of India’s coal-fired plants report critically low fuel stocks as the heat lifts electricity demand. The Economic Times reports that the Asian Development Bank lists El Niño-related disruptions among the key risks to India’s growth. The syllabus link is GS1 climatology and GS3 disaster management and energy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

An exceptionally strong El Niño pushes eastern equatorial Pacific waters more than 3°C above normal → India’s monsoon ends about 15% deficient and temperatures run above the 1996-2025 norm → hotter-than-usual weather lifts power demand while nearly 40% of coal-fired plants report critically low stocks → the Climate Impact Lab runs past temperature-mortality relationships over seasonal forecasts for 24,378 regions → it projects 15,800 additional heat deaths in India by February 2027, in months India’s heat plans are not designed to watch

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **“Super El Niño” is shorthand for an Oceanic Niño Index near +2°C, and its heat arrives with a lag** — The Oceanic Niño Index (ONI), used by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is the three-month running mean of sea surface temperature anomalies in the Niño 3.4 region of the east-central equatorial Pacific. El Niño conditions are declared when it stays at or above +0.5°C and La Niña when it stays at or below -0.5°C; events near +2°C or more, as in 1982-83, 1997-98 and 2015-16, are informally called “super”. The Southern Oscillation is the atmospheric half of the system, a see-saw of surface pressure across the tropical Pacific, and the coupled phenomenon is called ENSO. Because the warmed ocean releases heat over months, global temperature usually peaks after the El Niño itself, which is why 1998 and 2016 each set a record in their time.
2. **Heat meets the legal definition of a disaster but is missing from the list that unlocks relief funds** — Section 2(d) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 defines a disaster as a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence causing substantial loss of life, human suffering or damage beyond the coping capacity of the affected community.

	Assistance from the State and National Disaster Response Funds is tied to a notified list — cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloudburst, pest attack, and frost and cold wave — and heatwave is not on it, though a State may spend up to 10% of its SDRF allocation on local disasters it notifies itself. Planning runs instead through heat action plans under National Disaster Management Authority guidelines first issued in 2016, modelled on Ahmedabad's 2013 plan, the first in South Asia. 3. IMD's heatwave is defined by summer thresholds, while the body responds to heat and humidity together — The India Meteorological Department declares a heatwave when a station's maximum is at least 40°C in the plains, 37°C on the coast or 30°C in the hills and exceeds normal by 4.5°C to 6.4°C, with a larger departure counting as a severe heatwave, or when the maximum reaches 45°C (47°C for severe) regardless of the normal. These absolute, summer-calibrated thresholds mean a humid October can kill without triggering an alert. Wet-bulb temperature, read by a thermometer wrapped in a wet cloth, captures heat and humidity together, because the body cools by evaporating sweat and moist air absorbs little of it. A widely cited 2010 study put the limit of human survival at a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C sustained for about six hours; later laboratory work suggests lower limits for real people, especially the elderly. 4. Coal stock norms are the power system's buffer, and the Central Electricity Authority decides when it has run thin — The Central Electricity Authority, constituted under Section 70 of the Electricity Act, 2003, advises the government on power policy and sets norms for how many days of coal a thermal plant must hold, higher for plants far from the mines than for pithead plants. Its daily coal stock report classes a plant as critical when its stock falls below a quarter of the normative level. Coal linkages to power plants are allotted under the SHAKTI policy of 2017. In extraordinary circumstances, Section 11 of the Act lets the appropriate government direct a generating company to operate its station as directed, a power the Centre has used to keep imported-coal plants running in recent summers.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. ENSO is a standing Prelims theme, and heat is its newest face — Prelims has repeatedly tested ENSO and the monsoon, including a 2017 question on whether the Indian Ocean Dipole can influence an El Niño's impact. The GS1 line on geophysical phenomena and the GS3 line on disaster management let the examiner move from mechanism to consequence. The Oceanic Niño Index, wet-bulb temperature and the list of notified disasters are the natural next Prelims terms. 2. Mains treats disaster management as a question of institutions, not hazards — GS3 questions typically ask about the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the gap between warning and response. Heat is where that gap is widest, because it kills quietly, and a coal-short grid widens it further. A question on notifying heatwaves, on heat stress among outdoor workers, or on energy security in a hotter climate fits this template exactly.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Oceanic Niño Index is the three-month running mean of sea surface temperature anomalies in the Niño 3.4 region of the east-central equatorial Pacific; a sustained value of +0.5°C or more indicates El Niño conditions and -0.5°C or less indicates La Niña. • Heatwave is not among the notified disasters eligible for assistance from the State and National Disaster Response Funds; a State may use up to 10% of its SDRF allocation for local disasters that it notifies itself. • Under IMD criteria, a heatwave requires a maximum temperature of at least 40°C in the plains, 37°C in coastal areas or 30°C in hilly regions together with a

departure from normal of 4.5°C or more, or an actual maximum temperature of 45°C or more.

- Wet-bulb temperature combines the effect of heat and humidity; a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C sustained for several hours is widely cited as the theoretical upper limit of human survival.
- Ahmedabad's Heat Action Plan of 2013 was the first such plan in South Asia and served as a model for the National Disaster Management Authority's guidelines on heat action plans.
- The Central Electricity Authority is constituted under Section 70 of the Electricity Act, 2003, and Section 11 of the Act empowers the appropriate government to direct a generating company to operate its station in extraordinary circumstances.

ANALYSIS

- 1. This is a projection, not an attribution, and its real uncertainty is wider than the band printed** — Attribution studies, such as those by World Weather Attribution, start from an event that has already happened and ask how much climate change altered its odds or intensity. The Lab instead runs a seasonal forecast through mortality relationships estimated from past data, a conditional forecast of excess deaths against a 1996-2025 baseline. The report does not say whether "give or take 1,600" covers the chance that the temperature forecast itself is wrong, and without published coefficients no one can test it, so the true uncertainty is likely wider. The counter-view is strong: planners need forward estimates, and an attribution study after the deaths saves no one. The right use of 15,800 is to rank districts for action, not to headline a certainty.
- 2. The window of the estimate falls in months India's heat system is not built to watch** — India's heat governance is seasonal: IMD thresholds, heat action plans and changed school and working hours are built for March to June. The Lab's window runs from September to February, when humid post-monsoon heat in the east and south rarely crosses the absolute alert thresholds yet still kills the old and the sick. Global temperatures also usually peak in the months after a strong El Niño, and India's hot season of 2027 lies outside the Lab's window. The 15,800 is better read as an early instalment than as the full cost of the event.
- 3. Critically low coal stocks turn a heat problem into a health problem** — For most households the only protection against heat is a fan or a cooler, and both need the grid. Nearly 40% of coal-fired plants at critically low stock means the buffer is thinnest when failure would be most lethal, and load-shedding usually falls first on rural feeders and poorer consumers, those with the least adaptive capacity in the Lab's own model. The counter-view is that "critical" is a regulatory flag against a normative stock, not imminent shutdown; plants run on just-in-time rail supply, and mining and dispatch usually recover after the rains. But the flag exists to buy time, and two-fifths of the fleet below it is a planning failure whether or not the lights stay on.
- 4. India does not know how many people heat kills, which is why an outside model supplies the number** — Heat rarely appears on a death certificate. Most heat victims are older people whose heart, lungs or kidneys fail under stress and are recorded under those causes, while medical certification of the cause of death covers only part of registered deaths. Official heatstroke counts are therefore a small fraction of the toll, and the government has no rival figure to set against the Lab's. The fix is excess-mortality monitoring: compare deaths registered under the Civil Registration System in a hot spell with the same weeks of normal years, district by district, the kind of analysis on which Ahmedabad built its plan after the 2010 heatwave. Until India measures heat deaths, every estimate will be contested and few will be acted upon.
- 5. Cooling is an adaptation that consumes the power it depends on** — The 'postcard from our future' framing is an argument for adaptation, and in urban India that

	increasingly means air-conditioning, which adds to peak demand in the hottest hours and, on a coal-dependent grid, to both emissions and stock stress. The India Cooling Action Plan of 2019 recognised this by stressing building design, efficient appliances and passive cooling. The counter-view is that denying poorer households mechanical cooling in the name of emissions would be unjust, given India's low per capita emissions. The answer is sequencing: cool roofs, shaded workplaces, efficient fans and changed working hours first, because they cut deaths without adding to the evening peak.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A heat-mortality estimate for a season India does not associate with heatwaves exposes the limits of a warning system built on summer thresholds." In the light of projections of additional heat-related deaths linked to the 2026-27 El Niño, examine the adequacy of India's institutional framework for managing extreme heat. Should heatwaves be notified as a disaster eligible for SDRF and NDRF assistance? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the Climate Impact Lab estimate of 15,800 additional heat-related deaths in India, give or take 1,600, between September 2026 and February 2027, and state that it is a model projection against a 1996-2025 baseline, not a count. 2. Body — the hazard — Explain the Super El Niño through the Oceanic Niño Index, the lag between an El Niño peak and global temperature, and why wet-bulb temperature makes humid post-monsoon months dangerous below heatwave thresholds. 3. Body — the framework and its gaps — Cover Section 2(d) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, heatwave's absence from the notified list and the 10% SDRF window, NDMA's heat action plan guidelines and the Ahmedabad model, IMD's absolute thresholds, and weak cause-of-death data. 4. Body — notification and the energy link — Give the case for notification (legal fit, a national entitlement) and against it (fiscal drain, a diffuse hazard). Link to nearly 40% of coal plants at critical stock, Section 11 directions and the India Cooling Action Plan. 5. Conclusion — Recommend bounded notification with an objective trigger, year-round heat action plans adapted to humid heat, district excess-mortality monitoring through the Civil Registration System, and a grid plan that treats heat as a reliability risk.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the District Magistrate of a humid coastal district in eastern India. IMD has not declared a heatwave, but hospitals report a rise in deaths among the elderly in October. What do you do? Approach: I would not wait for a formal declaration, because the thresholds were designed for summer and the harm is already visible in hospital data. I would activate the district heat action plan out of season, open cooling spaces in public buildings, move outdoor work away from the afternoon, and have ASHA workers check on elderly people living alone. I would ask the Chief Medical Officer to track daily deaths against the same weeks of earlier years, so that we see the excess and not only certified heatstroke. If the State has notified heat as a local disaster I would seek SDRF support; if not, I would send the data upward. Q2. As Secretary, Ministry of Power, you learn that nearly 40% of coal-fired plants are at critical stock during an El Niño heat spell. How do you prevent power cuts? Approach: I would first separate plants critical because of rail logistics from those critical because of unpaid dues or poor planning. With the Ministries of Coal and Railways I would prioritise rakes to plants with the lowest stock relative to their dispatch obligations. I would review whether imported-coal plants need directions under Section 11 of the Electricity Act for the season. With the States I would push time-of-day tariffs and staggered agricultural supply, so that the evening peak does not

break the system.

Q3. An interview board asks: should heatwaves be notified as a national disaster?

Approach: There is a strong case, because heat meets every element of the definition of disaster in the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and leaving it off the notified list makes relief depend on which State a victim lives in. Notification would bring relief norms, compensation to families and a clearer duty to prepare. The worry is fiscal: heat is chronic and widespread, and a loose trigger could drain funds meant for sudden disasters. A workable answer is notification with an objective trigger, such as an IMD warning combined with district excess-mortality data, so that the entitlement is real but bounded.

5.2 Arunachal Cabinet Sets Up Empowered Committee to Push Siang Upper Multipurpose Project Survey Past Local Resistance

THE NEWS Guwahati. Amid protests, the Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet on Wednesday adopted a resolution approving the constitution of an empowered high-level committee “to guide and coordinate” the pre-feasibility report survey and associated activities for the proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), The Hindu reports. A pre-feasibility report is the first technical study of whether a site’s rock and river flows can support a project, and at roughly what cost, prepared before a detailed project report or any environmental clearance; for a dam, the survey behind it is fieldwork in the villages that fear submergence. A multipurpose project serves more than one end, here power, water storage and flood moderation. Villagers along the Siang river belt are resisting the pre-feasibility report for the project, which would generate an estimated 11,000 megawatts (MW) or more of hydroelectricity. Two of its three designated sites are in Siang district and one is in Upper Siang district. The Cabinet noted that the Union government had declared SUMP a national project in 2008, underlining its strategic significance, and said the project could strengthen water and energy security, help mitigate floods in the Siang-Brahmaputra basin, generate employment and support the long-term socio-economic development of the region. It underlined concerns raised by some sections of people in Siang and Upper Siang districts “regarding misinformation and disinformation” being spread by certain vested interests, and resolved that conducting the survey peacefully depended on sustained, meaningful engagement with residents of the two districts. “The voices, welfare, and aspirations of the likely project affected families and local communities have always been, and will always remain, central to the process,” the Cabinet said. Meanwhile, local authorities organised a series of school exhibitions on SUMP involving 640 students from four schools in Siang district, which an official statement described as “a targeted educational outreach initiative to foster awareness about river management and the SUMP among students.” The report does not name the committee’s members, its powers or any timeline. The Siang is the name the Yarlung Tsangpo takes when it enters India from Tibet, and it becomes the Brahmaputra in Assam, which is why the project is argued in terms of strategy and flood control as much as electricity. The syllabus link is GS3 on infrastructure (energy), environmental impact assessment and disaster management, and GS2 on the protection of vulnerable sections, here the Adi and other tribal communities of the Siang valley.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The Yarlung Tsangpo rises in Tibet and India is the downstream state on the Siang-Brahmaputra → the Union declares SUMP a national project in 2008, recasting a hydro scheme as a strategic and flood-control asset → China approves and begins its own lower-reaches Yarlung Tsangpo project, sharpening the case for Indian storage as a counterweight → villages in Siang and Upper Siang districts, whose land the survey would mark first, resist the pre-feasibility work → the Arunachal Cabinet sets up an empowered high-level committee to push the survey through while promising “meaningful engagement”

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. The Siang is the Yarlung Tsangpo in India, and becomes the Brahmaputra only after the Dibang and Lohit join it — The Yarlung Tsangpo rises in south-western Tibet near the Mansarovar region, flows east across the plateau, and turns sharply around the Namcha Barwa massif, the Great Bend, before entering Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang, also called the Dihang. Joined by the Dibang and the Lohit near Sadiya in Assam, it becomes the Brahmaputra, and in Bangladesh the Jamuna. India and China have no

water-sharing treaty; they use an Expert Level Mechanism set up in 2006 and memoranda under which China supplies flood-season hydrological data. In December 2024 China approved a large hydropower project on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo, where construction formally began in July 2025; India has said it will monitor the project.

2. **A storage reservoir can hold a flood cushion; a run-of-river project cannot** — A run-of-river project passes the river's flow through turbines with little pondage, so it cannot hold back a flood or store water for the lean season. A storage project impounds a large reservoir behind a high dam for regulated releases, irrigation and flood moderation, at the cost of far larger submergence. The flood cushion is reservoir space kept empty during the monsoon to absorb a flood peak, and so unavailable for generating power. In March 2019 the Union Cabinet declared hydro projects above 25 MW to be renewable energy, with a hydropower purchase obligation. Under the scheme of National Projects approved in 2008, the Centre funds 90% of the cost of the irrigation and drinking-water components of selected projects.
3. **A survey is not a clearance: the EIA Notification, 2006 and the Dam Safety Act, 2021 are the later gates** — Under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006, issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, hydroelectric projects of 50 MW or more are Category A, appraised by an Expert Appraisal Committee of the Union Environment Ministry, and those of 25 MW to 50 MW are Category B, appraised at the State level. The stages are screening (for Category B only), scoping, public consultation and appraisal, and the public hearing is conducted by the State Pollution Control Board at or near the site. A pre-feasibility survey comes before all of this, before any statutory forum for objections exists. After construction, the Dam Safety Act, 2021 governs specified dams through a National Committee on Dam Safety, a National Dam Safety Authority and State-level bodies.
4. **On tribal forest land, consent is a legal requirement, and among the Adi it is also a customary one** — The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 recognises individual and community forest rights, and its Section 4(5) bars eviction until the recognition and verification of rights is complete. A 2009 Environment Ministry order requires, before forest land is diverted under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (renamed the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam in 2023), certification that rights are settled and that the gram sabha has consented. In the Niyamgiri case, Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment and Forests (2013), the Supreme Court held that the gram sabha must decide whether a project affects the community's religious and cultural rights. The Adi, one of the largest tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, live along the Siang valley and take collective decisions through traditional village councils called kebang.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **Prelims maps the Brahmaputra system, and China's upstream projects bring it into GS2** — Prelims routinely tests North-Eastern river geography: which rivers flow through Arunachal Pradesh, which tributaries join the Brahmaputra and where, and the names a river takes across borders. The Siang–Brahmaputra–Jamuna sequence and the confluence near Sadiya are standard material. China's lower-reaches project moves the same geography into GS2, on India–China relations.
2. **GS3 places infrastructure and environmental impact assessment side by side** — The GS3 syllabus lists energy infrastructure and environmental impact assessment within a few lines of each other, and large Himalayan dams sit where they meet. An answer is expected to weigh energy and water needs against seismic, ecological and social risks, and to know the sequence from pre-feasibility to EIA to dam safety.
3. **GS2 and the ethics paper test consent and the rights of project-affected people** — The Forest Rights Act, the gram sabha and development-induced displacement recur in

	GS2 under the welfare of vulnerable sections. The ethics paper frames the same conflict as public interest against community rights, and in the Siang case both sides claim to speak for the public interest.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Yarlung Tsangpo enters India in Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang, or Dihang, and is called the Brahmaputra after the Dibang and the Lohit join it near Sadiya in Assam; in Bangladesh it is known as the Jamuna. ● Under the EIA Notification, 2006, hydroelectric projects of 50 MW or more are Category A projects appraised at the Centre, while those of 25 MW to 50 MW are Category B projects appraised at the State level. ● The public hearing under the EIA Notification, 2006 is conducted by the State Pollution Control Board or the Union Territory Pollution Control Committee. ● Section 4(5) of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 provides that no member of a forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribe or other traditional forest dweller shall be evicted from forest land under occupation until the recognition and verification procedure is complete. ● In the Niyamgiri case (2013), the Supreme Court held that the gram sabha must decide whether a mining project affects the religious and cultural rights of the forest-dwelling community. ● The Dam Safety Act, 2021 establishes the National Committee on Dam Safety and the National Dam Safety Authority, and applies to specified dams more than 15 metres high, or between 10 and 15 metres high if they meet prescribed design conditions. ● India and China have no water-sharing treaty; they discuss trans-border rivers through an Expert Level Mechanism set up in 2006 and share flood-season hydrological data under memoranda of understanding.
ANALYSIS	1. Calling resistance “misinformation” turns a consent problem into a communications problem — The Cabinet blames misinformation by vested interests and answers with a coordinating committee and school exhibitions. But the villagers’ fear is not a misreading of hydrology; it is an accurate reading that a storage project of this size needs a large reservoir and that the survey is where their land first gets marked. According to a Down To Earth report of January 2025, the survey involves drilling to test rock strength and earmarking villages for relocation, and at least 27 villages in the two districts would be directly affected. The counter-view deserves weight: without a survey no one, villagers included, can judge the project. The way through is a survey conditional on sharing its findings with each village council before any further step. 2. The strategic argument is real, and it is also the argument for the largest possible dam — The Cabinet speaks of water and energy security, and the unstated context is China’s lower-reaches project. A large reservoir on the Siang could absorb a sudden upstream release or cover a lean-season shortfall, which a run-of-river plant cannot. But that logic pushes the design toward maximum storage and so maximum submergence: the strategic benefit and the local cost rise together. It also puts a very large reservoir in one of the world’s most seismically active regions, where the 1950 Assam–Tibet earthquake of magnitude 8.6 set off landslides that blocked rivers. The counter-view is that without storage India has no hydrological answer to upstream construction; the honest position is that the dam’s size should be a disclosed trade-off, not an assumption. 3. A flood cushion and a power station want opposite things from the same reservoir — For power, a reservoir should be as full as possible; for flood control, part of it must stay empty through the monsoon. Only a published operating rule — how much

cushion, held when, and who decides during a flood — resolves this. Assam's floods also come from rain over the valley itself and from tributaries that join below the Siang, so one dam upstream can moderate only part of a flood peak. The Cabinet's flood-mitigation claim is therefore plausible but conditional, and the project reports must quantify it. A small cushion means a small flood benefit; a large one means lower power revenue, and the project's economics must say which.

4. **Eighteen years as a national project and still at pre-feasibility is a verdict on top-down planning** — SUMP has been a national project since 2008, yet in 2026 its first-stage survey needs a Cabinet resolution to proceed. Designation from New Delhi gave the project status, not legitimacy in the valley. The empowered committee repeats the approach at the State level: it improves coordination among departments, and the report says nothing about whether affected villages will have a seat on it. The counter-view is that large infrastructure needs an empowered authority to cut through delay, and consultation cannot mean a permanent veto by a few. But the 2,000 MW Lower Subansiri project, whose construction was halted for about eight years from 2011 by downstream protests in Assam, suggests that consent secured early is faster than force applied late.
5. **Persuading schoolchildren signals where the dialogue with adults stands** — Exhibitions for 640 students are legitimate outreach, since the young will live longest with the project, but turning to classrooms while adults along the river resist suggests the adult dialogue has stalled. The Adi already have an institution for collective decisions in the kebang, and credible engagement would take the pre-feasibility questions there, with independent technical advisers the villagers trust. According to a Down To Earth report of May 2025, the State earlier offered a development package of ₹5 crore over three years, through an agreement signed with two residents of one village, in exchange for consent to the survey. Packages negotiated village by village can divide a community rather than persuade it.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

“Designating a dam as a project of strategic national importance does not dispense with the consent of those who must make way for it.” Critically examine this statement in the context of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project in Arunachal Pradesh, and suggest a framework to reconcile India's transboundary water-security concerns with the rights of indigenous communities. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — Introduce the Arunachal Cabinet's decision to form an empowered high-level committee for the SUMP pre-feasibility survey, the project's estimated 11,000 MW or more, its national-project status since 2008 and the resistance in Siang and Upper Siang districts.
2. **Body — the strategic case** — Explain the Siang-Yarlung Tsangpo-Brahmaputra link, China's lower-reaches project, the absence of a water-sharing treaty, and why storage rather than run-of-river gives a flood cushion and some hydrological leverage.
3. **Body — the rights case** — Cover the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Section 4(5), the 2009 requirement of gram sabha consent before forest diversion, the Niyamgiri judgment of 2013, the Adi and their kebang, and the fact that the EIA public hearing arrives only after the survey stage.
4. **Body — risks and trade-offs** — Discuss seismicity, submergence, the conflict between flood cushion and power generation, dam safety under the 2021 Act, and the lesson of stalled projects such as Lower Subansiri.
5. **Conclusion** — Propose consent-based surveys with shared findings, affected communities on the empowered committee, and public disclosure of reservoir size and operating rules, so that the national interest is built with the valley rather than against

it.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of Siang district. Villagers have blocked a survey team at a designated site. What do you do?

Approach: I would withdraw the team rather than force the survey, because a survey carried out under police protection will poison every later stage. I would meet the village kebang and the protest leaders with the project's engineers and explain exactly what the survey involves, where drilling will take place and what it does not decide. I would offer to share the data with the village and invite an independent expert of the villagers' choosing to observe. Every commitment would be recorded in writing, so that the empowered committee is bound by it.

Q2. You are the member secretary of the new empowered committee. What should its first three decisions be?

Approach: First, to include elected representatives and village council members from the affected areas, so that it is not seen as an instrument of enforcement. Second, to publish in plain language, including the local language, what the survey will and will not do, and whether it earmarks any land for relocation. Third, to set up a grievance channel with a fixed time limit for replies. Coordination without credibility will only speed up the conflict.

Q3. An interview board asks: can a project of national strategic importance override local consent?

Approach: The State can acquire land for a public purpose, and national security is a legitimate one; under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, a purely government project needs a social impact assessment but not the consent of affected families. But the power to acquire is no licence to ignore rights Parliament wrote into the Forest Rights Act and the Supreme Court enforced in Niyamgiri. Strategic importance raises the obligation to consult, because the costs fall on a small indigenous community while the benefits are national. Where consent cannot be obtained, the design itself — size, location and reservoir level — should be reconsidered before coercion is.

6. Health & Life Sciences

All three stories are about harm hidden in plain sight: sugar, salt and fat behind the pack, fakes inside the medicine supply chain, and a child's pregnancy found too late for the statute. In each case the remedy was known for years, and the State moved only when a court or a rights commission pushed it. The lesson is that in public health, deadlines are themselves health policy. A year's grace for labels, a committee referral for drug tracing and eleven days between a Medical Board's examination and a court order all have a human cost.

6.1 FSSAI Tells Supreme Court It Will Bring Red-Hexagon Sugar, Salt and Fat Warnings in One Phase

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) told the Supreme Court on Wednesday, September 23, that it will bring in front-of-pack nutrition labelling on packaged food and beverages in a single phase rather than in stages. Front-of-pack labelling means a simple warning on the face of the packet, where a shopper looks first, rather than the detailed nutrition table on the back. In a compliance affidavit, FSSAI said it needs about four months to finalise and issue the draft regulations under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, after which food business operators get one year to comply. The Economic Times says the year is meant to spare firms with packaging already printed in bulk "commercial hardships". The Hindu calls it "a voluntary implementation period of 365 days". The affidavit answers the Court's order of September 10, which asked for a "reasonable, scientifically justified and clearly defined timeline" and called food safety a cause of "national interest". The proposed symbol, in a format similar to Canada's, is a red hexagon on a white square background, printed with the names of the nutrients that exceed prescribed limits. It must sit at the top left of the front of the pack, in a font at least one point larger than the back-of-pack nutrition table. One hexagon will list every nutrient in excess; FSSAI rejected public health activists' demand for a separate symbol per nutrient, saying it could confuse consumers. A product high in even one of sugar, salt or fat carries the warning. The thresholds are those of the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). For packaged food, sugar is set at 5% of energy from added sugar, with total sugar not exceeding 10%, and fat at 15% of energy from added fat and up to 30% from total fat. For liquid foods and beverages, the fat limits stay the same and the sugar limits are 10% and 30% of energy. So lemon juice with more than 2 g of added sugar or 175 mg of salt per 100 ml, or chips with added fat above 4.2 g or salt above 625 mg per 100 g, would carry the warning. On fat, the papers differ: ET says added fat, The Hindu saturated fat. The syllabus link is GS2 on health and GS3 on food processing and consumer protection.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Packaged foods high in fat, sugar and salt become a daily staple as India's burden of non-communicable disease rises → an FSSAI expert committee in 2014 and a 2018 draft propose front-of-pack warnings, which later drafts dilute → a 2022 star-rating proposal is attacked for giving unhealthy foods a health halo → public health petitioners take the delay to the Supreme Court, which on September 10 demands a clear timeline → FSSAI proposes a single-phase red-hexagon warning with ICMR-NIN thresholds and a one-year compliance window

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The FSS Act, 2006 made FSSAI the single food regulator and gave it the power to prescribe labels** — The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 brought eight earlier food laws and orders together, including the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, and replaced them with a single science-based framework. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body set up under Section 4 of the Act. It works under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and State Commissioners of Food Safety enforce the law on the ground. Section 23 bars the sale of packaged food that is not marked and labelled as regulations specify, and FSSAI frames those regulations under Section 92 with the prior approval of the Central Government. The Act penalises misbranded food under Section 52 and misleading advertisements under Section 53, and these provisions are the legal basis for action against false health claims.
- 2. India has argued over front-of-pack labels for more than a decade, and each draft was weaker than the last** — According to Down To Earth, an FSSAI expert committee recommended in 2014 that calories and nutrients of concern, such as sugar, fat and salt, be shown on the front of packs. A 2018 draft required nutrients above the thresholds to be highlighted in red. A 2019 revision replaced salt with sodium, total fat

	with saturated fat, and total sugar with added sugar, and the Centre for Science and Environment said these changes suited industry. The FSS (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, which govern back-of-pack nutrition information today, were notified without front-of-pack warnings. In 2022 FSSAI proposed an 'Indian Nutrition Rating', a star system in which healthier products earn more stars. Public health experts criticised it because stars can make foods high in sugar, salt or fat look healthy. According to LiveLaw, the present proceedings are in <i>3S and Our Health Society v. Union of India</i> before the Supreme Court. 3. Warning labels and rating labels rest on two different ideas, and warnings are the stronger tool against harmful nutrients — Front-of-pack systems that tell the shopper what the numbers mean fall into two families. Rating systems, such as Australia's voluntary Health Star Rating and France's Nutri-Score, grade the whole product and let good nutrients such as fibre or protein offset bad ones. Warning systems flag only what is harmful. Chile's Law 20.606 on food labelling and advertising, enacted in 2012 and in force from 2016, requires a black octagonal 'high in' label for each of sugar, sodium, saturated fat and calories and restricts the marketing of such foods to children. Several Latin American countries have since adopted similar warnings. Canada's mandatory symbol, required from 2026, is a single black-and-white 'high in' box that lists every nutrient in excess together, which is the one-symbol approach FSSAI says it is following. 4. WHO limits and Article 47 set the public-health baseline against which the thresholds must be judged — The World Health Organization recommends keeping free sugars below 10% of total energy intake, and below 5% for further benefit, and keeping adult salt intake under 5 g a day. Its global action plan on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) set voluntary targets, including a 25% relative reduction in premature NCD mortality and a 30% relative reduction in mean population salt intake by 2025. Foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) are a major dietary driver of obesity, hypertension and diabetes. In India, the National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, an ICMR institute, prepares dietary guidelines and nutrient thresholds. Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to regard raising the level of nutrition and improving public health as among its primary duties.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 health and GS3 food processing meet in a single regulatory question — The syllabus names issues relating to health and food processing and related industries in India. Mains questions on lifestyle diseases and on regulating processed food can use this case as current evidence that design choices decide whether a regulation works: the symbol, the thresholds and the timeline. 2. Prelims tests regulators through their parent Act, ministry and powers — Questions on regulators usually ask which Act creates a body, which ministry it sits under and whether its orders bind. FSSAI, the FSS Act's regulation-making power, ICMR-NIN and the WHO sugar and salt limits are all likely material, as is the difference between warning labels and rating labels. Constitutional anchors such as Article 47 are frequently paired with such questions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. ● The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 repealed the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 and consolidated several food laws and orders into a single statute. ● Labelling of pre-packaged food in India, including the nutrition information table, is governed by the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display)

Regulations, 2020, framed by FSSAI under the FSS Act.

- Chile's food labelling law, enacted in 2012 and implemented from 2016, requires black octagonal 'high in' warning labels, whereas Nutri-Score and the Health Star Rating are summary rating systems that grade the whole product.
- The World Health Organization recommends that intake of free sugars be reduced to less than 10% of total energy intake, and that adults consume less than 5 g of salt a day.
- Article 47 of the Constitution, a Directive Principle of State Policy, 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 Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, is an institute of the Indian Council of Medical Research.

ANALYSIS

- 1. "Single phase" is the headline concession, but mandatory warnings are still more than a year away** — Public health groups feared a phased roll-out in which the most contested products would be put off and each new phase would reopen lobbying, and a single phase removes that risk. But the regulator's own timetable is about four months to issue the regulations and then a 365-day window. Even if nothing slips, mandatory warnings would not reach shelves before early 2028. The Hindu's word 'voluntary' matters here: if compliance is voluntary for the year, the warning becomes an obligation only at the end, and makers of the least healthy products have no reason to move early. The industry's point about packaging printed in bulk justifies a transition period, but not necessarily a full year. On the other side, a rushed rule invites litigation and stays, and one deadline that holds is better than an ambitious one that a court suspends.
- 2. Choosing a warning over the star rating is the real victory in the affidavit** — The 2022 Indian Nutrition Rating could have let a biscuit high in sugar earn stars for its fibre or protein, which is the 'health halo' critics warned about. A red hexagon names only the nutrients in excess, gives no credit for anything else, and asks the shopper one question: is this product high in something harmful? The refusal to give each nutrient its own symbol is a defensible choice for a crowded Indian pack, but it has a cost. A product high in all three nutrients carries one hexagon, just like a product high in one, so the signal does not grow with the harm. Chile's approach of one octagon per nutrient makes a very unhealthy product look very unhealthy, and that is why activists wanted it.
- 3. The thresholds and their exact wording, more than the colour, will decide how many products are caught** — Thresholds from ICMR-NIN rest on Indian science, which makes them harder to challenge in court than an imported model. But a threshold stated as a share of energy can be met through reformulation, for example by replacing sugar with non-nutritive sweeteners, so the regulation will need clear rules on what counts as 'added'. Given the papers' split between added and saturated fat, it matters that Down To Earth records that the 2019 draft's move from total fat to saturated fat and from salt to sodium was seen as friendly to industry, so the final wording deserves close reading. Salt against sodium is not a small matter, because 1 g of sodium equals about 2.5 g of salt, and a limit written in sodium looks lower than the same limit written in salt. Manufacturers reformulating to stay just below the line is not a loophole. It is the policy working as intended.
- 4. The action against e-commerce and quick-commerce platforms shows that labels matter only where the shopper actually sees them, and that is increasingly a screen** — Alongside the affidavit, ET reports, FSSAI began penal action against Amazon, Flipkart India, Swiggy Instamart, Zepto and BigBasket over allegedly misleading claims about Happilo Premium Date Bites – Zesty Orange. Swiggy Instamart and BigBasket

	also face action over three Milky Mist dairy products, and Amazon Seller Services, Swiggy Instamart and BigBasket over the online sale of fruits and seeds of Datura, a poisonous plant. A red hexagon on the physical pack is useless if the app shows only a product photograph, so the final regulation should require the warning in every online listing. Platforms will argue that they are marketplaces and that sellers carry the liability. But if the Datura allegation holds, it shows that the platform's own listing checks are the only practical control. 5. When a regulator needs a Supreme Court timeline, the failure is institutional — The Court's language of 'national interest' and its demand for a 'clearly defined timeline' show a court filling a gap that the regulator left open for years. LiveLaw has reported that the Court earlier questioned whether FSSAI's opposition to warning labels came from industry pressure. A court can set deadlines but cannot design a label. The scientific panels and public consultation under the FSS Act are the right forum, and litigation should hold them to account, not replace them. The counter-view is plain: a decade of drafts shows that without the Court nothing would have moved. The lasting fix would be statutory or regulatory time limits for finalising health-critical regulations once a draft is published.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Front-of-pack warning labels are a low-cost tool against non-communicable diseases, yet India has debated them for over a decade." Examine the design choices in FSSAI's proposed front-of-pack labelling and discuss the challenges in making it effective for Indian consumers. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with India's NCD burden and the role of HFSS foods, then state that FSSAI told the Supreme Court on September 23 that it will introduce a single-phase red-hexagon warning, with about four months to notify the regulations and a year for compliance. 2. Body — design choices — Explain the warning-versus-rating choice and contrast it with the 2022 star-rating proposal and the health-halo criticism. Cover the single hexagon listing all nutrients in excess against Chile's one octagon per nutrient, the ICMR-NIN energy-share thresholds with the lemon juice and chips examples, placement at the top left and the font-size rule. 3. Body — challenges — Discuss the timeline and the 'voluntary' year, the ambiguity between added and saturated fat and between salt and sodium, reformulation with sweeteners, enforcement on e-commerce and quick-commerce platforms with the Datura and misleading-claims actions as examples, the capacity of State food safety enforcement, and consumer literacy. 4. Body — way forward — Suggest fixed dates in the regulation, warnings required in online listings, restrictions on marketing HFSS foods to children on the Chilean model, school canteen rules, and periodic review of thresholds by ICMR-NIN. 5. Conclusion — Argue that the choice of a warning over a rating is the substantive gain, and that its public-health value now depends on the fine print and on enforcement, anchored in Article 47.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Commissioner of Food Safety in a State. Small snack makers say a one-year window is too short for them. How do you respond? Approach: I would separate the genuine difficulty of reprinting packaging from resistance to the warning itself. Small units can be helped with template artwork, a helpdesk and clear guidance on calculating thresholds, but the deadline itself should be uniform, or large firms will route products through small ones. I would publish a list of products likely to need warnings so that firms can plan early. My message would be

that the rule is coming, and those who reformulate first will lose the fewest customers.

Q2. As District Collector, you learn that a dark store in your district is selling Datura seeds through a quick-commerce app. What do you do?

Approach: I would have the Designated Officer and Food Safety Officers inspect the premises at once, seize the stock and draw samples under the FSS Act, and inform the Commissioner of Food Safety and FSSAI. Because Datura is poisonous, I would alert hospitals and the health department to watch for poisoning cases. I would also ask the platform to delist the product across the region, not just in my district. Finally, I would ask the platform why its own filters allowed the listing, because that is where the repeat risk lies.

Q3. An interview board asks: is a warning label not paternalistic? Adults can decide what to eat.

Approach: A warning does not stop anyone from buying anything. It only makes information that is already legally required easy to read at the point of choice. Real autonomy depends on informed choice, and a nutrition table on the back of a small packet does not inform most shoppers. The paternalism objection would be stronger against a ban or a tax. Front-of-pack warnings are among the least coercive tools a state has for a problem that costs the public health system heavily.

6.2 NHRC Recommends a National Drug Registration Certificate and QR Track-and-Trace to Fight Spurious Medicines

THE NEWS New Delhi. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has recommended a centralised registration system for medicines sold in India, a portal to track their movement through supply chains in real time, and dynamic QR codes to authenticate them, as part of a broad set of measures to curb spurious and counterfeit drugs, The Economic Times reports. In plain terms, a spurious drug is a fake: it imitates another medicine, carries a false manufacturer's name, or has been substituted in whole or in part. The central proposal is a National Drug Data Registration Certificate, a centralised and authenticated system under which every medicine would be compulsorily registered through a central government portal. This covers branded, branded generic and unbranded generic products, whether made by a third party or for domestic use or export. A branded generic is an off-patent medicine sold under a company's own brand name, and third-party manufacturing means one firm has its product made by another under contract. The NHRC also proposed a trace-and-track portal holding each medicine's manufacturer identity, composition, batch information and distribution chain, allowing real-time tracking of drugs entering each State or Union Territory, starting with life-saving and high-risk medicines. Under a centrally regulated digital authentication protocol, QR codes on medicine packs would be dynamic and uniquely serialised to prevent duplication and to standardise data governance across manufacturers. In simple terms, each pack would carry its own code, so a copied code would show up as a duplicate. The commission recommended a centralised national database of counterfeit-medicine cases, covering offenders, products, emerging patterns and enforcement outcomes, which could be used with artificial intelligence tools to identify organised networks and repeat offenders. It also proposed a uniform standard operating procedure for forensic protocols, sampling, residue and laboratory analysis, supply-chain investigation, digital evidence extraction and legal strategies. The proposals follow an open house discussion on 'Measures to Curb Spurious Medicines in India', held earlier this year and chaired by NHRC member Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, with central and State drug authorities and other stakeholders taking part. The NHRC forwarded the recommendations to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) in August. The regulator referred them to the drug consultative committee, which ET describes as an expert committee under the CDSCO, for its advice. The syllabus link is GS2 on health and statutory bodies, and GS3 on technology in governance.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India's medicine market runs on a very large number of brands, much of it made under contract, and regulation is split between the Centre and the States → counterfeiters exploit the lack of a single registry and of an identity for each pack → the Centre adds traceability in pieces: QR codes on APIs, barcodes on the top 300 brands and, in June 2026, an expansion to vaccines, antimicrobials, narcotic drugs and anti-cancer medicines → the NHRC holds an open house on

spurious medicines and in August sends a complete architecture to CDSCO → CDSCO refers it to the drug consultative committee, where the Centre and the States must agree

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 sorts bad medicine into three legal categories, with the harshest penalties for fakes that injure** — Section 17 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 defines a misbranded drug, for instance one that is coloured or coated to hide damage or carries a false claim on its label. Section 17A defines an adulterated drug, for instance one made in insanitary conditions or containing a harmful substance. Section 17B defines a spurious drug: one sold under another drug's name, made to imitate another drug, or labelled with a fictitious manufacturer. A drug that is simply below the prescribed standard is called 'not of standard quality', which is a separate and lesser category. The Drugs and Cosmetics (Amendment) Act, 2008 raised the penalties. Under Section 27(a), an adulterated or spurious drug likely to cause death or grievous hurt carries at least ten years' imprisonment, which may extend to life, and a fine of at least ₹10 lakh or three times the value of the drugs confiscated, whichever is more. Some offences were made cognizable and non-bailable, and special courts were provided for.
2. **Drug regulation is split between the Centre and the States, and the Act sets up two central advisory bodies** — The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India, sits under the Directorate General of Health Services in the Union Health Ministry. It approves new drugs and clinical trials, regulates imports and sets standards. State drug controllers license the manufacture and sale of most drugs and do most of the enforcement, and 'drugs and poisons' is Entry 19 of the Concurrent List. The Drugs Technical Advisory Board, under Section 5 of the Act, gives technical advice. The Drugs Consultative Committee, under Section 7, includes representatives of the Centre and of every State and advises on securing uniformity in how the Act is administered. The Mashelkar Committee (2003) examined drug regulation, including the problem of spurious drugs, and argued for stronger central oversight and tougher penalties.
3. **Traceability and manufacturing standards are already being tightened step by step** — According to a PIB release of August 12, 2025, the Drugs Rules, 1945 were amended on January 18, 2022 to require a QR code on every active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) manufactured or imported in India. An amendment of November 17, 2022 required a barcode or QR code on the primary packaging of the brands listed in Schedule H2, the top 300 brands, from August 1, 2023. Revised Schedule M, which sets Good Manufacturing Practices, was notified on December 28, 2023. It applied from June 29, 2024 to manufacturers with a turnover above ₹250 crore, with a conditional extension to December 31, 2025 for smaller firms. A PIB release of June 25, 2026 says Schedule H2 has been expanded to all vaccines, antimicrobials, narcotic and psychotropic drugs, and anti-cancer medicines. The deadline is July 1, 2027 for vaccines, narcotic drugs and anti-cancer drugs and July 1, 2028 for antimicrobials, and the code carries nine data elements, including batch number and manufacturing licence number.
4. **The NHRC is a statutory, recommendatory body, and it treats access to safe medicine as part of the right to life** — The NHRC was set up under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993. Its chairperson must have been Chief Justice of India or a judge of the Supreme Court. Its members include a serving or former Supreme Court judge, a serving or former High Court Chief Justice, and three members with knowledge of human rights, at least one of them a woman. The chairpersons of several national commissions are ex officio members. Section 12 lets it inquire into violations, review safeguards and promote research, and its recommendations under Section 18 are advisory rather than binding. The Supreme Court has read the right to health into Article 21, notably in *Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity v. State of West Bengal* (1996), and Article 47 makes improving public health a primary duty of the State.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	GS2 covers both the institution and the service — The syllabus asks about statutory, regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies, and about issues relating to health. Here a human rights body is designing regulatory architecture for a health regulator, a good case for questions on institutional coordination and the limits of recommendatory bodies. Prelims regularly tests NHRC composition and drug-law categories — The composition, appointment and powers of the NHRC are standard Prelims material. So are the definitions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and the roles of CDSCO and the DCGI. Schedule M and Schedule H2 of the Drugs Rules are the likely next set, given their recent revisions. GS3 frames it as technology in governance and India's standing as a pharmaceutical exporter — Serialised QR codes, national registries and AI-assisted enforcement fit the syllabus theme of applying technology in everyday life. India's reputation as a supplier of affordable generics depends on the integrity of its supply chain, so drug quality is also an economic question.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Sections 17, 17A and 17B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 define misbranded, adulterated and spurious drugs respectively. - The Drugs Consultative Committee, constituted under Section 7 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, consists of representatives of the Central Government and of each State Government and advises on securing uniformity in the administration of the Act. - The Drugs Technical Advisory Board is constituted under Section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 to advise on technical matters arising out of the administration of the Act. - 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. - Schedule M of the Drugs Rules, 1945 prescribes Good Manufacturing Practices for pharmaceutical products, and Schedule H2 lists drug formulations that must carry a barcode or QR code on their packaging. 'Drugs and poisons' is an entry in the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. - The National Human Rights Commission is a statutory body under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, and its recommendations after an inquiry are not binding on the government.
ANALYSIS	The central proposal shows what is missing today: a complete national list of what is legally on sale — The recommendation that every medicine be compulsorily registered through a central government portal, including export-only and third-party products, implies that no such complete national list exists now. Without a master list, a QR code can say what a pack claims to be, but not whether that product is legally licensed. Bringing in export and contract-made products closes a real gap, because products licensed for one purpose can be diverted to another market. The registry is therefore the foundation, and the QR code only works on top of it. The objection is administrative: registering every product of every licensee is a large exercise, and a registry that is incomplete or out of date would give false assurance. A QR code stops copying only if it is unique and someone actually scans it — A static code printed on a pack can be photocopied onto a thousand fakes, which is why the NHRC wants codes that are dynamic and uniquely serialised, so that a second scan of the same code raises a flag. That protection works only if scanning happens at the wholesaler, the pharmacy and ideally the patient's phone, with every scan recorded

centrally. Starting with life-saving and high-risk medicines is sensible, and it matches the Centre's June 2026 expansion of Schedule H2 to vaccines, anti-cancer medicines, antimicrobials and narcotic drugs. Serialisation costs money, and small manufacturers will pass some of it on. But the counterfeit cancer injections and rabies vaccines this magazine reported earlier this month show what the absence of such checks costs.

- 3. The hardest part is federal, not technical** — Because State drug controllers issue most manufacturing and sale licences, a central registry and a real-time map of drugs entering each State depend on State departments, which vary widely in staff and laboratory capacity. Sending the proposals to the drug consultative committee, where every State is represented, is the correct channel. It also means the pace will be set by the slowest State. A national system needs central funding for State laboratories and inspectors, not just a central portal, or it will produce data that no one on the ground acts on.
- 4. The forensic SOP may do more for convictions than the technology** — Drug prosecutions often turn on procedure: how a Drugs Inspector drew and sealed a sample under Section 23 of the Act, and whether the Government Analyst's report under Section 25 was properly served. A uniform standard operating procedure for sampling, laboratory analysis and digital evidence would make cases harder to defeat on technicalities. A national database of offenders, which AI tools can search, would let enforcement treat counterfeiting as the organised crime it often is, rather than as a string of unrelated seizures. This is the least glamorous recommendation and possibly the most valuable, because the deterrent effect of the 2008 penalties depends on convictions that actually follow.
- 5. A rights body designing regulation shows both the reach and the limits of the NHRC** — The NHRC has approached fake medicines as a violation of the right to life, which fits its mandate under Section 12 to review safeguards and promote research. Its open house brought central and State regulators to one table, which the fragmented regulatory system rarely does on its own. But its recommendations are advisory, it has no power to make CDSCO act, and its technical proposals will be judged by a committee of the very regulators whose gaps they expose. The fair view is that the NHRC can set the agenda and keep public attention on it, while accountability for delivery has to remain with the Health Ministry and CDSCO.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"Spurious medicines are as much a failure of regulatory design as of criminal enforcement." In the light of the National Human Rights Commission's recent recommendations, examine the institutional gaps in India's drug regulatory framework and suggest measures to secure the integrity of the medicine supply chain. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Define spurious drugs under Section 17B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and state the NHRC's proposals: a National Drug Data Registration Certificate, a trace-and-track portal, dynamic serialised QR codes, a national offender database and a uniform forensic SOP, forwarded to CDSCO in August.
- 2. Body — institutional gaps** — Cover the Centre-State split in licensing and enforcement, the absence of a complete national product registry, uneven State laboratory and inspector capacity, contract manufacturing and diversion of export products, and prosecutions that fail on sampling procedure.
- 3. Body — what has been done** — Cite the 2008 amendment's penalties and special courts, QR codes on APIs, barcodes on Schedule H2 brands, revised Schedule M, and the June 2026 expansion of Schedule H2 to vaccines, antimicrobials, narcotic drugs and anti-cancer medicines.

	4. Body — measures — Recommend the central registry, serialisation with mandatory scanning at pharmacies, central funding for State laboratories, a national intelligence database, a uniform forensic SOP, whistle-blower protection, and a public verification app for patients. 5. Conclusion — Link drug quality to Article 21 and to India's credibility as a supplier of affordable medicines, and argue that traceability must be matched by enforcement capacity in the States.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As District Collector, you are told that a patient has died after a suspected counterfeit injection at a private hospital. What do you do? Approach: I would have the Drugs Inspector seize the remaining stock, search the supplying distributor and draw samples strictly according to the procedure in the Act, so that the case does not fail in court. Because offences involving spurious drugs that cause death are cognizable, I would ensure an FIR is registered and the chain of custody is documented. I would inform the State Drugs Controller and CDSCO so that other districts can be warned, and I would issue a public alert naming the batch. I would also order an audit of the hospital's procurement to find where the fake entered. Q2. You are a State Drugs Controller asked to support a national track-and-trace system with a thin inspectorate. What are your priorities? Approach: I would start with the categories the NHRC and the Centre have already prioritised, meaning life-saving and high-risk medicines, and with the largest wholesalers, who handle most of the volume. I would use scan data to direct inspections to anomalies rather than inspecting at random. I would ask the Centre for funds to add testing capacity, because traceability without testing only moves the bottleneck. And I would publish enforcement results so that pharmacies see scanning as their protection. Q3. An interview board asks: should a human rights commission be advising on drug regulation? Is that not CDSCO's job? Approach: Designing the system is CDSCO's job, but the NHRC has a statutory mandate to review safeguards for rights, and a fake medicine takes away the right to life in the most direct way. Its value lies in convening all parties and in public pressure, not in technical authority. The right test is whether its proposals are sound, and the registry, traceability and forensic SOP are well founded. The risk of duplication is met by sending its recommendations, as has happened, to the regulator's own expert committee.

6.3 J&K and Ladakh High Court Lets 11-Year-Old Sexual-Assault Survivor End Pregnancy Beyond 24-Week Limit

THE NEWS Jammu. The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh on Tuesday, September 22, allowed an 11-year-old girl to terminate her pregnancy. It held that the mere fact that the pregnancy had crossed the statutory 24-week period under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act "could not result in denial of constitutional protection to the child", The Indian Express reports. Disposing of a petition filed on behalf of the minor, Justice Wasim Sadiq Nargal directed the authorities to take immediate steps, observing that "the minor being about 11 years old cannot be compelled to carry a pregnancy resulting from the sexual assault committed upon her". A medical board found that the pregnancy had reached 24 weeks and 2 days by September 22, the date of the judgment. The Medical Board had examined the girl on September 11 and found her physically and mentally fit to undergo an abortion. It said termination at this stage was medically feasible, though it carried increased maternal and procedural risks, including haemorrhage, infection and the need for blood transfusion. The girl had moved with her family to Baramulla in March and developed fever, vomiting, cough and abdominal pain, and a medical examination revealed that she was pregnant. She disclosed that she had been sexually assaulted by an unknown person during her stay in Kashmir. The alleged offender has yet to be arrested. The legal problem is that the MTP Act sets gestational limits, meaning limits on how many weeks into a pregnancy a termination is allowed.

Since the 2021 amendment, a termination is allowed up to 20 weeks on one doctor's opinion. Between 20 and 24 weeks it needs two doctors' opinion and is limited to specified categories, which include rape survivors and minors. Beyond 24 weeks, the Act allows it only for substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a Medical Board, or at any time to save the woman's life. This girl's case fits neither route, so the Court relied on the Constitution to go beyond the statute. The syllabus link is GS2 on the protection of vulnerable sections and on health, GS1 on issues relating to women and children, and GS4 on ethics.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

An 11-year-old is sexually assaulted in Kashmir, and the pregnancy is found only after she falls ill → a petition is filed on her behalf and a Medical Board examines her on September 11 → by the judgment date, September 22, the pregnancy is 24 weeks and 2 days, past the MTP Act's outer limit for rape survivors and minors → the Act allows termination beyond 24 weeks only for substantial foetal abnormality or to save the woman's life → the High Court holds that the statutory ceiling cannot deny the child constitutional protection and orders immediate steps for termination

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The MTP Act, as amended in 2021, sets three layers of time limits and one exception with no limit** — The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, as amended by the MTP (Amendment) Act, 2021, allows termination up to 20 weeks on the opinion of one registered medical practitioner. From 20 to 24 weeks it requires the opinion of two practitioners and is limited to categories of women prescribed by the rules. Beyond 24 weeks, Section 3(2B) removes the time limit only where termination is needed because of substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a Medical Board, which every State and Union Territory must set up with a gynaecologist, a paediatrician and a radiologist or sonologist. Section 5 separately permits termination at any stage when it is immediately necessary to save the pregnant woman's life. Under the Act, a pregnancy alleged to have been caused by rape is presumed to cause grave injury to the woman's mental health.
- 2. The rules name who may seek a termination between 20 and 24 weeks, and minors and survivors of sexual assault are among them** — Rule 3B of the MTP Rules, 2003, as amended in 2021, lists the eligible categories. They include survivors of sexual assault, rape or incest; minors; women whose marital status changes during the pregnancy, such as by widowhood or divorce; women with physical disabilities; women with mental illness; cases of foetal malformation; and women in humanitarian or disaster situations. For a minor, Section 3(4)(a) requires the written consent of her guardian. Section 5A makes it an offence to reveal the name or particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated, except to a person authorised by law. The 2021 amendment also replaced 'married woman or her husband' with 'any woman or her partner' in the ground of contraceptive failure.
- 3. The courts have placed reproductive choice within Article 21 but have also drawn a line at a viable foetus** — In *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration* (2009), the Supreme Court held that a woman's right to make reproductive choices is a dimension of personal liberty under Article 21. *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) recognised decisional autonomy over one's body as part of privacy. In *X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department* (2022), the Court held that unmarried women are entitled to terminate a pregnancy between 20 and 24 weeks on the same footing as married women. It also held that, to reconcile the MTP Act with POCSO, a doctor need not disclose a minor's identity in the mandatory report to the police if the minor and her guardian so request. The courts have also drawn a limit. According to Supreme Court Observer, a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud refused to allow termination of a 26-week pregnancy of a married woman after AIIMS found no foetal abnormality. The Bench said it was averse to stopping the heartbeat of a viable foetus and that Article 142 could not be invoked in every case.
- 4. The POCSO Act treats a pregnancy caused by sexual assault on a child under twelve**

	as an aggravated offence and makes reporting mandatory — Under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, penetrative sexual assault is ‘aggravated’ when the child is below twelve years of age (Section 5(m)) or when the assault makes the child pregnant (Section 5(j)(ii)). After the 2019 amendment, Section 6 prescribes rigorous imprisonment of at least twenty years, extendable to imprisonment for the rest of natural life, or death. Section 19 obliges anyone who knows of such an offence, including doctors, to report it to the police or the Special Juvenile Police Unit, and Section 21 punishes failure to report. Section 23 bars the media from disclosing a child victim’s identity, and in <i>Nipun Saxena v. Union of India</i> (2018) the Supreme Court held that the identity of survivors must not be revealed even indirectly. The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has been the common High Court for both Union Territories since the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 and GS1 ask how laws protect vulnerable sections, and this case tests the protection at its edge — The syllabus names mechanisms, laws and institutions for the protection of vulnerable sections, along with issues relating to women and children. The MTP amendment of 2021 is a natural Mains topic, and this ruling adds a hard case: a child survivor whom the statute’s own categories cover up to 24 weeks, but not a day beyond. 2. Prelims tests the numbers and the authorities in the MTP framework — The 20-week and 24-week limits, the number of doctors required, the Medical Board for foetal abnormalities and the Rule 3B categories are all testable facts, as are POCSO’s mandatory reporting and the landmark reproductive-rights cases. 3. GS4 uses such cases to test the conflict between law and conscience — An ethics case study here would ask how a doctor, a Collector or a judge should act when following the rule to the letter produces an unjust result. The best interest of the child, a principle in Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which India ratified in 1992, is the framework examiners expect.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 as amended in 2021, a pregnancy may be terminated up to 20 weeks on the opinion of one registered medical practitioner, and between 20 and 24 weeks on the opinion of two, for categories of women specified by rules. - Under the amended MTP Act, the gestational limit does not apply where termination is necessitated by substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a Medical Board constituted by the State or Union Territory government. - Section 5 of the MTP Act permits termination of a pregnancy at any stage where it is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman. - Survivors of sexual assault, rape or incest and minors are among the categories of women eligible for termination between 20 and 24 weeks under the MTP Rules. - In <i>Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration</i> (2009), the Supreme Court held that a woman’s right to make reproductive choices is a dimension of personal liberty under Article 21. - In <i>X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department</i> (2022), the Supreme Court held that unmarried women are entitled to seek termination of pregnancy between 20 and 24 weeks on the same footing as married women. - Section 19 of the POCSO Act, 2012 makes reporting of a sexual offence against a child mandatory, and Section 21 prescribes punishment for failure to report.
ANALYSIS	1. The Court did not bend the statute; it found that the statute had no answer for this

child — The 2021 amendment assumed that 24 weeks is enough time for a rape survivor or a minor to find out, disclose and seek help. That assumption fails most often for the youngest children, who may not recognise a pregnancy and often cannot report the abuse. The Act's only route beyond 24 weeks is foetal abnormality, a condition of the foetus rather than the woman, so a healthy pregnancy in a child's body falls into a gap. The High Court used its constitutional jurisdiction to fill the gap, and its principle, that a numerical ceiling cannot defeat constitutional protection, is sound. The objection is that relief which depends on reaching a High Court in time is uneven across the country, and Parliament should not leave the courts to rewrite the limit case by case.

- 2. The last eleven days show how process itself can carry a case past the limit** — By simple arithmetic from the Board's own estimate of 24 weeks and 2 days on September 22, the girl was about 22 to 23 weeks pregnant when the Board examined her on September 11. That is inside the window in which the MTP Act permits termination for minors and rape survivors on the opinion of two doctors. Between that examination and the judgment, eleven days passed and the statutory line was crossed. Hospitals should treat a minor within the 24-week window as a case that needs no court at all, and Medical Boards and courts should work to deadlines measured in days. The counter-view is that a court needs a careful medical record before ordering a late procedure, which is fair; the answer is a deadline for the Board's report, not skipping it.
- 3. Foetal viability is the strongest counter-argument, and the 2023 Supreme Court ruling shows it is real** — At 24 weeks and beyond, a foetus may be viable with intensive care, and in October 2023 the Supreme Court refused a 26-week termination partly for that reason. That case, however, involved an adult woman and no abnormality or assault. Here the pregnant person is a child of about 11, the pregnancy results from a crime, and the Board recorded increased maternal risks, including haemorrhage and the need for transfusion. The balance is therefore different, and the High Court was right to put the child's life and health first. Honest analysis must still admit that the later the stage, the harder the ethical question, which is why the solution is speed rather than the absence of any limit.
- 4. The child's own voice and her privacy are part of her best interest, not an afterthought** — The MTP Act asks for a guardian's written consent for a minor, but Suchita Srivastava places consent at the heart of reproductive choice, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asks that a child's views be heard in matters affecting her. A child of 11 needs age-appropriate counselling to understand what is happening to her. Privacy is equally part of protection. The MTP Act's confidentiality clause, Section 23 of POCSO and the Nipun Saxena guidelines all bar any disclosure that could identify her, and this magazine reports only what the paper printed for that reason. A child who is identified in her community is harmed a second time.
- 5. The criminal case is the unfinished half of justice** — The alleged offender has not been arrested. Assault on a child under twelve that results in pregnancy is aggravated penetrative sexual assault under POCSO, with a minimum of twenty years' rigorous imprisonment. Courts routinely direct that foetal tissue be preserved for DNA profiling in such cases, and whether that has been done here is not reported. Protecting the child medically while the criminal case stalls would be only half a remedy.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"A statutory ceiling on gestational age cannot override the constitutional protection owed to a child survivor of sexual assault." Discuss in the light of a recent ruling of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, and suggest reforms to the medical termination of pregnancy framework. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE

- 1. Introduction** — State the facts: on September 22 the High Court allowed an 11-year-

MAINS QUESTION	old sexual-assault survivor to terminate a pregnancy of 24 weeks and 2 days, holding that the MTP Act's 24-week ceiling could not deny her constitutional protection. 2. Body — the statutory framework and its gap — Explain the 20 and 24-week limits, the Rule 3B categories covering minors and rape survivors, the Medical Board route beyond 24 weeks limited to foetal abnormality, and Section 5 for saving life. Show why a healthy pregnancy in a child past 24 weeks has no statutory route. 3. Body — the constitutional reasoning — Use Article 21 as read in Suchita Srivastava, Puttaswamy and X v. Principal Secretary, and the best-interest principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Present the counter-view from the October 2023 Supreme Court ruling on a viable foetus and Article 142, and distinguish it on the facts. 4. Body — reforms — Suggest allowing Medical Boards to approve terminations beyond 24 weeks for minors and rape survivors, time-bound decisions by Boards and courts, training for doctors on the 20 to 24-week route without a court order, POCSO reporting that protects the child's identity, preservation of DNA evidence, and counselling through One Stop Centres. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that gestational limits protect women from unsafe late procedures and must not become barriers to the very people they were meant to protect, and that a legislative fix is better than case-by-case litigation.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As District Collector, you learn that a 12-year-old survivor of sexual assault in your district is 21 weeks pregnant and her family wants to approach the High Court. What do you do? Approach: I would first make sure the family and the district hospital know that no court order is needed. At 21 weeks, a minor and survivor of sexual assault falls within the MTP Act's 20 to 24-week window, and termination needs the opinion of two registered doctors and her guardian's consent. I would direct the Chief Medical Officer to arrange the assessment within a day or two, with counselling through the One Stop Centre. I would ensure the police are informed as POCSO requires, with her identity kept confidential, and that foetal tissue is preserved as evidence. Every day spent in the wrong forum brings the 24-week limit closer. Q2. As Superintendent of Police, how would you handle the investigation where the offender is unknown? Approach: I would have a woman officer record the child's statement at her home or a place of her choice, as Section 24 of the POCSO Act requires, without repeated questioning. I would secure forensic evidence, including DNA from preserved foetal tissue, and trace everyone who had access to her in the relevant period. The BNSS requires investigation of rape and POCSO offences to be completed within two months of the information being recorded, and I would hold the team to that. Throughout, no detail that could identify her would be released. Q3. An interview board asks: should the 24-week limit be removed altogether for minors and rape survivors? Approach: I would not remove the limit entirely, because late terminations carry higher medical risk and raise real questions about foetal viability that the law should answer, not ignore. But the present design leaves no route at all for a child past 24 weeks unless there is a foetal abnormality. That gap should be closed by letting Medical Boards approve such cases on the merits within fixed time limits. The deeper reform is earlier detection and reporting of child abuse, so that such cases rarely approach the limit.

7. Science & Technology

Today's science story is less about what machines can do than about who gets to do frontier science. AI companies now claim results that mathematicians chased for entire careers, but they announce them by press release, keep their methods to themselves and decide by corporate policy which countries' scientists may use the tools. For India, which has long done better in theoretical science than its budgets would predict but has no frontier model of its own, access to models and compute has become a question of scientific sovereignty.

7.1 OpenAI Claims a Millennium Prize Proof While India's Institutes Are Shut Out of Free Frontier-Model Access

THE NEWS Bengaluru. On September 8, OpenAI announced that an unreleased internal model had solved the Navier–Stokes existence and smoothness problem, one of six unsolved Millennium Prize Problems, each carrying a million-dollar bounty, The Hindu's science page reports. According to the report, OpenAI, spurred by rumours that its rival Anthropic was closing in, deployed 10,000 autonomous AI agents and millions of dollars' worth of computing power and found a solution in 88 hours. The claim is already contested. On September 7, New York University mathematician Tristan Buckmaster revealed that he and Levent Alpöge had worked for about a year on a simplified version of the problem using similar methods, assisted by both companies' models; OpenAI denied specifically accessing their data but said it “cannot rule out” that de-identified data from their usage helped improve its models. The run of claims began earlier. On May 20, OpenAI said its internal reasoning model had solved the planar unit distance problem posed by the Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdős in 1946. On July 20, Mr. Alpöge, who works at Anthropic, posted on X that its model Claude Fable 5 had produced a counterexample — a single case that proves a general claim false — to the Jacobian conjecture, an 87-year-old open problem in algebraic geometry. On August 1, OpenAI said its newest model, ‘Astra’, had solved ten more open problems, three from Erdős's list. Mathematicians are divided. Bristol's Andrew Booker says Claude Code wrote 30,000 lines of code and about 200 pages of mathematics in a week on a problem he had been stuck on for about ten years, and MIT's Andrew Sutherland calls it “an exciting time”; yet Dr. Sutherland warns that AI proofs gloss over the key intuitive step, and Dr. Booker that, left unchecked, they can become “completely incomprehensible”. Columbia's Michael Harris and UC San Diego's Karthik Ganapathy, who helped draft the June 2026 Leiden Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Mathematics, fault companies for announcing results without their methods. On July 29, OpenAI offered 1,00,000 scientists, mathematicians and engineers free access to its frontier models but excluded Indian, Russian and Chinese institutes, the report says, most likely because of geopolitical tensions. It warns that India, with no frontier model of its own, may struggle to keep pace in theoretical science. The syllabus link is GS3 on developments in science and technology, computers and the indigenisation of technology.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Frontier models learn to reason and to formalise proofs in machine-checkable languages such as Lean → mathematicians like Andrew Booker begin using them as a ‘grad student army’ → companies race to claim famous open problems, from Erdős's unit distance problem on May 20 to the Jacobian conjecture on July 20 → OpenAI claims the Navier–Stokes Millennium Prize Problem on September 8, amid a dispute over whether researchers' data helped → mathematicians demand transparency through the Leiden Declaration, while OpenAI's July 29 free-access scheme leaves out Indian institutes

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Clay Institute priced seven problems at \$1 million each in 2000, and only one has been solved** — The Clay Mathematics Institute, a private foundation in the United States, announced the seven Millennium Prize Problems in Paris in 2000 and offered US\$1 million for the solution of each. They are the Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer conjecture, the Hodge conjecture, Navier–Stokes existence and smoothness, P versus NP, the Poincaré conjecture, the Riemann hypothesis and Yang–Mills existence and mass gap. Only the Poincaré conjecture has been solved, by the Russian mathematician Grigori Perelman in 2002–03; he declined the Fields Medal in 2006 and the Millennium Prize awarded in 2010, which is why the report speaks of six remaining problems. The Institute's rules require publication in a qualifying outlet, a wait of at least two years and general acceptance by mathematicians before any award, so a company's announcement is a claim, not a prize.

	2. The three problems in the news come from three different branches of mathematics — The Navier–Stokes equations, named after Claude-Louis Navier and George Gabriel Stokes, describe how viscous fluids such as air and water move, and underpin weather forecasting and aircraft design; the prize asks whether their three-dimensional solutions stay smooth for all time or can ‘blow up’. The Jacobian conjecture, posed by the German mathematician Ott-Heinrich Keller in 1939, states that a polynomial map whose Jacobian determinant is a non-zero constant must have a polynomial inverse, so one counterexample disproves it. The planar unit distance problem, posed by Paul Erdős (1913–1996) in 1946, asks for the largest number of pairs of points exactly one unit apart among n points in a plane. Erdős left hundreds of such problems, which is why they have become a yardstick for AI systems. 3. A proof assistant certifies that a proof is correct, not that anyone understands it — A proof assistant such as Lean, created by Leonardo de Moura at Microsoft Research from 2013, requires a proof to be written in a precise formal language so that a small trusted program can check every step; the report says current models can produce proofs and formalise them in this way. Computer-assisted proof is not new: Kenneth Appel and Wolfgang Haken’s 1976 proof of the Four Colour Theorem relied on a computer to check cases no human could, and Georges Gonthier verified it in the Coq proof assistant in 2005. The lesson of that history is that machines can settle whether a result is true, while the understanding of why it is true still has to be built by people. 4. India has built shared compute under the IndiaAI Mission, but not a frontier model — A frontier model is a general-purpose AI model at the leading edge of capability, trained with very large computing power and data; the term was used in the Bletchley Declaration of November 2023, which India signed. The Union Cabinet approved the IndiaAI Mission on March 7, 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore, implemented by the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation, across seven pillars that include compute capacity, an innovation centre for indigenous models and safe and trusted AI, per PIB. It targeted 10,000 or more GPUs, the chips used to train and run AI; a PIB release of March 25, 2026 says more than 38,000 have been onboarded for start-ups and academia at affordable rates. Shared compute lowers the cost of using models, but training one at the frontier needs far larger, concentrated investment.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. The GS3 syllabus asks about developments in science and technology and their effects — GS3 lists science and technology developments and their effects in everyday life, awareness in IT and computers, and the indigenisation of technology. Prelims 2020 asked what AI could effectively do at its present stage of development, and Mains 2023 asked how AI helps clinical diagnosis and whether it threatens privacy. This story moves the question to how AI changes the way knowledge is produced and certified. 2. Access to frontier AI is a running thread in this magazine — The 22 September card covered calls for India to secure early access to frontier models for safety testing, and the 23 September card the Xi-Trump AI dialogue. Today adds the science angle: a company’s access list now decides who can compete in basic research, which serves GS2 answers on technology diplomacy and GS3 answers on indigenisation.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Millennium Prize Problems were announced by the Clay Mathematics Institute in 2000, with a prize of US\$1 million offered for the solution of each of the seven problems. ● The Poincaré conjecture is the only Millennium Prize Problem solved so far; Grigori Perelman, who proved it, declined both the Fields Medal (2006) and the Millennium Prize (2010).

- The Navier–Stokes equations describe the motion of viscous fluids, and the related Millennium Prize Problem concerns the existence and smoothness of their solutions in three dimensions.
- The Fields Medal is awarded every four years by the International Mathematical Union at the International Congress of Mathematicians to mathematicians under 40 years of age.
- Lean is an interactive theorem prover, or proof assistant, in which a proof written in a formal language is checked step by step by a computer.
- The IndiaAI Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore, is implemented by the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- 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.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Until it is verified and understood, the Navier–Stokes result is a corporate claim, not a theorem** — The report says OpenAI ‘announced’ a solution; it does not say the proof has been formally verified, refereed or published. The Clay rules demand publication, a two-year wait and general acceptance precisely because famous problems attract flawed proofs. A formalisation in Lean would settle correctness, but the mathematicians quoted say AI proofs skip the hardest steps and drift into invented terminology, so human checking could take years. The counter-view is real: experts who checked the Erdős unit distance solution judged it worthy of a top journal, so these systems are not producing noise. The sound posture is neither dismissal nor celebration but a firm line between ‘announced’, ‘verified’ and ‘accepted’.
- 2. Secrecy about prompts and methods breaks the norm that makes science self-correcting** — Science corrects itself because others can reproduce the method, not merely admire the answer. Harvard’s Nina Zubrilina asks for the prompts and objects to ‘intentional mysticism’; without them nobody can tell how much the model did and how much the company’s own expert mathematicians did. Michael Harris’s reading, that companies chase mathematics to signal progress towards artificial general intelligence and to please investors, explains the incentive: the headline is the product. The counter-view is that companies have spent compute no university could afford and that published answers still invite scrutiny; the Leiden Declaration is the community setting terms for the tools rather than refusing them.
- 3. The Buckmaster episode warns that researchers’ unpublished ideas can become training data** — Tristan Buckmaster and Levent Alpöge worked for a year on a simplified Navier–Stokes problem using both companies’ tools, and OpenAI ‘cannot rule out’ that their de-identified usage data improved its models. A researcher using a commercial model on unpublished work may thus be feeding a system its owner can point at the same problem. De-identification protects the person, not the idea, and a research idea is not ‘personal data’ under India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. Universities and funders therefore need their own rules on AI use for unpublished work and on contractual opt-outs from model training. The counter-view is that usage data improves tools for everyone, but priority and credit are the currency of academic careers and deserve protection.
- 4. Excluding Indian institutes shows that access, not only ownership, is now an instrument of power** — The report groups Indian institutes with Russian and Chinese ones and attributes the July 29 exclusion ‘most likely’ to geopolitical tensions; no formal reason is given. The pattern is familiar: a U.S. AI diffusion rule of January 2025 placed India in a middle tier of countries facing caps on advanced chips, before it was

	rescinded in May 2025. A company's access list is not an export control in law, but it has the same effect on an Indian doctoral student. The Economic Times reports that French President Emmanuel Macron urged countries at the UN General Assembly to pool investment in an open-source frontier model independent of the great powers, one route for a middle power. The counter-view is that paid and open models remain available, so the exclusion is a cost, not a wall; but where, in Dr. Booker's experience, two weeks of AI help beat five years of effort, a cost decides who finishes first. 5. India's edge in theoretical science will erode unless model access is treated as research infrastructure — The report notes that India once enjoyed an edge in the theoretical sciences, an advantage built on talent and modest inputs rather than expensive laboratories. If a model is a 'grad student army', a mathematician's output now depends on access to compute and models as much as on training. The IndiaAI Mission's GPUs are open to academia, but theory departments rarely compete for such resources, and the Anusandhan National Research Foundation, set up under a 2023 Act, could earmark model access for basic research. Training must also shift from pure problem-solving towards exposition, formalisation and judgement, as Dr. Sutherland suggests. The counter-view is his reassurance that mathematics will never be 'solved'; yet the report's note that 2026 Fields medallist Jacob Tsimmerman stopped taking graduate students shows how seriously the field takes the risk.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Artificial intelligence systems have begun to solve problems that mathematicians chased for decades, but the terms on which they do so are set by a handful of corporations." Discuss the opportunities and risks this creates for the practice of science. What should India do to ensure that its researchers are not left behind in access to frontier AI? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with OpenAI's September 8 claim on the Navier-Stokes Millennium Prize Problem, the July 20 counterexample to the 87-year-old Jacobian conjecture and the May 20 Erdős result, and state that these are announced claims awaiting verification. 2. Body — opportunities — Explain the gains: speed (Booker's 30,000 lines of code and about 200 pages of mathematics in a week), machine-checkable formalisation in proof assistants such as Lean, and search across distant fields of the literature. 3. Body — risks to science — Discuss incomprehensible proofs and 'proof indigestion', secrecy about prompts, the Buckmaster data-use dispute, the commercial motives Michael Harris describes and the disruption of careers, and present the June 2026 Leiden Declaration as the community's norm-setting response. 4. Body — India's response — Cite the July 29 exclusion and the absence of an Indian frontier model; set out the IndiaAI Mission's ₹10,371.92 crore and 38,000-plus GPUs, then propose earmarked model access for basic research through the ANRF, institutional AI-use policies, support for indigenous reasoning models and coalitions for open models. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that frontier AI access is now research infrastructure, like a telescope or a supercomputer, and that India must both secure it and train scientists who can verify and explain machine-made results.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are Secretary, MeitY. Senior mathematicians write that Indian institutes have been left out of a foreign company's free frontier-model programme. What do you do? Approach: I would first establish the facts with the company, since the report attributes the exclusion only 'most likely' to geopolitics, and raise it diplomatically if it reflects policy. In parallel I would open a dedicated window on the IndiaAI compute portal for

basic-science departments, with simple applications and credits for available models. I would also ask the IndiaAI Innovation Centre to prioritise mathematical reasoning in the indigenous models it supports. Less dependence is the long-term answer; keeping researchers working is the immediate duty.

Q2. As Vice-Chancellor, you learn that the central proof in a doctoral thesis was produced largely by an AI model. How do you handle it?

Approach: Using AI is not misconduct in itself, but I would require full disclosure of the tools, prompts and extent of machine contribution, in the spirit of the UGC's 2018 regulations on academic integrity. The viva should test whether the candidate understands why the proof works, backed by a formal verification or a clear human-readable exposition. A doctorate rewards the candidate's own contribution, which may lie in framing and explaining the result. I would then have the academic council write a policy so that future cases follow rules.

Q3. An interview board asks: should Indian scientists be barred from using foreign AI models on unpublished or sensitive research?

Approach: A blanket ban would hurt Indian science more than it protects it, because these tools now multiply a researcher's output. The sensible line is risk-based: strategically sensitive work should run on secure, preferably domestic, infrastructure, while open research can use foreign tools with training opt-outs in the contract. The Buckmaster episode shows that even open research carries a priority risk, so researchers must know what the terms of service allow. The goal is informed use, not fearful abstinence.

8. Society

Both stories are about young people in Delhi being failed by the spaces the city hands them: a public park that turned out to be unwatched after dark, and paying-guest rooms and coaching floors that no rulebook quite recognises. In both, the state arrives after the harm, with audits, sealing and statements, and in both the real test is whether the audit becomes a routine rather than a reaction. The Capital's split between the L-G, the elected government and the civic bodies makes that harder, because every fix needs several owners to agree. Safety that depends on a headline is not a policy.

8.1 After Astha Kunj Gang-Rape, L-G Orders Park Safety Audits; DURGA Reserves E-Autos for Women, Transgender Persons

THE NEWS New Delhi. Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Wednesday, September 23, directed the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to conduct safety audits of public parks across the Capital, after a 17-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped on Monday at Astha Kunj Park near Kalkaji Mandir in south-east Delhi by three men who posed as police personnel. All three were arrested on Tuesday and remanded to two-day judicial custody on Wednesday; one was shot in the leg in what police describe as an exchange of fire. The order followed a review with the MCD Commissioner, the Commissioner of Police and the DDA Vice-Chairman. A release from Lok Niwas, the L-G's office, says the audit will examine lighting, guards at all entry and exit points, patrolling inside parks, particularly after sunset, and sanitation, and will consider handing some parks to residents' welfare associations (RWAs) or private entities for upkeep. The DDA will identify "dark spots" — unlit, unwatched stretches — add lighting and CCTV, may restrict late-evening entry in multi-gate parks to selected gates, and will coordinate with the police; The Indian Express adds that the DDA and MCD must report within a week. Police say 379 people were apprehended under Section 65 of the Delhi Police Act in drives across the Central Range. Citing sources, The Indian Express reports that one accused was a former police informer once caught for eve-teasing but released because no complaint was filed. Students of Lady Shri Ram College for Women (LSR), near the site, marched on Wednesday evening; The Hindu describes hundreds of LSR students in a women-only march, The Indian Express around 200 students from several Delhi University colleges. "We want freedom from rape culture, moral policing and patriarchy," one student said. At an online meeting, LSR students had flagged missing PCR vans, a non-functional police Pink Booth and dark roads. The same day, the Delhi Cabinet approved the 'DURGA' scheme: 1,300 pink electric autos in phase one, 1,170 for women and 130 for transgender persons, capped at 90 and 10 per revenue district, for Delhi residents aged 20 to 40 with a voter ID, a driving licence and a public service vehicle (PSV) badge; women with more than three children are ineligible. The syllabus link is GS1 on women and urbanisation, and GS2 on schemes for vulnerable sections.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Delhi's parks are kept by the DDA and the MCD but patrolled by a police force answerable to the Union Home Ministry → dark, thinly guarded stretches and a locally known offender never formally booked → a teenager is gang-raped at Astha Kunj Park by men posing as police → LSR students march and list a non-functional Pink Booth, missing PCR vans and unlit roads → the L-G orders park safety audits with a one-week report, and the Delhi Cabinet clears DURGA e-autos reserved for women and transgender drivers

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The law forbids revealing a rape survivor's identity, and protects a minor twice over** — Section 72 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), which replaces Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, punishes printing or publishing the name, or anything that may make known the identity, of a victim of rape and related offences with up to two years' imprisonment and a fine. Where the victim is under 18, Section 23 of the POCSO Act, 2012 also bars the media from disclosing the child's name, address, photograph, family details, school or neighbourhood. In *Nipun Saxena v. Union of India* (2018), the Supreme Court held that the identity must not be disclosed even in a remote manner. Section 70(2) of the BNS prescribes imprisonment for the remainder of natural life, or death, for the gang rape of a woman under 18.
- 2. The Nirbhaya Fund and the Safe City Projects are the Union's money for women's safety in public space** — The Nirbhaya Fund was announced in the Union Budget 2013-14 with ₹1,000 crore, after the December 16, 2012 gang rape in Delhi; the Justice J.S.

Verma Committee's report that followed shaped the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. The fund is non-lapsable and administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, while the Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal ministry that appraises projects. From it, the Union Home Ministry in 2018 sanctioned Safe City Projects for eight cities — Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai — for lighting, CCTV, women's help desks and command centres. One Stop Centres for survivors also draw on it.

3. Safety audits and CPTED treat violence in public space partly as a design failure —

The women's safety audit was developed in Toronto in 1989 by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC): women walk a space and record lighting, sightlines, isolation and access to help. In Delhi, the women's resource centre Jagori adapted the method, and in 2010 Delhi was among the first cities in UN Women's Safe Cities Global Initiative, with Quito, Cairo, Port Moresby and Kigali. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) rests on natural surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement and maintenance, building on Jane Jacobs's "eyes on the street" (1961). In *Why Loiter?* (2011), Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade argue that women are safer when they may be in public space for any reason, not only a purposeful one. Under the Twelfth Schedule (Article 243W), parks, gardens and playgrounds, and street lighting, are municipal functions.

4. The Transgender Persons Act, 2019 obliges governments to design schemes that include transgender persons —

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 defines a transgender person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth, including trans men, trans women, persons with intersex variations and those with socio-cultural identities such as kinner and hijra. Section 3 prohibits discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, access to public facilities and the right to movement. The District Magistrate issues a certificate of identity, and a National Council for Transgender Persons is chaired by the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment. The Act builds on *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014), in which the Supreme Court recognised the right to self-identify one's gender and directed that transgender persons be treated as socially and educationally backward classes.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. GS1 keeps asking about women and the city, not only women and the law — The GS1 syllabus lists "role of women and women's organization" and "urbanization, their problems and their remedies". In 2019 UPSC asked, "What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space?" — which this story answers directly. Answers that cite design, lighting, transport and the right to be in public space score better than lists of penal sections.

2. GS2 tests institutions and schemes for vulnerable sections, and Delhi's split governance — The GS2 syllabus covers "welfare schemes for vulnerable sections" and "mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies" for their protection. The Nirbhaya Fund's administering ministry, the Transgender Act's identity certificate and the NALSA judgment are the provision-level facts Prelims draws on. Article 239AA, a recurring GS2 topic, explains why the park audit came from Lok Niwas and the e-auto scheme from the Delhi Cabinet.

3. Ethics papers use such cases to test privacy, dignity and restraint — GS4 case studies often place the candidate as an officer under media pressure after a sexual assault; the bar on disclosing identity and the reported encounter test dignity, transparency and restraint in the use of force.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Section 72 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced Section 228A of

the Indian Penal Code, punishes the disclosure of the identity of a victim of rape and related offences with imprisonment of up to two years and a fine.

- Section 23 of the POCSO Act, 2012 prohibits the media from disclosing the identity of a child victim, including name, address, photograph, family details, school and neighbourhood.
- The Nirbhaya Fund, announced in the Union Budget 2013-14, is a non-lapsable fund administered by the Department of Economic Affairs; the Ministry of Women and Child Development is its nodal ministry.
- Safe City Projects under the Nirbhaya Fund were sanctioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs for eight cities: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai.
- Under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, the certificate of identity is issued by the District Magistrate, and the National Council for Transgender Persons is chaired by the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Under Article 239AA(3)(a), public order, police and land (Entries 1, 2 and 18 of the State List) lie outside the law-making power of the Legislative Assembly of Delhi.
- The Twelfth Schedule (Article 243W) lists parks, gardens and playgrounds, and public amenities including street lighting, among the functions that may be devolved to municipalities.

ANALYSIS

1. An audit of lamps and guards will not find the offender everyone already knew about

— The audit checklist is sensible, but the reporting points to a different failure. The Indian Express says one accused had been caught for eve-teasing and let go because no complaint was filed, park guards called him a local strongman, and the DCP (South-East), Vineet Kumar, said police staff “have details of all local ruffians”, including him. The knowledge existed; the system could not act without a formal complaint, which harassed women rarely file. An audit that counts bulbs but creates no channel for informal reports, such as a help desk that logs non-FIR complaints, fixes the visible gap and leaves the real one. The counter-view is fair: policing by reputation can slide into arbitrary harassment, so such a channel must lead to documented warnings, not extra-legal punishment.

2. Men posing as police succeeded because moral policing has taught young people to fear the uniform

— The accused, the papers report, posed as police and used police terminology, and The Indian Express, citing sources, says they threatened a POCSO case. Teenagers stopped by ‘police’ in a park comply rather than call for help because they have learnt that authority in parks harasses young people; the LSR slogan against “moral policing” names this link precisely. The 22nd Law Commission in 2023 advised against lowering the age of consent from 18, which keeps adolescent companionship legally fraught and open to such blackmail. Moralistic patrolling of parks may therefore make impersonation easier, not harder. The counter-view is that visible policing deters predators, which is true, but only when park users trust the uniform to protect rather than question them.

3. Closing gates after dark and handing parks to RWAs treats women’s presence as the problem

— The DDA may restrict late-evening entry in multi-gate parks, and officials have been asked to examine handing some parks to RWAs or private entities. Both reduce risk by reducing use, yet the logic of Jane Jacobs and of Why Loiter? is that busy, open spaces are the safer ones. RWA management often means locked gates and the quiet exclusion of domestic workers, vendors and the poor, privatising a public good the Twelfth Schedule assigns to municipalities. Likewise, 379 people apprehended under Section 65 of the Delhi Police Act measures activity, not safety.

The counter-view is that some parks are unmanageable at night with current staff, and RWAs do improve upkeep; the fair test is whether the audit ends with more lights and footfall, or with more locks.

- 4. Delhi's safety is divided by the Constitution, and coordination is standing in for accountability** — Under Article 239AA, police and land lie with the Union through the L-G, who also chairs the DDA; the MCD answers to its own elected house; transport and women's welfare sit with the elected Delhi government. The same day brought the L-G's audits and the Cabinet's DURGA, parallel tracks with no common owner. A one-week report from two agencies invites a tick-box exercise; the better design is one accountable agency per park, a published audit with a named officer, and repeat audits by women users on the Jagori model. The counter-view is that the L-G's direct control of the police and the DDA produced a response within 48 hours, which a fully devolved city might not manage.
- 5. DURGA is a livelihood scheme dressed as a safety scheme, and its eligibility rules decide whether it is either** — The Chief Minister's Office pitches DURGA as both "dignified self-employment" and women's safety. Its eligibility — age 20 to 40, a driving licence and a PSV badge — selects women already in the transport trade, where few women are, so without a training pipeline the 1,300 autos may lack drivers. The bar on women with more than three children is defensible in law, since the Supreme Court upheld a two-child norm for panchayat candidates in *Javed v. State of Haryana* (2003), but it sits oddly in a livelihood scheme. The 130 autos for transgender persons are a real step towards the inclusion the 2019 Act demands. The counter-view is strong: women drivers make women passengers feel safer at night, and women at the wheel normalise women's presence in public space, a deeper cure than any park audit.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"Responses to violence against women in Indian cities rely heavily on surveillance and policing, while the design and use of public space receive less attention." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent measures in Delhi. What would a gender-sensitive framework for safe public spaces include? (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Open with the Astha Kunj Park gang rape and the L-G's order of September 23 for safety audits of public parks, due within a week, as an example of policy made after a crime.
- 2. Body — the surveillance-and-policing track** — Describe CCTV, lighting of dark spots, beat patrols and area-domination drives in which 379 people were apprehended under Section 65 of the Delhi Police Act, linked to the Nirbhaya Fund and Safe City Projects. Note the limits: a known offender released for want of a complaint, a non-functional Pink Booth, and sweeps that measure activity, not safety.
- 3. Body — the design-and-use track** — Explain women's safety audits (METRAC, Jagori, UN Women Safe Cities), CPTED and the Why Loiter? argument for the right to public space. Contrast gate closures and RWA handovers with measures that raise footfall, such as DURGA's women and transgender drivers, noting its eligibility limits.
- 4. Body — the governance fix** — Point to Delhi's split under Article 239AA and the Twelfth Schedule functions of parks and street lighting. Propose one accountable agency per park, published audits by women users, a channel for non-FIR complaints, campus safety-advisory protocols, and strict protection of identity under Section 72 BNS and Section 23 POCSO.
- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that policing catches offenders after the fact while design and use prevent opportunities, and that a city is safe for women when they can use its spaces at any hour for any reason.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the District Magistrate of South-East Delhi. The audit report is due in a week. What do you do?

Approach: I would not let the audit be a desk exercise by two engineering wings. Each park would be walked after sunset by a team including neighbourhood women, LSR students and park staff, using a simple safety-audit sheet, with dark spots mapped. Quick fixes — lights, trimmed bushes, working gates, a functioning Pink Booth — would be done within the week under named officers. A complaint number at every gate would ensure that harassment which never becomes an FIR is still recorded and followed up.

Q2. As the Deputy Commissioner of Police, a television channel asks you for details of the survivor and her family to 'humanise' the story. How do you respond?

Approach: I would refuse, and say why: Section 72 of the BNS makes disclosure of a rape victim's identity an offence, and because she is a minor, Section 23 of the POCSO Act bars the media from disclosing her name, school, neighbourhood or family. The public legitimately needs to know about arrests, the investigation and safety measures, which I would share through regular briefings, while warning my own staff that leaks are punishable. Transparency about the case and silence about the survivor are not in conflict.

Q3. An interview board asks: should a livelihood scheme like DURGA exclude women with more than three children?

Approach: I would say the condition works against the scheme's purpose. The women most in need of self-employment are often those with larger families and less say over fertility, so the bar punishes the woman without influencing any decision. Courts have upheld such norms for elected office, but a livelihood scheme exists to widen opportunity. If the aim is smaller families, education and health services for women achieve it far better than eligibility bars.

8.2 Vidhi Centre Seeks a 'Mixed-Use Educational Building' Category for Delhi's PGs and Coaching Centres

THE NEWS New Delhi. After the Satya Niketan building collapse, which this magazine carried on September 17, The Hindu on Thursday published a prescription for the regulatory gap behind it from Kartavi Satyarthi, Senior Resident Fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, a legal-policy think tank; what is new today is the fix. She describes a cycle in which investigations, suspensions of officials and arrests of landlords after each disaster "gain momentum for some time and slowly settle down": "It is Satya Niketan now, it was a flooded basement in Rajinder Nagar two years ago." Delhi, she writes, houses millions of students who come to join premier institutes or prepare for competitive government exams, feeding "a sprawling ecosystem of largely unregulated" paying-guest (PG) accommodations and coaching centres. A PG is a room or floor let out, usually with meals, to students or workers; many have grown from an extra room rented out into "full-blown commercial establishments". Coaching centres also run from floors of buildings marked residential. Both turn a residential building partly or wholly commercial, which should attract different safety norms, but enforcement cannot identify such hybrids, and rules for schools and college hostels do not apply to them. Three instruments together create "an odd mismatch between the law on paper and the way it actually functions". The Master Plan of Delhi (MPD), the statutory land-use plan, does not specifically mention PGs. The Unified Building Bye-Laws (UBBL) recognise coaching centres as educational buildings, but their development controls — limits on floor area, height, setbacks and the like — do not apply to them. The Ministry of Education's 2024 coaching-centre guidelines "lack teeth" and cover only broad infrastructure. First, she proposes, the DDA and the MCD should recognise PGs and coaching centres as a separate land-use category of "mixed-use educational buildings", with standards on fire protection, safe exits, minimum floor area per person and maximum capacity, in which owners could register their buildings. Second, since blanket standards with "little recourse for correction" invite rent-seeking, enforcement should help owners comply: a building safety task force or district-level committee of urban local body representatives under State oversight, periodic audits, a compliance resolution plan that grades gaps, with immediate closure where they are alarming, and annual reports to the State government on buildings

shut and rehabilitated. The syllabus link is GS1 on urbanisation, GS2 on local government and GS3 on disaster management.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Lakhs of students migrate to Delhi for universities and competitive-exam coaching → spare rooms become commercial PGs and coaching centres occupy floors of residential buildings → the MPD does not mention PGs and the bye-laws' development controls skip coaching centres, so no safety standard clearly applies → enforcement surges only after deaths, in Rajinder Nagar in 2024 and Satya Niketan in 2026, then fades → the Vidhi Centre proposes a separate 'mixed-use educational building' category with district task forces, audits and compliance plans

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Delhi's land use is planned by the DDA through a statutory Master Plan** — The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) was set up under the Delhi Development Act, 1957 to prepare and enforce the Master Plan of Delhi; the Lieutenant-Governor is its Chairman. The first Master Plan came in 1962, followed by MPD-2001 and MPD-2021, notified in 2007, with MPD-2041 prepared as its successor. The plan zones land by use, and its mixed-use regulations decide which non-residential activities may run from residential plots; these were widened in MPD-2021 after the Supreme Court-monitored sealing of commercial premises in residential areas in 2006, in the M.C. Mehta litigation. Under Article 239AA(3)(a), land in Delhi lies outside the Delhi Legislative Assembly's law-making power.
- 2. Bye-laws turn the plan into building rules, and the National Building Code supplies the safety floor** — Building bye-laws set development controls — floor area ratio, ground coverage, height, setbacks, parking — and the approvals a building needs. Delhi's Unified Building Bye-Laws, 2016 replaced the Building Bye-Laws of 1983 and apply across the city's local bodies. The National Building Code of India, 2016, published by the Bureau of Indian Standards, is a model code whose Part 4 deals with fire and life safety; it binds only when adopted into bye-laws. The Code classifies buildings by occupancy: Group A is residential, covering lodging or rooming houses and dormitories among others, and Group B is educational, each with its own exit and fire requirements. A building that is sanctioned in one group and used as another escapes the rules that fit its real use.
- 3. The 2024 coaching guidelines are advisory because education and building regulation sit with States and cities** — The Ministry of Education issued its Guidelines for Registration and Regulation of Coaching Centres in January 2024. They provide for registration, bar enrolment of students below 16 years, require at least one square metre per student in a class, mandate compliance with fire and building safety codes, and call for counsellors, with penalties of ₹25,000 for a first offence, ₹1 lakh for a second, and cancellation of registration thereafter. Per a PIB release, the guidelines were sent to States and Union Territories to consider "by way of appropriate legal framework", because education is in the Concurrent List — Entry 25 of List III, moved there by the Forty-second Amendment, 1976. PRS tracks a Rajasthan Coaching Centres (Control and Regulation) Bill, 2025, one State's move to legislate, and the Central Consumer Protection Authority separately polices misleading coaching advertisements.
- 4. The Rajinder Nagar deaths of 2024 showed what happens when sanctioned use and actual use diverge** — On July 27, 2024, three civil services aspirants drowned when rainwater flooded the basement of a coaching centre in Old Rajinder Nagar that was being used as a library, although basements were permitted for uses such as parking and storage. The Delhi High Court transferred the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation, and in August 2024 the Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of safety norms in coaching centres, remarking that centres flouting them had become "death chambers". Under the Seventy-fourth Amendment, the Twelfth Schedule (Article 243W) lists urban planning, regulation of land use and construction of

	buildings, and fire services among municipal functions, which places day-to-day responsibility with the city's civic bodies.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS1 asks about the problems of urbanisation, and student hubs are a textbook case — The GS1 syllabus reads “urbanization, their problems and their remedies”, and UPSC asked in 2013 about the social problems that originated from the speedy process of urbanisation in India. Coaching hubs such as Mukherjee Nagar and Rajinder Nagar show informal conversion of housing, overcrowding and safety risk arising from a migration that the city never planned for. 2. GS2 and GS3 treat such deaths as failures of local government and disaster management — GS2 questions on the 74th Amendment ask why urban local bodies remain weak despite constitutional status, and this case shows the cost of split responsibility between the DDA, the MCD and the fire service. For GS3 disaster management, the National Disaster Management Authority's guidelines on urban flooding (2010) and school safety (2016) are the natural references; answers that move from tragedy to institutional design stand out. 3. Interview boards ask aspirants about the coaching economy itself — Candidates who have lived in Delhi's coaching hubs are often asked what they would change there as administrators; a clear view on classification, graded enforcement and student safety is a strong answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Delhi Development Authority was constituted under the Delhi Development Act, 1957; it prepares the Master Plan of Delhi and the Lieutenant-Governor is its Chairman. ● The National Building Code of India is published by the Bureau of Indian Standards; its Part 4 deals with fire and life safety, and it is a model code that becomes binding when adopted by local authorities. ● The Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution, added by the Seventy-fourth Amendment, 1992, lists urban planning, regulation of land use and construction of buildings, and fire services among municipal functions. ● Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the Forty-second Amendment, 1976, and is Entry 25 of List III. ● The Ministry of Education's Guidelines for Registration and Regulation of Coaching Centres, 2024 are advisory to States and Union Territories and bar coaching centres from enrolling students below 16 years of age. ● Under the National Building Code, buildings are classified by occupancy, with Group A covering residential buildings and Group B covering educational buildings. ● Under Article 239AA(3)(a), land (Entry 18 of the State List) is outside the law-making power of the Legislative Assembly of Delhi.
ANALYSIS	1. The core failure is classification: buildings are regulated by what they were sanctioned as, not by what they are — A house converted into a thirty-bed PG or a floor turned into a two-hundred-seat classroom remains, on paper, a residential building, so the fire exits, occupancy limits and structural checks meant for dormitories or educational buildings are never triggered. That is why the author's central proposal is a new category rather than more inspections: inspectors can only enforce rules that attach to a building. A “mixed-use educational building” category gives regulators a trigger and owners a standard to meet. The counter-view is that a new category with costly standards may push small landlords further into informality, renting rooms without registering; the author concedes this risk, which is why she pairs standards

with supported compliance.

- 2. Recognising PGs as a land use will collide with residents, property values and the Master Plan's logic** — Formal recognition of PGs and coaching centres as mixed-use legitimises commercial conversion in residential colonies, which neighbours and RWAs often resist because of crowding, parking and noise. Delhi's history of mixed use — the 2006 sealing drive and the widening of mixed-use rules in MPD-2021 — shows that such changes are politically fraught and slow. Yet refusing recognition has not stopped the market; it has only kept it outside safety rules. The counter-view deserves weight: the better answer may be supply — purpose-built student housing and more university hostels — which removes the pressure to convert family homes at all. A serious reform needs both a category for what exists and a plan for what should replace it.
- 3. Enforcement by crisis is itself a policy, and a bad one** — The pattern the author describes — suspensions, arrests of landlords, sealing drives, then quiet — punishes after the fact and teaches everyone that the risk of enforcement is episodic. Post-disaster sealing also displaces students in mid-preparation and pushes rents up in surviving buildings, shifting the cost to those the drive is meant to protect. Periodic audits with published annual reports on buildings shut and rehabilitated convert enforcement from a reaction into a routine that can be measured. The counter-view is that Delhi already has many overlapping agencies, and one more task force without statutory powers or budget will repeat the failure; the proposal works only if the committee has legal backing and a single accountable chair.
- 4. The compliance-resolution plan is the most important idea and the least glamorous** — The suggestion that enforcement should support owners — identify gaps, judge whether they can be fixed, close only where danger is alarming — follows the logic of responsive regulation described by Ian Ayres and John Braithwaite (1992), in which regulators begin with persuasion and escalate to sanctions only when needed. Blanket rules with no path to correction invite bribes, which the author calls rent-seeking, whereas graded enforcement lifts the bulk of buildings to standard instead of sealing a few for the cameras. Its risk is indefinite forbearance, where every gap becomes "capable of being addressed"; the plan must have deadlines, public disclosure and non-negotiable red lines such as blocked exits and occupied basements.
- 5. Students are consumers without information, and disclosure can do what inspection cannot** — A student arriving from a small town chooses a PG or coaching centre on price, distance and word of mouth, with no way to know whether the building has two exits or a certified capacity. Registering buildings in a separate category would allow a public register showing each building's audit status, which students and parents could check before paying. The state already polices misleading coaching advertisements through the Central Consumer Protection Authority; safety disclosure is the missing half of consumer protection. The counter-view is that price-sensitive students will still choose cheap and unsafe rooms, so disclosure complements minimum standards rather than replacing them.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"Recurring deaths in Delhi's coaching hubs reflect a failure of classification and enforcement more than an absence of rules." Discuss with reference to the regulation of paying-guest accommodation and coaching centres in Indian cities, and suggest an enforcement framework that avoids both negligence and rent-seeking. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Begin with the cycle the Vidhi Centre describes — Rajinder Nagar's flooded basement in 2024, the Satya Niketan collapse in 2026 — and the millions of students whose housing and classrooms sit in converted residential buildings.
- 2. Body — the classification gap** — Explain how the MPD does not mention PGs, how the

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

UBBL recognises coaching centres as educational buildings but its development controls do not apply to them, and how the 2024 Ministry of Education guidelines are advisory. Add the National Building Code's occupancy groups to show why a building sanctioned as residential escapes educational and dormitory norms.

3. **Body — the enforcement gap** — Describe enforcement by crisis: suspensions and sealing after deaths, displacement of students, then fading attention. Note the split between the DDA, the MCD and the fire service, and the Twelfth Schedule functions that place responsibility with civic bodies.
4. **Body — a framework** — Propose a 'mixed-use educational building' category with standards on fire, exits, floor area per person and capacity; a district task force with statutory backing; periodic audits; graded compliance plans with deadlines and red lines; annual public reports; a public register for students; and supply-side student housing.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that safety must be designed into the category a building belongs to, and enforced as a routine with published results, so that the next report counts buildings made safe rather than lives lost.

Q1. You are the MCD Deputy Commissioner of a zone that includes a large coaching hub. No new category exists yet. What do you do this month?

Approach: I would begin with a rapid survey of buildings used as PGs and coaching centres, prioritising basements, buildings with a single staircase and those with high occupancy. With the Delhi Fire Service, I would close immediately only those with life-threatening conditions such as occupied basements or blocked exits, and give the rest a written compliance list with deadlines. I would publish the list of inspected buildings and their status so students can check before paying. Monthly progress reports would go to the Commissioner, so the drive does not fade after the first week.

Q2. A sealing drive after a tragedy will leave two thousand students without rooms weeks before an examination. How do you balance safety with their hardship?

Approach: Life safety comes first, so buildings with grave hazards must be vacated. But I would stagger the action, giving students notice, coordinating with universities and nearby hostels for temporary accommodation, and ensuring landlords refund deposits. Buildings with fixable gaps would get short deadlines rather than immediate sealing. The aim is to remove danger without turning students into the victims of the enforcement meant to protect them.

Q3. An interview board asks: is the coaching industry itself the problem?

Approach: The coaching industry exists because the gap between school and university teaching and the demands of competitive examinations is large, so it meets a real demand. The problem is that it grew faster than the city's rules and the state's capacity to enforce them, in buildings designed for families. Regulation should address safety, fair advertising, fees and student well-being rather than try to abolish coaching. In the long run, better public teaching and more predictable examinations would reduce the dependence that feeds this market.

9. Internal Security

India's defence buying runs on two tracks, and both moved on the same day. For the hardest platforms, such as submarines, India still needs a foreign designer and is now choosing to bind that partner through a government-to-government agreement; for weapons its own laboratories have designed, it buys from Indian producers under the top indigenous category. The first track will only be a success if it eventually makes itself unnecessary.

9.1 Germany Is Ready to Sign the \$8-Billion Six-Submarine Deal; MoD Buys 160 SAT-SAAW Glide Bombs

THE NEWS New Delhi. Germany is ready to sign a “forward leaning” deal with India for six submarines worth \$8 billion, its new ambassador to India, Jasper Wieck, told journalists on Wednesday, September 23, The Hindu reports. “From the German side, we should sign tomorrow,” Mr. Wieck said, describing the deal as being in its final stages. “The government has agreed to all the documents that have been worked on, in particular, the G2G agreement, the inter-governmental agreement which is very ambitious and is very forward-leaning with regard to Indian requests.” A G2G, or government-to-government, agreement is a deal signed between two states, in which the seller's government stands behind the supply, as distinct from a purely commercial contract between companies. Germany's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) and India's Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders are in talks to build the six submarines for India, and the envoy said Germany has eased barriers that had posed a challenge in defence cooperation with India. He said the deal would give a “big boost” to the India-Germany partnership, and that both countries have raised investment in their military capabilities because of what he called an “unfriendly geostrategic environment”. Mr. Wieck described Russia as the “aggressor” in Ukraine, but said India can help end the crisis because it has positive relations with both Kyiv and Moscow. The report quotes no Indian official and gives no Indian signing date. On the same day, the Ministry of Defence signed a ₹810.79-crore contract with Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) to procure 160 Satellite Smart Anti-Airfield Weapons (SAT-SAAW) and associated equipment for the Indian Air Force. The SAT-SAAW is an air-to-ground precision-guided glide bomb designed to neutralise enemy airfields from stand-off range, that is, from a distance beyond the reach of the enemy's air defences; a glide bomb has no engine and flies to its target on its own momentum and control surfaces after release. According to the Ministry, the contract was signed in New Delhi in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh under the Buy (Indian-Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) category, and the weapon is expected to enhance stand-off precision strike capability. The syllabus link is GS3 on security and the indigenisation of technology, and GS2 on India's bilateral partnerships.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

A 30-year plan approved in 1999 seeks 24 conventional submarines by 2030 → Project-75 delivers six Kalvari-class boats between 2017 and 2025, without air-independent propulsion, as older Russian and German boats age → Project-75 (India), the first Strategic Partnership programme, gets its Request for Proposal in July 2021 with Mazagon Dock and TKMS among the contenders → Germany eases export barriers, agrees a G2G framework and says on September 23 it is ready to sign the \$8-billion deal → the decision rests with New Delhi, which the same day buys 160 DRDO-designed SAT-SAAW under Buy (Indian-IDDMM)

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Project-75 (India) was the first acquisition launched under the Strategic Partnership model** — The Strategic Partnership model, introduced in 2017 under the Defence Procurement Procedure 2016 and retained in DAP 2020, lets the Ministry of Defence choose an Indian ‘strategic partner’ to build a major platform in India with a foreign original equipment manufacturer (OEM) that transfers technology, in four segments: fighter aircraft, helicopters, submarines, and armoured vehicles or main battle tanks. Per a PIB release of July 20, 2021, the MoD issued the Request for Proposal for six conventional submarines with fuel-cell-based air-independent propulsion, named Project 75 (India), at an estimated cost of over ₹40,000 crore, and called it the first programme under the model. The shortlisted partners were Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders and Larsen & Toubro; the foreign OEMs were Naval Group (France), TKMS (Germany), JSC ROE (Russia), Daewoo (South Korea) and Navantia (Spain).
- 2. India's submarine shortfall comes from a 1999 plan that has slipped by more than a decade** — A 30-year plan approved in 1999 envisaged 24 conventional submarines by

2030, through two lines of six boats built with foreign collaboration, to be followed by indigenous designs. The first line, Project-75, produced six Kalvari-class boats of the French Scorpène design at Mazagon Dock in Mumbai with Naval Group under a 2005 contract, from INS Kalvari in December 2017 to INS Vagsheer in January 2025. The rest of the conventional fleet is Russian-origin Sindhughosh (Kilo) class and German-origin Shishumar (HDW Type 209) class boats of the 1980s and 1990s; two Shishumar boats were built at Mazagon Dock, India's first submarine construction. HDW is now part of TKMS, so the new deal renews an old industrial tie.

3. Air-independent propulsion is what separates a modern conventional submarine from an older one — A diesel-electric submarine must rise to snorkel depth every few days to run its diesel engines and recharge its batteries, which is when it is most easily detected. Air-independent propulsion (AIP) generates power without atmospheric oxygen, through fuel cells, closed-cycle engines or Stirling engines, letting a boat stay submerged for two weeks or more at far lower cost than nuclear propulsion. The Kalvari class has no AIP; DRDO's Naval Materials Research Laboratory has developed a fuel-cell-based system, and per a PIB release of December 30, 2024 the MoD signed a ₹1,990-crore contract with Mazagon Dock to build an AIP 'plug', an extra hull section, and integrate it onboard Indian submarines. P-75(I) boats are to carry AIP from the start.

4. DAP 2020 ranks procurement categories, and Buy (Indian-IDDm) sits at the top — The Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, in force from October 1, 2020, ranks capital acquisition categories in order of preference: Buy (Indian-IDDm), Buy (Indian), Buy and Make (Indian), Buy and Make, Buy (Global – Manufacture in India) and Buy (Global). Buy (Indian-IDDm) covers products indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by an Indian vendor with at least 50% indigenous content by cost. The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by the Defence Minister, grants the Acceptance of Necessity that starts every capital purchase, and inter-governmental agreements are a permitted route, used for 36 Rafale jets from France in 2016. The Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW) was designed by DRDO's Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad, as a 125-kg class weapon to hit runways, radars and bunkers up to 100 km away, and has been flight-tested from the IAF's Jaguar and HAL's Hawk-i.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 pairs security with the indigenisation of technology, and this story shows both tracks** — The GS3 syllabus lists the indigenisation of technology alongside security challenges and their management. Defence procurement reform — DAP 2020, the Strategic Partnership model, the positive indigenisation lists first notified in August 2020 — is a staple of answers on self-reliance, and today's two stories contrast co-production with a foreign partner against a straight indigenous purchase.
- 2. GS2 reads defence deals as markers of strategic partnership** — A submarine deal backed by a government-to-government agreement would be the largest marker yet of India-Germany ties moving into defence. The envoy's remarks on Russia and Ukraine show a European partner accommodating India's ties with Moscow while offering itself as an alternative supplier, useful for answers on diversifying defence imports.
- 3. Prelims tests definitions and institutions, not deal values** — The likely hooks are what AIP does, which DAP 2020 category ranks highest and what indigenous content it needs, which DRDO laboratory designed a weapon, and which shipyard built which submarine class. The \$8 billion and ₹810.79 crore figures are Mains illustrations, not Prelims facts.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Under the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, 'Buy (Indian-IDDm)' is the highest-priority capital acquisition category and requires a minimum of 50% indigenous content.

- The Strategic Partnership model enables the Ministry of Defence to select Indian companies to build major platforms — fighter aircraft, helicopters, submarines and armoured vehicles — in India in collaboration with foreign original equipment manufacturers.
- Project-75 (India), for six conventional submarines fitted with air-independent propulsion, was the first acquisition programme under the Strategic Partnership model.
- Air-independent propulsion allows a conventional submarine to remain submerged far longer by generating power without atmospheric oxygen, reducing the need to snorkel to recharge its batteries.
- The Kalvari-class submarines of Project-75 are of the French Scorpène design and were built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, Mumbai.
- The Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW) is a precision-guided glide weapon designed by DRDO's Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad, to strike airfield assets from stand-off range.
- The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by the Defence Minister, accords Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisitions of the armed forces.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The G2G wrapper matters more than the price, because it moves supply risk from a company to a state** — P-75(I) was designed as a commercial procurement in which an Indian shipyard teams up with a foreign firm; the envoy's stress on a 'G2G agreement' means the German state now underwrites it. Germany licenses arms exports tightly and has historically been cautious about sales beyond its allies, so a programme needing German parts and upgrades for three decades is exposed to a future licence refusal; a government-level commitment reduces that risk, and 'eased barriers' reads as clearance given in advance. The cost is leverage: G2G narrows competition and price discovery, and the 2016 Rafale agreement drew political and legal challenge, though the Supreme Court declined to order a probe in December 2018. G2G suits long-lifecycle platforms, provided pricing and technology-transfer terms are scrutinised as a tender would be.
- 2. Signing will not close the submarine gap this decade; it only stops it widening in the next** — On Project-75's record, contract to first commissioning took about 12 years, from 2005 to December 2017. Even a faster P-75(I) will deliver in the 2030s, as the Kilo and Type 209 boats of the 1980s and 1990s near retirement, so the 1999 target of 24 boats by 2030 will be missed. The Navy will need bridges: life extensions, the DRDO AIP retrofit on Kalvari-class boats and quicker decisions on follow-on orders. The counter-view is that capability beats count, since an AIP boat that stays down for weeks does work that once needed several older ones. That is partly true, but submarines spend long spells in refit, and a thin fleet cannot keep enough of them at sea.
- 3. The envoy's Russia remarks show Europe courting India on India's own terms** — Mr. Wieck called Russia the 'aggressor' yet credited India's ties with both Kyiv and Moscow, a formulation that accepts India's strategic autonomy rather than demanding alignment. Berlin's interest is plain: every major European platform reduces India's dependence on Russian equipment, such as the Kilo-class boats. For India, it also lowers exposure to U.S. sanctions under CAATSA, the 2017 law targeting significant transactions with Russia's defence sector. The counter-view is that India does not want to swap one dependence for another, and European suppliers attach conditions too; the deal's value lies in how much design and production capability stays in India.
- 4. SAT-SAAW shows Buy (Indian-IDD) works best when an Indian laboratory owns the design** — The SAAW line runs from a DRDO design through a defence public sector producer to an Air Force user, with no foreign licensor holding the design, which is why it qualifies for the top indigenous category. Stand-off airfield attack is no niche: the

	official briefings on Operation Sindoor in May 2025 described precision strikes on several Pakistani air bases. The Hindu gives no break-up of the ₹810.79 crore between weapons and associated equipment, so no unit cost can be derived. The counter-view is depth: 160 is a modest stock for a high-intensity conflict, and IDDM needs only 50% indigenous content, so seekers and electronics may still be imported. If, as its name suggests, the weapon relies on satellite navigation, jamming resistance and India's own NavIC system matter as much as the airframe. 5. P-75(I) will be judged by whether India can design the next submarine itself — Project-75 built six boats in India, yet India still needs a foreign design for the next line, which shows that building to someone else's drawings does not by itself create design capability. The 1999 plan was meant to end in indigenous design, and the Strategic Partnership model was meant to go beyond assembly. The test is whether hull design, combat-system integration and AIP know-how are written into the contract with measurable milestones. The counter-view is realism: no OEM hands over its core design capability, so deep local supply chains and independence in maintenance are the achievable goals. Even so, the German partnership should be a bridge to an Indian design, not a new permanent dependence.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's conventional submarine programme shows both the promise and the limits of acquiring military capability through foreign collaboration." Examine this statement in the light of Project-75 and Project-75 (India). How can the Strategic Partnership model and inter-governmental agreements be used to close the submarine capability gap while building indigenous design capacity? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the German ambassador's statement of September 23 that Berlin is ready to sign the \$8-billion deal for six submarines to be built by TKMS and Mazagon Dock, and set it against the 1999 plan for 24 conventional submarines by 2030. 2. Body — the record so far — Trace Project-75's six Kalvari-class Scorpène boats (2005 contract, commissioned December 2017 to January 2025, without AIP), then P-75(I): the July 2021 RFP, the first programme under the Strategic Partnership model, and years of delay while the Kilo and Type 209 boats aged. 3. Body — what the new deal adds and its limits — Explain AIP, and how a G2G agreement reduces export-licence and lifecycle risk while deepening India-Germany ties and diversification from Russian equipment. State the limits: weaker price leverage, boats arriving only in the 2030s, and a new dependence if design know-how is not transferred. 4. Body — the indigenous track — Use DAP 2020's Buy (Indian-IDDM) category, the December 2024 DRDO AIP plug contract and the ₹810.79-crore SAT-SAAW order from BDL to show that owning a design shortens the path to the user. Propose milestone-linked technology transfer, rising indigenous content across the six boats and a funded indigenous design programme. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that foreign collaboration should buy time and skills, not permanence, and that P-75(I) will be judged by whether the submarine after it is designed in India.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Joint Secretary handling the submarine contract in the Ministry of Defence. What would you insist on before signing? Approach: I would insist on payments linked to construction milestones, firm delivery dates backed by liquidated damages, and a named list of technologies to be transferred, with a way to verify the transfer. Indigenous content should rise from the

first boat to the sixth, and spares and upgrades should be assured under the G2G agreement so that export licences cannot be withheld later. Independent cost benchmarking would answer the charge that the G2G route skipped price discovery.

Q2. As the head of Bharat Dynamics, how would you ensure the 160 SAT-SAAW are delivered on time and to specification?

Approach: I would agree a joint production plan with the IAF and DRDO, reviewed monthly, so that design queries are settled quickly. I would map every imported component and develop Indian MSME suppliers wherever possible, since supply disruption is the usual cause of delay. Quality assurance would begin with the first lot, not at final acceptance. Timely delivery of an indigenous weapon is also a signal to the services that the IDDM route can be trusted.

Q3. An interview board asks: after four decades of submarine collaboration, India still depends on foreign designs. Has 'Make in India' in defence failed?

Approach: It has not failed, but it has been slow in the most complex platforms. Where Indian laboratories own the design, as with SAAW, the path from design to order now works, and Mazagon Dock has built a full class of modern submarines. The missing piece is design capability, which comes only from sustained, funded design programmes and contracts that demand design-level transfer. I would argue for patience with hard milestones, rather than celebration or despair.

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 — Conscience Recorded on File

SCENARIO The Election Commission of India has three members. Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 says its business shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously, and where the members differ, by the opinion of the majority. This week The Indian Express reported that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi objected on record at least 14 times between October 2025 and August 2026 to decisions they said were taken without their knowledge. On May 16, Mr Joshi recorded that Form 6 “cannot be altered without making amendments in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960”; Mr Sandhu agreed. In July the new declaration appeared on the online form anyway, and Mr Sandhu learnt of it from a newspaper. On August 13 he called the change “unauthorised/illegal” and directed that it be removed; it was still on the form this week. On July 29 both wrote separately to Cabinet Secretary T.V. Somanathan about a work-allocation order issued without the Commission’s approval. The Commission’s press note, signed by a Deputy Director, says “differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation” and that all decisions were unanimous. Former Chief Election Commissioner O.P. Rawat says the two should not have waited ten months: “you can immediately go public.” Former CEC S.Y. Quraishi writes that “conscience recorded on file is conscience nevertheless.” The Economic Times reports that the annual confidential reports of nearly 50 transferred officers are stuck because the three members could not sign them together. Now imagine you are a member of such a Commission in August, before any of this is public. Your notes go unanswered, voters fill in a form you believe is illegal every day, an officer whose report is pending asks for help, and a newspaper has sent questions. What do you owe the Commission, and what do you owe the voter?

- Q1.** Identify the stakeholders and the values in conflict. Was keeping the dissent on file for ten months an act of institutional loyalty, prudence or complicity?
- Q2.** As a member of the Commission in August, set out what you would do, and in what order, about the disputed Form 6, the stalled confidential reports and the newspaper’s questions.
- Q3.** When does a public official’s duty move from recording dissent to disclosing it? Suggest institutional safeguards that would make such a choice unnecessary.

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. What is at stake is the voter’s trust, not a quarrel among three people —** The stakeholders are the millions of voters who fill in Form 6, including first-time voters and people trying to get back on the roll; the officers who run the rolls, including the nearly 50 whose confidential reports are stuck; the three members; political parties; and the courts, which have relied on the Commission’s word. The values in conflict are collegiality and confidential deliberation on one side, and legality, transparency and the citizen’s right to know on the other. A third value cuts across both. As Justice Dipankar Datta said this week in the case on appointing Election Commissioners, it is not enough for the Commission to be independent; it must also appear to be independent. Everything the members do must be judged by what it does to that appearance.
- 2. Recording dissent on file was the right first step —** In Indian administration, the file is how accountability works: a note records who said what, when and why, and a court, Parliament or an auditor can examine it later. By writing notes, asking for the file, and jointly setting aside the July 28 work-allocation order on July 30, the two Commissioners used the internal channels first. Integrity requires that before anything else. Going public at the first disagreement would make every multi-member body unworkable, because members would stop speaking frankly to each other. Albert Hirschman’s idea of exit, voice and loyalty fits here: raising one’s voice inside the institution is the loyal choice, and it should be tried before resigning or going public. Quraishi is right that this was conscience, not acquiescence.
- 3. But a note that is ignored cannot be the last step —** Going further is justified when the wrong is serious, continuing and hard to undo, and when internal remedies have been exhausted. By August 13, one Commissioner had directed that the Form 6 change be removed, with the other already on record against it, and it stayed on the form. When a view held by two of the three members is simply ignored, the internal channel has failed. In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), which Quraishi cites, the Supreme Court warned that “it would be wrong to project the individual and eclipse the Election Commission”. O.P. Rawat’s criticism therefore has force: the Commission’s independence exists so that members can

speak. The counter-view is that a public split in the middle of a nationwide revision could itself damage confidence in elections. That risk is real, but it grows, not shrinks, the longer an unlawful act continues.

4. **Weigh each option by its consequences** — Continuing to write notes is safe for the member, but voters bear the cost. Resigning in protest keeps one's own integrity intact, but it leaves the Commission to the Chief Election Commissioner alone and throws away the majority that Section 18 provides. Writing to the Cabinet Secretary, as the two did in July, is understandable, but it asks the executive to referee a constitutional body whose whole value lies in its independence from the executive. Leaking the file would inform citizens, but it would destroy the trust that frank deliberation depends on and invite charges of partisanship. The Constitution itself explains why members are cautious: under Article 324(5), the Chief Election Commissioner has the same protection against removal as a Supreme Court judge, while an Election Commissioner can be removed on the CEC's recommendation. That makes courage costly. It does not make silence right.
5. **Recommended course: act as a majority first, then put it on the record** — The member should first ask for a full meeting of the Commission and put forward a written motion to bring Form 6 back in line with the Rules and to adopt rules of business under Section 18(1). If the Chief Election Commissioner refuses to call the meeting or to act, the two members should record a joint majority decision and send it to the officers who must carry it out. If that is ignored as well, they should issue a signed public statement saying that specific decisions do not have the Commission's approval, giving the facts and no more than is necessary. Routine matters, such as the confidential reports of transferred officers, should be cleared at once and kept separate from the dispute, because it is unfair to hold subordinates' careers hostage to a quarrel among their superiors. The newspaper should get an honest answer or an honest refusal to answer, never a false denial.
6. **Institutional fixes that make dissent visible without paralysing the body** — The Commission should publish its rules of business and state, for every major decision, whether it was unanimous or taken by majority, as Quraishi and former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa have urged. Dissent notes could be released once a decision has been implemented. The model is the proviso to Section 8(1)(i) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, under which Cabinet decisions, and the material behind them, are made public once the matter is complete. The electoral-roll software should be audited independently, so that statutory officers keep the powers the law gives them. Giving Election Commissioners the same protection against removal as the Chief Election Commissioner would let members speak inside the institution without fearing for their jobs. The Nolan principles of openness and accountability are best served by rules like these, not by relying on individual heroism.

Case 2 — The Signature Under the Detention Order

SCENARIO From April 10 to 18, industrial and contract workers in Noida protested for higher wages and parity with Haryana; the protest turned violent on April 13. About a month later, Uttar Pradesh police invoked the National Security Act against Delhi University student Akriti Chaudhary, alleging that she had instigated stone-pelting and arson. The detention order was signed by Gautam Buddha Nagar District Magistrate Medha Roopam. On September 2, after nearly five months of detention in Karna Jail, the Allahabad High Court allowed Ms Chaudhary's habeas corpus petition. It criticised the District Magistrate's lack of application of mind to the police report and called the State's version a "concocted story". It said her conduct was "worthy of derision" and a violation of her oath of allegiance to the Constitution. It warned that an errant bureaucracy could reduce the State to an "Orwellian Dystopia", and ordered ₹5 lakh in compensation to be paid from her salary. On September 23 the Supreme Court stayed those paragraphs pending a hearing on October 7. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that the strictures were passed without notice to the District Magistrate and that "there are several administrative, hierarchical layers" before a District Magistrate forms an opinion. Senior Advocate Mukul Rohatgi said the order was meant to maintain public order, not law and order. For the student, Colin Gonsalves said she was already in police custody before the violence began, and that the State never produced the speech it relied on: "Not one microgram of evidence." You are the District Magistrate of another industrial district in the State. Contract workers have announced a march for wage parity next week. This morning the Superintendent of Police sends you a proposal to detain a young woman organiser under the NSA, citing an intelligence note that she is likely to incite violence. There is no recording of any speech. The SP says the State will confirm the order anyway.

- Q1. What ethical and legal issues do the Noida detention and the court orders that followed raise? Whose rights and interests are at stake?
- Q2. As the District Magistrate, what will you do with the detention proposal, and how will you keep the peace during the march?
- Q3. Should officers pay compensation out of their own salaries for unlawful detentions? Weigh the case for personal accountability against the risk that officers become too timid to act.

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Liberty is the rule and preventive detention the exception** — Article 22 allows preventive detention but surrounds it with safeguards. A detenu must be told the grounds as soon as possible and given the earliest opportunity to make a representation, and detention beyond three months needs the opinion of an Advisory Board. The National Security Act, 1980 allows a person to be detained for up to twelve months to prevent them from acting against the security of the State, public order or essential supplies and services, and a State may empower a District Magistrate to make the order. Because there is no trial first, the District Magistrate's "subjective satisfaction" has to rest on relevant, specific and recent material. The stakeholders are the detenu and her family, the workers whose protest she joined, the public whose safety is at stake, the police, and the credibility of the district administration.
2. **Public order is not the same as law and order** — In *Ram Manohar Lohia v. State of Bihar* (1966), the Supreme Court described three concentric circles: law and order is the largest, public order a smaller circle inside it, and the security of the State the smallest. Violence at a labour protest is usually a law-and-order problem, to be dealt with by arrest and prosecution under the ordinary criminal law. Preventive detention is justified only when the disturbance affects the even tempo of life of the community as a whole. By arguing that the order was meant "to maintain public order, not law and order", Mr Rohatgi accepts that this distinction decides the case. A District Magistrate who cannot explain in writing why the ordinary law is not enough has not reached the satisfaction the NSA requires.
3. **A layered process does not dilute a personal signature** — The Solicitor General is right that a detention passes through several layers: the police proposal, the District Magistrate's order, the State's approval within twelve days, and the Advisory Board. But the law places the satisfaction in the officer who signs, and each layer relies on the one below it. If every officer treats the next one as the real check, nobody checks at all. Duty ethics is clear on this: a person's liberty cannot be used as a means to administrative convenience. The consequentialist worry, that refusing to detain a genuine instigator could cost lives, is serious, but it is an argument for demanding better evidence, not for signing without it. Integrity means taking responsibility for every decision that carries one's name.
4. **Fairness is owed to the officer too** — According to the Solicitor General, the High Court passed its strictures and ordered the recovery from salary without giving the District Magistrate notice. In *State of U.P. v. Mohammad Naim* (1964), the Supreme Court held that a court should not make disparaging remarks about a person unless that person is before it or has had a chance to explain, the remarks are supported by evidence on record, and they are necessary to decide the case. Natural justice, the principle of hearing the other side, protects officers as much as citizens. Courts have long made the State pay compensation for violations of Article 21, as in *Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa* (1993), and have allowed the State to recover the money from officials found at fault. The fair sequence is for the State to compensate the victim at once, then hold an inquiry in which the officer is heard, and recover the money only if bad faith or gross negligence is established.
5. **What the District Magistrate should do this morning** — She should send the proposal back with a written request for the actual material: any recording or transcript of a speech, witness statements, the specific acts attributed to the organiser, and the reasons why the ordinary law is not enough. She should meet the Superintendent of Police and consider less drastic measures: talks with the organisers, a notified route and timing for the march, video recording, enough police on the ground and, if needed, the preventive powers of the *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita*, such as an order under Section 163, which replaced the old Section 144. If the material still does not show a threat to public order, she should decline in writing. If it does, she should draft the grounds herself, have them served within the time Section 8 of the NSA allows (five days, or ten in exceptional cases) in a language the detenu understands, and tell her of her right to make a representation. Meanwhile, the labour department should start conciliation on the wage-parity demand, because that grievance is what is driving the protest.
6. **Institutional fixes: make the file speak for itself** — Every district should use a detention checklist, vetted by a legal officer, that records the specific material relied on and explains why the ordinary law is not enough. States should track how many NSA orders are revoked by Advisory Boards or quashed by courts, and treat a high rate as a warning about a district's practice, not as bad luck. Courts, for their part, should issue notice before passing strictures on named officers. A rule that salary is recovered only after a finding of bad faith or gross negligence would deter careless detentions without scaring honest officers into doing nothing. Gandhi's talisman asks whom a decision helps. Here the weakest person in the story is a young student who spent nearly five months in jail on evidence that a court could not find.

Case 3 — ₹862 a Day and a City Waiting for Buses

SCENARIO Contract drivers on Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses have been on strike since September 15, demanding better pay, paid leave and social security. They are employed by seven private companies that operate Delhi's cluster buses, and earn ₹862 a day with no paid leave or social security. The people hit hardest are daily wage earners, domestic workers and students. Delhi Metro ran eight to ten extra trains and 20 to 50 extra trips a day from September 16 to 22. Police have detained hundreds of drivers after registering FIRs over alleged vandalism and mischief; the drivers say the charges are false. On Wednesday, 37 drivers at the DTC's Wazirabad depot were served show-cause notices for allegedly obstructing bus services between September 16 and 22. They were given 24 hours to reply in writing, failing which the depot could decide their cases without hearing them, and eight drivers have been blacklisted. Some drivers have gone back to work for fear of losing their jobs; others have reportedly fled to their home towns, fearing a crackdown. The DTC has made attendance compulsory, and at the Kalkaji depot staff have been told to report between September 24 and 30. "We won't back down," says Lalit Chaudhary, president of the DTC Karamchari Ekta Union, which has called a full strike of all contract employees on September 28. Also on Wednesday, a Delhi High Court Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia asked the Delhi government why it had not invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act, and told it to make sure buses keep running. You manage the Kalkaji depot. Fewer than half your drivers have reported for duty. One who has driven your routes for years tells you he cannot afford to lose his job, but cannot face his colleagues either. At the gate, a domestic worker tells you she has lost two days' wages walking to work.

- Q1.** Identify the stakeholders and the ethical values in conflict. Is a strike by low-paid contract drivers in an essential public service justified?
- Q2.** As depot manager, how will you handle the compulsory-attendance order, the drivers who stay away and the stranded commuters over the coming week?
- Q3.** Should the government invoke the Essential Services Maintenance Act? Suggest institutional arrangements that would prevent such disputes in outsourced public services.

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. The working poor are on both sides of the depot gate —** The drivers earn ₹862 a day with no paid leave or social security. The commuters who suffer most are daily wage earners, domestic workers and students, people who cannot switch to a taxi. The other stakeholders are the seven private operators who employ the drivers, the DTC, the Delhi government, the police and the High Court. Several values are in conflict: the dignity of labour and fair wages against the public's claim to an essential service, the right to protest against the rule of law, and sympathy for the strikers against fairness to those who went back to work. Gandhi's talisman, which asks us to recall the poorest person and ask whether a step will help them, does not settle this, because the poorest people are on both sides. That is exactly why the manager must look for a course that serves both, not one that picks a side.
- 2. The right to strike is real but limited, and violence falls outside it —** The Supreme Court has held that there is no fundamental right to strike. In *All India Bank Employees' Association v. National Industrial Tribunal* (1962), it held that the right to form unions under Article 19(1)(c) does not carry a guaranteed right to strike. In *T.K. Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu* (2003), it held that government employees have no right to strike. A strike is still a recognised form of industrial action, regulated by labour law, and governments can prohibit strikes in notified essential services. Ethically, peacefully staying away from work to press a genuine grievance is very different from blocking buses or damaging property. The show-cause notices at Wazirabad are about alleged obstruction, so they must be tested against evidence for each driver rather than assumed to apply to all.
- 3. At the depot, fair process is the manager's strongest tool —** A 24-hour deadline, the threat of a decision without a hearing, and blacklisting before any inquiry look like punishment first and hearing later, which offends both natural justice and proportionality. The manager should give drivers a reasonable time to reply, and use logbooks and CCTV footage to separate those who blocked buses from those who simply stayed away. He should state in writing that no one will be dismissed by word of mouth. Drivers who return must be protected from intimidation, and those who strike peacefully must not be punished later through their rosters or routes. The manager should also meet the union's representatives, write down their demands and send them to DTC headquarters and the operators with his own assessment. Being honest about what the depot can and cannot decide builds the trust that ends strikes.
- 4. Keep the city moving without breaking the law or the workers —** Commuters need help now. The manager can give priority to routes that serve hospitals, industrial areas and schools, coordinate with Delhi Metro, which has already added trains and trips, and publish accurate information about which buses are running. He must not put untrained or unlicensed

drivers on the road just to show numbers, because that swaps a labour dispute for a safety risk. Regular staff can be moved to the most important routes. None of this is breaking the strike by the back door: it limits the harm to people who have no say over the drivers' wages. Utilitarian reasoning supports these steps, and duty ethics sets their limits. The public must be served, but not at the price of drivers' safety or rights.

5. **ESMA should be the last resort, and the principal employer cannot hide behind contractors** — Invoking an essential services law would restore buses fastest, but it would criminalise low-paid workers whose grievance is genuine, deepen mistrust and probably just move the dispute elsewhere. Not invoking it and simply waiting leaves the city's poorest people to pay the price. A better course is a negotiation with a deadline and a credible offer on pay, leave and social security. The Act should be kept in reserve in case talks fail and the breakdown starts to endanger lives, for example by cutting off access to hospitals. The government should give the High Court these reasons in its reply. Contract labour law has long held the principal employer liable for wages when a contractor fails to pay them. Handing the work to seven companies does not free the public authority from its moral responsibility for how the people who drive its buses are treated.
6. **Institutional fixes: build fairness into the contract** — Operator contracts should fix minimum pay linked to the notified minimum wage for the job, provide paid leave, and require coverage under the Employees' Provident Fund and the Employees' State Insurance scheme, with penalties for breaches and regular audits. The Directive Principles point the same way. Article 39(d) calls for equal pay for equal work, Article 43 for a living wage, and in *State of Punjab v. Jagjit Singh* (2016) the Supreme Court applied "equal pay for equal work" to temporary employees doing the same work as regular staff. A standing grievance committee that includes union representatives, a conciliation process that begins before a strike does, and a published contingency plan for essential services would help prevent the next crisis. Workers who feel heard rarely need to stop the buses to be noticed.

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 3 — creating new States	Article 3 lets Parliament, by ordinary law, form a new State or alter the area, boundaries or name of an existing one. Such a Bill can be introduced only on the President's recommendation, and only after the President has referred it to the affected State Legislature for its views within a set period; those views do not bind Parliament. Article 4 says such laws are not amendments of the Constitution for the purposes of Article 368, so a simple majority is enough, and the 18th Amendment (1966) clarified that 'State' in clauses (a) to (e) of Article 3 includes a Union Territory. Uttar Pradesh minister Om Prakash Rajbhar has claimed the State will be divided into four; in November 2011 the Mayawati government passed an Assembly resolution proposing Purvanchal, Bundelkhand, Awadh Pradesh and Paschim Pradesh.
Article 371 series — the proposed Article 371(K) for Ladakh	Articles 371 to 371J make special provisions for particular States. Examples include development boards for Vidarbha, Marathwada, Saurashtra and Kutch under Article 371, protection of Naga customary law and land ownership under Article 371A (and of Mizo practices under Article 371G), and reservation for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region under Article 371J, added by the 98th Amendment in 2012. Every provision in the series so far applies to a State, whereas Ladakh has been a Union Territory without a legislature since October 31, 2019, under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019; a new Article 371(K) would need a constitutional amendment under Article 368. Ladakh's Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra writes that the Centre has offered, under Article 371, a directly elected UT-level body with legislative, executive and financial powers, which he calls a 'sui-generis' model, while the protest movement has demanded statehood and the Sixth Schedule.
Sixth Schedule and withdrawal from prosecution	Under Articles 244(2) and 275(1), the Sixth Schedule provides for Autonomous District Councils in the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Each council has up to 30 members, of whom not more than four are nominated by the Governor and the rest elected by adult franchise, and it can make laws on land, forests, inheritance, marriage and social customs. Section 360 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (Section 321 of the old CrPC) lets a Public Prosecutor withdraw from a prosecution only with the court's consent and after the victim has been heard; in <i>State of Kerala v. K. Ajith</i> (2021), the Supreme Court held that a withdrawal must be made in good faith in the interest of justice, not to stifle the process of law. A year after four protesters were killed and 44 injured in police firing in Leh on September 24, 2025, during a protest for statehood and the Sixth Schedule, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has announced the withdrawal of cases against 20 of the 87 people booked; the administration's communique cites Section 360 of the BNSS.
Article 44 — Uniform Civil Code	Article 44, a Directive Principle, says the State 'shall endeavour to secure' a uniform civil code for citizens throughout India. Marriage, divorce, adoption, wills and succession fall under Entry 5 of the Concurrent List, so both Parliament and the States can legislate on them. Goa has long had a common civil code inherited from the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867, and Uttarakhand's UCC, drafted by a committee under retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Desai, came into force on January 27, 2025; the 21st Law Commission's 2018 consultation paper on reform of family law found a UCC 'neither necessary nor desirable at this stage'. Retired Bombay High Court judge R.C. Chavan has resigned from Maharashtra's seven-member UCC committee, which Justice Desai also chairs, after a non-member attended its September 19 meeting as an adviser; two days later, retired IAS officer Shatrughna Singh was appointed a member-cum-senior adviser.
Tenth Schedule — the Speaker's three-month clock	Under paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule, added by the 52nd Amendment in 1985, the Speaker or Chairman decides whether a member has been disqualified for defection. Kihoto Hollohan (1992) upheld this power but made the decision subject to judicial review. In <i>Keisham</i>

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly (2020), the Supreme Court held that disqualification petitions should ordinarily be decided within three months, and suggested that Parliament consider an independent tribunal in place of the Speaker. Hearing the Trinamool Congress's plea against 20 rebel MPs now aligned with the NCPI, a Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant noted that the three months had lapsed but declined to fix a deadline for Speaker Om Birla; Justice Joymalya Bagchi called the Speaker's role 'amphibious', as both presiding officer of the House and a tribunal under the Tenth Schedule.
Section 17A, Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988	Section 17A, inserted by the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, bars any police officer from enquiring into or investigating an offence by a public servant that relates to a recommendation made or a decision taken in the discharge of official functions, without the prior approval of the government or authority competent to remove that public servant. No approval is needed when a person is arrested on the spot for accepting or attempting to accept an undue advantage. The Indian Express notes that a split verdict on Section 17A earlier this year was referred to a larger Bench, just as the October 2022 split verdict of a two-judge Bench in the Karnataka hijab case was, and that the hijab reference is still pending four years later.
Section 77, RP Act 1951 — election expenses	Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 requires every candidate to keep a separate and correct account of election expenses from nomination to the declaration of results, within a ceiling fixed under Rule 90 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961: ₹95 lakh for a Lok Sabha seat and ₹40 lakh for an Assembly seat in the larger States. Exceeding the ceiling is a corrupt practice under Section 123(6). Explanation 1 to Section 77(1) excludes the travel costs of a party's leaders (star campaigners), no law caps what a political party itself spends, and a candidate who fails to lodge the account with the District Election Officer within 30 days (Section 78) can be disqualified for three years under Section 10A. The BJP's expenditure reports to the Election Commission show that it spent ₹529.38 crore on the five Assembly elections that ended in May, ₹286 crore of it in West Bengal.
Form 6 and Section 31, RP Act 1950	Form 6, the application for inclusion in the electoral roll, is prescribed by the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. The Centre frames these Rules under Section 28 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 after consulting the Election Commission, so changing the form means amending the Rules, which is the point Election Commissioner Vivek Joshi recorded on file in May. Section 31 of the 1950 Act makes a false declaration in connection with the electoral roll punishable with imprisonment of up to one year, a fine, or both. In Delhi's Special Intensive Revision, 1,06,937 inclusion claims were filed between August 31 and September 22, against 47.56 lakh names left off the draft roll, and Form 6 still carries a declaration that the applicant is applying 'for the first time'.
Qualifying dates — Section 14, RP Act 1950	Since the Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021, Section 14(b) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 has provided four qualifying dates a year: January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1. A person turning 18 therefore no longer has to wait up to a year to register, as happened when January 1 was the only cut-off. Section 21 provides for revision of the rolls before each general election and in any year the Election Commission directs, and Section 21(3) allows it to order a special revision 'in such manner as it may think fit'. The Economic Times reports that no annual summary revision has been held since the 2024 cycle, breaking a convention followed since 1958, because the Chief Election Commissioner and the two Election Commissioners have not agreed on resuming it.
Bar Council of India — Advocates Act, 1961	The Bar Council of India is a statutory body set up under Section 4 of the Advocates Act, 1961. Its members are the Attorney General and the Solicitor General (ex officio) and one member elected by each State Bar Council. Under Section 7(1)(h), the BCI promotes legal education and lays down its standards in consultation with universities and State Bar Councils; under Section 7(1)(i), it recognises the universities whose law degrees qualify a person to enrol as an advocate. A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant has agreed to examine the BCI's authority over legal education, on a petition challenging the BCI-PEARL Trust and the India International University of Legal Education and Research in Goa; the Bench observed orally that the BCI may set general norms, such as the duration of a course, but cannot dictate the finer details of legal

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	education.
Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025	The Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 replaced four older laws with a single code on the entry, stay and exit of foreigners: the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000. Section 21 of the Act penalises unauthorised entry, and Section 23 penalises visa overstay and general contraventions; Foreigners Regional Registration Offices handle registration of foreigners in the field. A special court at Delhi's Rouse Avenue complex has granted default bail to six Ukrainian nationals arrested by the NIA in March over an alleged cross-border conspiracy involving ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, and has discharged them under Sections 21 and 23 because the FRRO had compounded those offences.
CSR — Section 135, Companies Act, 2013	Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 applies to any company with a net worth of ₹500 crore or more, a turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or a net profit of ₹5 crore or more. Such a company must spend at least 2% of its average net profit over the three preceding financial years on the activities listed in Schedule VII, under a CSR policy approved by its board. Since the 2019 amendment, unspent money must be transferred to a fund listed in Schedule VII or, for ongoing projects, to an Unspent CSR Account, which turned the old 'comply or explain' rule into a binding obligation. In its first prosecution complaint before a special court in Raipur in the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission examination case, the Enforcement Directorate alleges that former chairperson Taman Singh Sonwani received ₹45 lakh, shown as CSR funding to an institution he controlled, in return for favouring a businessman's son and daughter-in-law in the 2021 State service examination.
Annual general meeting — Sections 96 and 97, Companies Act, 2013	Section 96 of the Companies Act, 2013 requires every company other than a One Person Company to hold an annual general meeting each year, within six months of the end of the financial year and with no more than 15 months between two AGMs; the Registrar of Companies may extend the deadline by up to three months, except for the first AGM. If a company defaults, Section 97 lets the National Company Law Tribunal, on a member's application, call the AGM or direct that it be called, and give directions for holding it, including that one member present in person or by proxy is deemed to constitute the meeting. Tata Sons' August 18 AGM was deferred for want of quorum because the joint nominee of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Sir Ratan Tata Trust could not take part while the Maharashtra Charity Commissioner's restrictions on SRTT remain in place. The company has a three-month extension from the Registrar, and lawyers say it could now approach the NCLT under Section 97.
Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 — who runs UPI	The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 makes the Reserve Bank of India the authority that regulates and supervises payment systems, through its Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems; no one may operate a payment system without RBI authorisation. The National Payments Corporation of India, set up in 2008 as a not-for-profit company promoted by the RBI and the Indian Banks' Association, runs UPI, which was launched in 2016. From October 15, person-to-merchant (P2M) UPI payments above ₹2,000 will carry a merchant discount rate of 0.4%, the first such charge on UPI since 2020. ET reports that the fee is likely to be split 40% to the payer's (issuing) bank, 30% to the merchant's (acquiring) bank, 20% to the payment gateway and 10% to the UPI app.
Income-tax Act, 2025 — TDS when buying from a non-resident	The Central Board of Direct Taxes, constituted under the Central Boards of Revenue Act, 1963, administers direct taxes. The Income-tax Act, 2025, which replaced the Income-tax Act, 1961 from April 1, 2026, uses a single 'tax year' in place of the old 'previous year' and 'assessment year'. Under the old law, a resident buying property from another resident deducted TDS through a PAN-based form (Section 194-IA), but a buyer from a non-resident deducted tax under Section 195 and needed a Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number (TAN). The CBDT has amended the Income-tax Rules, 2026 so that, from October 1, 2026, resident individuals and HUFs buying immovable property from non-residents can deposit and report TDS under Section 393(2) of the 2025 Act through a PAN-based challan-cum-statement in Form 141, which has a new Schedule E, without obtaining a TAN.

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Liquidation under the IBC — the list of stakeholders	The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India, set up on October 1, 2016 under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, regulates insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities, and frames regulations under the Code. The Adjudicating Authority is the National Company Law Tribunal for companies and LLPs (Section 60) and the Debt Recovery Tribunal for individuals and partnership firms. When a company is ordered into liquidation under Section 33, the liquidator verifies claims and prepares a list of stakeholders, which decides whose claims are recognised and who takes part in consultations. By a gazette notification that took effect on Wednesday, the IBBI has allowed a liquidator to modify an entry in this list on receiving additional information, provided the Adjudicating Authority is informed within 30 days; earlier, the liquidator had to apply to the NCLT first.
Mutual funds' overseas investment cap — FEMA, 1999	Under Section 6 of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, which replaced the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1973, capital account transactions, including investment abroad, are regulated by the RBI in consultation with the Centre. Separately, resident individuals can send up to \$250,000 abroad each financial year under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme. Indian mutual funds' investment in overseas securities is subject to an industry-wide ceiling set by the RBI, with SEBI allocating limits to individual fund houses. The industry has now used up its entire \$7-billion limit, so fund houses cannot create fresh units of international exchange-traded funds, and ET reports that these funds are trading well above the value of their underlying portfolios.
Customs Act, 1962 — 'prohibited goods'	Section 2(33) of the Customs Act, 1962 defines 'prohibited goods' as goods whose import or export is prohibited under the Customs Act or any other law in force, except goods whose conditions for permitted import or export have been met. Section 11 lets the Centre prohibit imports and exports for purposes including the protection of human health. Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, importing and selling drugs requires licences, and the Drugs Controller General of India is the central licensing authority. A Bombay High Court Bench of Justices Suman Shyam and Advait Sethna has upheld the Drugs Controller General's ban on the sale of imported nicotine pouches, 'Zyn' and 'Fox', at duty-free shops in Mumbai airport for want of licences, holding that goods imported even for warehousing or re-export are not immune from domestic law.
Wind energy — the 100 GW and 400 GW markers	The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is the nodal ministry for wind power, and the National Institute of Wind Energy in Chennai is its technical institution for assessing wind resources; India notified a National Offshore Wind Energy Policy in 2015. India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (2022) commits it to about 50% of cumulative installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030. Suzlon co-founder Girish Tanti says the industry is broadly on track for the government's target of 100 GW of wind power by 2030, and that the next phase should aim for 400 GW by 2047. He warns, however, that the grid is lagging behind new generation and that renewable power is being curtailed because of grid constraints.
Construction and demolition waste — the CAQM Act, 2021	The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021 created a statutory commission, replacing the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority set up in 1998 at the Supreme Court's instance. The Commission can issue binding directions across the NCR and the adjoining areas of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and Section 14 of the Act provides penalties for contravening its orders. The Environment (Construction and Demolition) Waste Management Rules, 2025, framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, replaced the 2016 rules on construction and demolition waste. The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram has ordered that no occupancy or completion certificate will be issued until an online receipt shows that debris was deposited at its Basai plant, that projects of 20,000 sq m or more submit an integrated waste management plan within 30 days, and that recycled material in buildings rise from 5% in 2026 to 25% by 2030; serious violations will be referred to CAQM for prosecution under Section 14.
National Chambal Sanctuary and the gharial	The National Chambal Sanctuary, declared in 1979, is a protected area along the Chambal river spread across three States: Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It was set up mainly to save the gharial (<i>Gavialis gangeticus</i>), a fish-eating crocodilian listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN and protected under Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and it also

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	shelters the Ganges river dolphin and freshwater turtles. The Chambal rises in the Vindhyan ranges near Mhow in Madhya Pradesh and joins the Yamuna in Uttar Pradesh. In its suo motu case on illegal sand mining in the sanctuary, a Supreme Court Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta took note of the death of forest ranger Pratap Singh Chundawat, who was run over in Rajasthan's Pratapgarh district by a dumper carrying illegally mined soil, said preventive detention should be used in such cases, and listed the matter for October 6; Rajasthan told the court that the incident had no link to the sanctuary.
Domestic Tourism Expenditure Survey — MoSPI	The National Statistics Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation runs household surveys such as the Domestic Tourism Expenditure Survey, which measures trips and spending by purpose. Its estimates feed the Tourism Satellite Account, the standard method for measuring tourism's contribution to GDP; the previous domestic tourism survey was conducted from July 2014 to June 2015. The new survey, conducted from July 2025 to June 2026 across 2.46 lakh households, finds that pilgrimage and religious travel is the largest single purpose of overnight trips. MoSPI cautions that the results are not strictly comparable with 2014-15, because the earlier survey asked about religious trips over the previous 30 days and the new one asks about the previous 365 days.
Nauru becomes Naoero	Nauru, a single raised-coral island of about 21 sq km in the Micronesian Pacific, is one of the world's smallest republics. It was a German colony and then a trust territory administered by Australia on behalf of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, became independent in 1968, and joined the United Nations in 1999; its economy was long built on phosphate mining. President David Adeang told the 81st UN General Assembly that the country is returning to its own name and pronunciation, Naoero: its international code will change from NRU to NRO, and its people will be called dei-Naoero instead of Nauruan.
WHO — membership and withdrawal	The World Health Organization's Constitution came into force on April 7, 1948, the date now marked as World Health Day. The World Health Assembly of all member states, which meets in Geneva, is its supreme body and appoints the Director-General on the nomination of the Executive Board. The Constitution has no withdrawal clause, but the United States joined in 1948 with a reservation allowing it to leave on one year's notice after paying its dues. The US withdrawal, formalised in January 2026 over the agency's handling of COVID-19, cost the WHO its largest historical donor, which gave \$1.284 billion in 2022-23; Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus now says it is 'a matter of time' before the US rejoins.
Golan Heights	Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 war and annexed them in 1981. UN Security Council Resolution 497 (1981) declared the annexation 'null and void and without international legal effect', and the UN and most countries treat the territory as occupied Syrian land. The UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), set up in 1974, monitors the separation of Israeli and Syrian forces, and Indian troops have served in it. Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa told the UN General Assembly that 'the Golan will remain a Syrian land', saying Israel has carried out more than 500 air and artillery strikes on Syria since he took power nearly two years ago.
Badrinath and Jyotirmath	Badrinath, on the Alaknanda in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, is dedicated to Vishnu as Badrinarayan. It is one of the four shrines of Uttarakhand's Char Dham Yatra (with Yamunotri, Gangotri and Kedarnath), and also one of the four dhams of the all-India pilgrimage, with Dwarka, Puri and Rameswaram. Jyotirmath, near Badrinath, is one of the four cardinal mathas traditionally attributed to Adi Shankaracharya, the others being Sringeri in the south, Dwarka in the west and Puri in the east. A two-day festival on September 19-20 at the Tourist Arrival Plaza beside the Badrinath temple, which officials say the Army organised under Operation Sadbhavana, its community outreach programme, has drawn criticism over a concert-style 'bhajan jamming' session; the Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath said even blowing a conch is prohibited in the area so as not to disturb Lord Vishnu's meditation.

Source note: All items are drawn from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Economic Times* (Delhi Editions) — 24 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

An umpire is trusted not because he is always right, but because he belongs to no side.

Themes: Institutions · Ethics · Constitutional values

In November 1986, Pakistan's captain Imran Khan tried something Test cricket had not seen for decades. Tired of hearing that his side's home wins were the work of home umpires, he invited two Indian umpires, Pilo Reporter and V.K. Ramaswamy, to stand in the Lahore Test against the West Indies. Pakistani umpires had not been proved dishonest; that was beside the point. A home umpire could give a correct decision and still not be believed, because the loser could always say he belonged to the other team. By 1994 the International Cricket Council required one neutral umpire in every Test, and from 2002 both. Umpiring did not suddenly improve; what changed was the loser's willingness to accept it.

This week a Supreme Court judge reached for the same image. Examining the 2023 law under which the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister and the Leader of the Opposition select the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners, Justice Dipankar Datta wrote that when the umpire is picked by one side's captain, "even if the decisions taken by such umpire are correct, it has the patina of suspicion." And he added: "It is not enough for the EC to be independent, it must also appear to be independent." An arbiter's authority rests not on being always right but on the loser's belief that the call was made by someone with no stake in the result. This essay argues that this belief is part of independence, not decoration on it; that it rests on three visible things, how the arbiter is chosen, whether dissent can be spoken inside the institution, and whether reasons are given openly; and that the second is the most telling.

The law learnt this long ago. In 1999 the House of Lords set aside one of its own judgments in the Pinochet extradition proceedings because Lord Hoffmann, one of the judges, was a director of a charity linked to Amnesty International, which had intervened in the case. Nobody alleged that he was actually biased; it was enough that he stood too close to one side. Indian law asks the same question. In *Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India* (1987), the Supreme Court quashed a court martial on which sat the commanding officer the soldier had complained about, holding that the test is whether a reasonable person would apprehend bias, not whether bias is proved.

Appointment is the first thing the public sees. Article 324(5) protects the Chief Election Commissioner by making him removable only in the manner of a Supreme Court judge, but for seven decades Parliament made no law on how he should be chosen. In *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India* (2023), a Constitution Bench filled the gap with a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice. The 2023 Act replaced the Chief Justice with a Cabinet Minister. Parliament was entitled to legislate, but a panel on which two of three members sit in the same Cabinet answers the public's question in the weakest possible way.

The second sign is subtler. A body that is never seen to disagree cannot prove that it deliberates. The Talmud records a striking rule: if every judge of a Sanhedrin voted to convict in a capital case, the accused went free, because a court in which nobody argued for him had not truly weighed the case. Article 145(5) of our Constitution preserves a Supreme Court judge's right to dissent, and dissents are how a court argues with its future: Justice Subba Rao's lone view in *Kharak Singh* (1962) that privacy is part of personal liberty was vindicated fifty-five years later in *Puttaswamy*. Under Section 45ZL of the RBI Act, the published minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee record each member's vote and statement. A visible minority vote does not weaken the Reserve Bank; it tells markets that six people, not one, are thinking.

Hence the weight of the present dispute at the Election Commission. Two Election Commissioners are reported to have recorded objections at least fourteen times in ten months, saying decisions were taken in the Commission's name without their knowledge. The Commission replies that "differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation in any institution" and that its decisions were unanimous; the ruling party adds that if all three Commissioners only said "yes, yes", the Opposition would cry dictatorship. Both are right that dissent is healthy, and both miss its purpose. Dissent reassures only when it is heard, answered and, in time, disclosed; the 2023 Act itself provides for unanimity where possible and a majority where members differ. A unanimity announced over recorded objections convinces no one. In 2019, when Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa asked that his dissents on model code complaints be recorded in the Commission's orders, the majority kept them in the files. The files kept the dissent; the public lost the evidence.

Dissent is not only a signal to outsiders; it is how institutions avoid mistakes. In *Victims of Groupthink* (1972), Irving Janis showed how President Kennedy's advisers drifted into the Bay of Pigs fiasco of 1961 because doubters stayed silent in a room that prized agreement; in the Cuban missile crisis eighteen months later, Kennedy stayed away from some meetings so that his advisers would argue freely. In 1986, engineers who warned that the Challenger's seals might fail in the cold were overruled, and seven astronauts died. Richard Feynman's appendix to the inquiry report ends: "For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for nature cannot be fooled."

The counter-position deserves a fair hearing. Perception can be used as a weapon. Losing sides have always blamed the umpire, and a perception test that yields to the loudest partisan would let every defeated party discredit every result. Disagreement can also paralyse: the annual summary revision that adds eighteen-year-olds to the rolls, held since 1958, has reportedly not been resumed, and the appraisal reports of nearly fifty officers are stuck because the three Commissioners cannot sign together. And the test cuts both ways: the collegium, which Justice Datta defended this week, is criticised by many as "judges appointing judges".

These objections refine the argument; they do not defeat it. The right test, as the House of Lords held in *Porter v. Magill* (2001), is the view of a fair-minded and informed observer, not of the angriest spectator. Appearance should follow from structure, not from public relations: selection by a body that no single side controls, secure tenure, a recorded right to dissent disclosed after a decent interval, and reasons published with every major decision. Paralysis comes from a failure to decide, not from disagreement, and the law already supplies the remedy, which is a majority vote recorded as such. The same standard of openness should apply to the collegium as to the Cabinet.

Cricket offers one last lesson. When the Decision Review System was first used in a Test in 2008, many feared that letting players challenge umpires on camera would destroy their authority. It did not. Umpires are now overruled in public, yet their decisions have become easier to accept, because everyone can see that a wrong call can be put right. A republic's umpires are no different. Voters do not need an Election Commission that is never wrong. They need one that belongs to no side, lets its members disagree and shows its working, so that even the losing captain can walk off the field believing the game was fair.

Built from today's cards: Split verdict on referring the CEC Appointment Act to a Constitution Bench; Justice Datta's "perception test" and his defence of the Collegium · The CEC is not the Commission: Section 18 of the 2023 Act and the day after the Election Commissioners' dissents

ESSAY 2 · Essay · Section B · 6 min read

Knowledge belongs to all; the means of knowing, to a few.

Themes: Science and technology · International order · Knowledge and power

In January 1913 a clerk at the Madras Port Trust, with no degree and no laboratory, posted a letter crowded with formulas to G.H. Hardy at Cambridge. Hardy, after studying it with J.E. Littlewood, concluded that it could only have come from a mathematician of the highest class. Srinivasa Ramanujan needed nothing from the world except paper, a stamp and a reader able to check his work. That is why mathematics has been the most democratic of the sciences. A proof is as valid in Kumbakonam as in Cambridge, anyone patient enough can verify it, and what it proves belongs to everyone.

This year the most famous problems in mathematics have begun to fall to machines. According to reports this week, a model built by the AI company Anthropic produced in July a counterexample to the Jacobian conjecture, which had stood for eighty-seven years. On 8 September OpenAI announced that an unreleased internal model had solved the Navier-Stokes existence and smoothness problem, one of the Clay Institute's million-dollar Millennium Prize Problems, by running 10,000 autonomous AI agents for 88 hours. These claims are still being examined, and one is already disputed. The truths may still belong to everyone; the means of finding them now belong to a handful of companies in two countries. When OpenAI announced on 29 July that 1,00,000 scientists, mathematicians and engineers could use its frontier models free, Indian, Russian and Chinese institutions were left out, most likely because of geopolitical tensions, the report says. And as President Trump receives President Xi in Washington, the rules for this technology are being discussed by two capitals, while the rest of the world, in one commentator's phrase, risks becoming a rule-taker.

The prompt names a tension as old as learning. Knowledge, once found, tends towards the commons: it can be copied without being used up. The means of producing it, whether instruments, money, institutions or now computing power, tend towards concentration. When the two drift apart, knowledge becomes power over those who lack the means. This essay argues that the gap is now wider than at any time since the nuclear age, that it threatens not only India's share of discovery but the character of knowledge itself, and that the answer lies not in resentment but in building capacity, insisting on verifiability and claiming a seat where the rules are written.

The pattern is old. The printing press made books cheap; about a century later the Church issued its Index of Prohibited Books. The nuclear age made the pattern explicit. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of 1968 defined a nuclear-weapon state as one that had exploded a device before 1 January 1967, and so froze the hierarchy of that moment into law. India refused to sign, and after its 1974 test it faced the newly formed Nuclear Suppliers Group and decades of technology denial. In 1998 Jaswant Singh, writing in Foreign Affairs, called the arrangement nuclear apartheid. Thucydides had set out its logic twenty-four centuries earlier in the Melian dialogue: "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

What is new is that concentration now reaches inside knowledge itself. In 1942 the sociologist Robert K. Merton described the ethos of science as four norms: findings are common property; claims are judged by impersonal standards, not by who makes them; scientists are disinterested; and every claim faces organised scepticism. Machine mathematics strains at least two of these. The companies do not release the prompts that produced their proofs; a Harvard mathematician complained of "a certain amount of intentional mysticism around how they arrive at certain results". And the proofs are hard to read. The Bristol number theorist Andrew Booker says the AI "writes like an alien sometimes", and Columbia's Michael Harris describes a nightmare in which a machine produces an incomprehensible proof of the Riemann hypothesis and humans simply have to accept it. A truth that its receivers cannot understand must be taken on trust, and trust flows towards whoever owns the machine.

The counter-argument is strong. Science has always depended on costly instruments held by a few, and knowledge still spread. Firms that spend billions on computing have a fair claim to control what they built. Frontier AI can serve war as

well as peace, and withholding it from rivals may be prudence rather than prejudice, as nuclear export controls were. Rules written by two great powers are better than none: a Sino-American understanding not to collide by accident protects everyone. And unreadable proofs are not new. When Kenneth Appel and Wolfgang Haken proved the four-colour theorem in 1976, with a computer checking cases no human could, many mathematicians were uneasy; in 2005 the proof was formally verified in a proof assistant, and the unease faded. Today's models can already translate proofs into Lean, a language in which a machine checks every step.

These objections show that expensive means need not destroy a commons. They do not show that a commons survives on its own. It survives when the means are governed as shared institutions. The CERN Convention, in force since 1954, says that the organisation “shall have no concern with work for military requirements” and that its results “shall be published or otherwise made generally available”; India became an associate member in 2017. When the partners in the Human Genome Project met in Bermuda in 1996, they agreed to release sequence data within twenty-four hours, which helped keep the human genome in the public domain. The Green Revolution reached India because the wheat varieties Norman Borlaug bred in Mexico were shared through publicly funded international research. What matters is not the cost of the instrument but the charter under which it works.

For India this points to three duties. The first is capacity. Denial has always been answered best by building: C-DAC was set up in 1988 when advanced supercomputers were hard to obtain, and its PARAM 8000 followed in 1991; the cryogenic technology that American pressure kept Russia from transferring in the early 1990s was mastered at home and flew on a GSLV in 2014. The IndiaAI Mission, approved in 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore, must become compute that a researcher in a state university can actually use. The second is verifiability. Indian academies should give full credit only to machine proofs that can be formally checked and whose methods are disclosed, in the spirit of the Leiden Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Mathematics of June 2026. The third is voice. The Global South, S. Jaishankar said in New York this week, sits in the front row of crises and the back row of decision-making. India, which chairs BRICS this year, can help bring together the middle powers, including the countries behind this week's Norwegian and Finnish call for control of frontier AI models, so that the rules are not written in two capitals alone.

Isaac Newton wrote to Robert Hooke that if he had seen further, it was “by standing on the shoulders of Giants”. Those shoulders were open to anyone who could read. Ramanujan climbed them from a clerk's desk because a stranger in Cambridge was willing to read his work. The Ramanujan of 2026 may need more than paper and a stamp. He may need computing power, access and a seat in the room where the rules are made. A theorem does not care who proves it. A nation must care who can.

Built from today's cards: AI systems crack a Millennium Prize Problem and an 87-year-old conjecture; mathematicians split, and India is shut out of free frontier-model access · Trump hosts Xi: a US-China truce, an AI dialogue and the risk that India becomes a “rule-taker” · India's UNGA week: SRIA concerns to Rubio, the Global South in the “back row”, G4 on UNSC reform, and rejecting the OIC on Kashmir