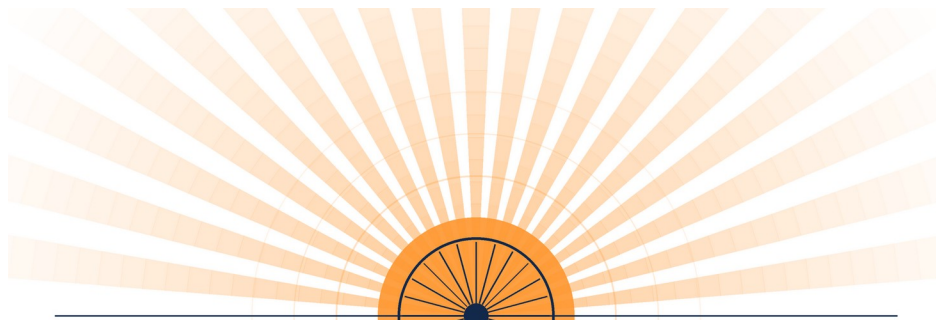




UPSC DARPAN

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

"In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value."

— B.R. Ambedkar, speech in the Constituent Assembly (25 November 1949)

The Hindu, The Indian Express & The Economic Times (Delhi Editions) — 26 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 · 26 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.

“The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.”

— **Constitution of India** · Article 46, Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy)

Use in: Counting caste (today's report that Census 2027 records caste in an open column for the first time since Independence, while the Centre has not yet decided how the answers will be sorted and tabulated; the 2011 SECC's open field produced over 46 lakh caste names and its caste tables were never published). Use it in GS2 answers on reservation and welfare and in essays on data and the State:

“special care” for the weaker sections needs to know who they are and where they fall behind, and the Mandal estimate still rests on the 1931 Census. Argue for a tabulation plan fixed before fieldwork, independent experts in the process, and caste cross-tabulated with education, occupation and assets so that deprivation within castes becomes visible.

“Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.”

— **United Nations General Assembly** · Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1, 2015), Sustainable Development Goal 5, Target 5.4

Use in: Who does the chores (today's Andhra Pradesh Class 1 and 2 textbooks, in which half of all household chores shown are done by men, replacing books that showed such work done entirely by women). Use it in GS1 answers on women's work and female labour force participation, and in essays on gender and invisible labour: the target names three routes together, public services and infrastructure to reduce the burden, and “shared responsibility within the household” to redistribute it, which is what a textbook can begin. Pair it with the NSO's Time Use Survey 2019, which found that women doing unpaid domestic work spent about 299 minutes a day on it against about 97 minutes for men, and with Article 51A(e).

“The sides have agreed that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

— **Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev** · Joint Soviet–United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva, 21 November 1985 (reaffirmed in the joint statement of the five nuclear-weapon States, 3 January 2022)

Use in: No First Use (today's op-ed arguing that India should review its nuclear doctrine for clarity without revising it: keep credible minimum deterrence and No First Use as set out by the Cabinet Committee on Security on 4 January 2003, and clarify the meaning of ‘massive retaliation’ as Pakistan's tactical weapons and new technologies shorten decision times). Use it in GS3 answers on security and in essays on restraint and power: NFU is the doctrinal form of the idea that nuclear weapons exist to deter, not to fight. Argue that predictability is itself a security asset, and that the case for review is about survivable second-strike capability and command-and-control, not about loosening the pledge.

Index

Everything in today's edition, card by card.

Front matter

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

1. Polity & Governance

- 1.1 Census 2027 Records Caste in an Open Column; Centre Yet to Decide How to Tabulate It
- 1.2 Scholars Say Anoop Baranwal Already Binds the 2023 EC Law as the Commission's Dissent Goes Public
- 1.3 West Bengal's Anti-Goonda Bill: President Returned It, Says ET; Still With MHA, Says Chief Minister
- 1.4 Karnataka Accuses Centre of Withholding ₹2,186.20 Crore in 15th Finance Commission Panchayat Grants Over Portal Gaps
- 1.5 Omar Abdullah Moves J&K Statehood Resolution Building on the 2000 Autonomy Resolution; BJP Tears Copies

2. Economy

- 2.1 Finance Ministry Sends New Model Investment Treaty to Cabinet, Keeping Taxation Outside Investor-State Arbitration
- 2.2 Centre Trims FY27 Borrowing to ₹15.99 Lakh Crore as RBI Flags War-Driven Inflation Risk
- 2.3 DPIIT Revisits a Dedicated Trade Secrets Law, Weighing Whistleblower Protection Against Compliance Burden
- 2.4 Four Ports Named India's First 'Mega Ports'; NHAI Codifies Design for 50,000-km Expressway Network

3. Agriculture & Food

- 3.1 Grain Stocks Far Above Buffer as Rice Harvest Falls 6.5%: Two Op-eds Split on Keeping Exports Open

4. International Relations

- 4.1 India and Liberia Launch a UN 'Group of Friends' to Protect Ships and Seafarers
- 4.2 WTO Panel to Hear Russia's Challenge to EU Carbon Border Tax; India Joins as Third Party
- 4.3 At 81 the UN Is 'Overweight and Weak'; India Targets the 2028-29 Elected Council Seat

5. Environment & Ecology

- 5.1 Keralam Asks the Centre to Shrink Its Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Area to 8,590.69 sq km of Forest Only
- 5.2 Expert Panel Recommends Clearance for 1,605 MW Subansiri Upper Dam Despite 1,35,733 Trees Marked for Felling

6. Health & Life Sciences

- 6.1 India to Pilot a BRICS Network of Mental-Health Centres of Excellence, With NIMHANS as Coordinating Centre

7. Science & Technology

- 7.1 France's EDF pitches European Pressurised Reactors as India finalises draft rules under the SHANTI Act
- 7.2 IIT Delhi demonstrates a university-built programmable micro-GPU on FPGA as AI demand lifts phone prices

8. Society

- 8.1 Andhra Pradesh's new Class 1-2 textbooks show men doing half of all household chores

9. Internal Security

- 9.1 AFSPA Extended Six Months in Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal as Kamjong Killings Take Toll to Eight
- 9.2 Centre Puts a Union Minister at the Naga Peace Table, Meeting an NSCN-IM Demand
- 9.3 Review India's Nuclear Doctrine Without Revising It: Keep No First Use, Clarify Retaliation

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

- 9.1 Case 1 — Twenty-Four Girls, and the Department That Stood In for a Parent
- 9.2 Case 2 — Fifteen Minutes on the Chief Minister's Handle
- 9.3 Case 3 — 'For the Satisfaction of the People, We Had to Go Beyond the Law'

10. Prelims Quick-Revision Facts

10 25 one-line facts in exam-pattern form

11. Essays of the Day

11.1 What the State counts, it comes to govern.

11.2 The work that holds the world together is the work no one sees.

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 today is about who gets to decide, and on what terms. The Centre will decide how India's first post-Independence caste count is classified, but has not said how; the Election Commission's appointment and internal deliberation are being tested in court, in Parliament and in public; the President sits between West Bengal and a Central narcotics law; the Union holds back panchayat money over portal data; and an elected Jammu and Kashmir Assembly can only ask for the Statehood it once had. In each case the constitutional text is clear enough — what is missing is a transparent, time-bound process that the losing side can accept.

1.1 Census 2027 Records Caste in an Open Column; Centre Yet to Decide How to Tabulate It

THE NEWS New Delhi. More than a month after the Union government notified the questionnaire for the second phase of Census 2027, finalising an open-column method to record caste, officials told The Hindu that no decision has yet been taken on how the government will sort, tabulate and rationalise the data collected. Under the open-column method, a person who is not from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs) writes his or her caste name freely in a blank field; the person may also choose a “no-caste” option or decline to disclose a caste. Bihar and Telangana, in their caste surveys, instead used a list from which respondents choose. Experts, Opposition parties and associations representing the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have criticised the choice, arguing that it is bound to repeat the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), whose open field yielded over 46 lakh different caste names and whose report successive governments shelved. A senior official said those discussions will begin as fieldwork progresses. The second phase, the Population Enumeration (PE) phase, has 40 questions, of which 13 are questions or data fields that were not part of the 2011 census — among them caste, family particulars, ID proofs and COVID vaccinations; the 2011 questionnaire had 29 questions. The caste question is being asked in India's census forms for the first time since Independence. Officials described the decision path: each division of the Census office works out tabulation for its own questions; the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India prepares a holistic proposal; the file goes to the Union Home Secretary; and the final call is taken by the Ministry or the Union Cabinet. Professor G.N. Devy said experts should have been included while finalising the questions, which would have settled doubts about post-collection analysis early. The PE phase has begun in Ladakh and the snow-bound areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. In Ladakh, the first State or UT where it is under way, Registrar General Mritunjay Kumar Narayan reviewed the work over four days; an enumerator spends 30 to 60 minutes per household on a mobile application, and the exercise ends by September 30. The syllabus link is GS2 on the constitutional basis of reservation and welfare for vulnerable sections, and GS1 on caste and social empowerment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 1931 Census is the last to count every caste, and from 1951 only SCs and STs are enumerated → the 2011 SECC records caste in an open field and returns over 46 lakh caste names, and the report is shelved → Bihar (2023) and Telangana run list-based caste surveys, sharpening the demand for a national count → the Centre puts a caste question into Census 2027 and chooses the open-column method → fieldwork begins in Ladakh and snow-bound areas while the rule for sorting and tabulating the returns is still undecided

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Census is a Union subject run under a 1948 law that guarantees confidentiality** — “Census” is Entry 69 of the Union List in the Seventh Schedule, so only Parliament can legislate on it. The Census Act, 1948 empowers the Central Government to notify that a census will be taken, to appoint census officers, and obliges every person to answer the questions put to them; the Census Rules, 1990 lay down the procedure. The exercise is conducted by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, which sits under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Section 15 of the Act makes individual census records confidential: they are not open to inspection and are not admissible as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding. This is why the Census publishes only aggregated tables, and why the method of tabulation decides what the country actually learns.
- 2. The SECC 2011 counted caste outside the Census, and its caste tables were never published** — The Socio-Economic Caste Census of 2011 was a separate exercise, run by the Ministry of Rural Development in rural areas and the then Ministry of Housing and

	Urban Poverty Alleviation in urban areas, with the Registrar General providing logistical support; it was not conducted under the Census Act. Its socio-economic data on deprivation was released and has been used to identify beneficiaries of schemes such as PMAY-Gramin and Ayushman Bharat. The raw caste data, which threw up over 46 lakh caste names, spelling variants, clan names and titles among them, was never released. The Union government later told the Supreme Court that the caste data was riddled with errors and unusable for policy. The lesson for 2027 is that an open field without a pre-agreed classification scheme produces a list that cannot be tabulated. 3. Reservation for backward classes rests on three Articles and one ceiling — Article 15(4), inserted by the First Amendment in 1951, allows the State to make special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes, SCs and STs. Article 16(4) permits reservation in public appointments for any backward class that, in the State's opinion, is not adequately represented in the services. Article 340 empowers the President to appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes; the Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1953) and the B.P. Mandal Commission (1979) were set up under it. In <i>Indra Sawhney v. Union of India</i> (1992), a nine-judge Bench upheld 27% reservation for OBCs in central jobs, excluded the “creamy layer”, and held that total reservation should not ordinarily exceed 50% save in extraordinary situations. Because the Mandal figure for the OBC share of the population was an estimate from 1931 data, every later debate on quotas has turned on the absence of fresh caste numbers. 4. States have run their own caste surveys, and courts have tested what can be done with them — Bihar conducted a caste-based survey under the State's executive power and published its findings in October 2023, showing Extremely Backward Classes and Backward Classes together at roughly 63% of the population. The State then raised reservation to 65%, which the Patna High Court struck down in 2024 for breaching the 50% ceiling. Telangana conducted a similar survey using a list of castes. After the 105th Constitutional Amendment (2021), Article 342A(3) confirms that each State may prepare and maintain its own list of socially and educationally backward classes, which can differ from the Central list. A national caste count will therefore have to be mapped against one Central list and many State lists.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS1 and GS2 both carry this story — The GS1 syllabus asks about social empowerment and the salient features of Indian society, and the GS2 syllabus asks about mechanisms, laws and institutions for the protection of vulnerable sections. Mains questions on reservation have repeatedly turned on the gap between the constitutional promise of adequate representation and the absence of data to measure it. A caste count in the Census is the first time that gap can close, so the method of counting is itself examinable. 2. Prelims tests the institutional plumbing of the Census — UPSC tends to ask which Ministry runs the Census, where the subject sits in the Seventh Schedule, which body conducts it, and how the Census differs from surveys such as the SECC or the National Sample Survey. Article 340 and the commissions set up under it are standard Prelims material. This story gives all of these a current hook. 3. Essay and ethics papers use caste data as a dilemma between recognition and division — Essay topics on identity and on data-driven governance invite the argument that counting caste can either entrench it or expose its inequalities. The open-column choice — self-identification versus a state-defined list — is a concrete illustration of that dilemma for GS4 as well.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● “Census” is listed as Entry 69 in the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. ● The Census of India is conducted under the Census Act, 1948 by the Office of the

Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, which functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- Under the Census Act, 1948, individual census records are confidential and are not admissible as evidence in civil or criminal proceedings.
- The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948.
- Article 340 empowers the President to appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes; the Mandal Commission was appointed under it.
- In *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992), the Supreme Court upheld OBC reservation, introduced the creamy-layer exclusion and held that reservations should not ordinarily exceed 50%.
- Article 342A(3), inserted by the 105th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2021, allows each State to prepare and maintain its own list of socially and educationally backward classes.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The open column is the honest method; the classification is where the politics hides** — Letting people write their own caste respects self-identification and avoids the charge that the State has decided in advance which castes exist, which is the main weakness of the list method used in Bihar and Telangana. But an open field moves every hard choice from the questionnaire to the tabulation room: whether a sub-caste is counted with its parent caste, whether a surname is a caste, whether two spellings are one group. Those are exactly the decisions that the Centre says it has not yet begun to discuss. The critics are right that a method is judged by its output, but wrong to assume the SECC result is inevitable; 46 lakh names is the raw count of entries, not of castes, and it is a coding problem before it is a political one. The counter-view is that a coding problem solved behind closed doors becomes a political problem anyway.
- 2. Deciding the method after collecting the data invites the suspicion that the result is being chosen** — Good statistical practice fixes the classification scheme, the synonym dictionary and the tabulation plan before fieldwork, so that no one can later be accused of arranging the numbers to fit a preferred outcome. Professor Devy's point that experts should have been consulted at the questionnaire stage is really a point about sequencing. The file path the officials describe — divisions, Registrar General, Home Secretary, Ministry or Cabinet — is an administrative chain with no statutory role for independent statisticians or social scientists. A published tabulation plan and an expert committee with members from outside government would cost little and would protect the Census, one of India's most trusted datasets, from becoming another contested institution.
- 3. The count will be read against the 50% ceiling from the day it is published** — *Indra Sawhney* tied reservation to backwardness and adequacy of representation, and later judgments have insisted on quantifiable data before quotas are extended. Caste numbers will therefore be used in two directions at once: by groups arguing that the 50% ceiling should give way to population share, as Bihar tried in 2023, and by those arguing for sub-categorisation within the OBCs so that a few dominant castes do not take most of the benefit. Both uses need tables that map census names onto the Central and State OBC lists. A national count that cannot be mapped onto those lists will satisfy neither side and will leave the courts where they were.
- 4. The caste question sits in a census that is otherwise more digital and more detailed than ever** — The PE phase has 40 questions against 29 in 2011, and enumerators enter data on a mobile application, spending 30 to 60 minutes per household in Ladakh. Digital capture should make tabulation faster, and an app can offer standardised spelling suggestions as a respondent's caste is typed, reducing the chaos of the SECC.

	The risk is the opposite: if the app nudges people towards pre-set names, the open column becomes a list method by the back door, without the transparency of a published list. The design of that interface is therefore a policy decision and should be disclosed, not treated as an IT detail. 5. A careful count can reduce, not deepen, caste consciousness — but only if it is used for targeting — The strongest objection to a caste census is that it will harden identities and feed competitive demands for recognition. The reply is that caste already determines access to land, credit, marriage and jobs, and that governments allocate reservations and welfare on caste lines without current data, which rewards the loudest groups rather than the most deprived. Evidence can discipline claims as well as fuel them. The test of Census 2027 will be whether its caste tables are cross-tabulated with education, occupation and assets, so that policy can see deprivation within castes, instead of producing one more population ranking.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Counting caste is easy; classifying it is the real policy choice.” In the light of the open-column method adopted for Census 2027, examine the administrative and constitutional challenges in collecting and using caste data. Suggest safeguards that would make the exercise credible. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that Census 2027 asks a caste question for the first time since Independence, using an open column in which non-SC/ST respondents write their caste freely, and that the Centre has not yet decided how the returns will be sorted and tabulated. 2. Body — administrative challenges — Use the SECC 2011 example of over 46 lakh caste names to explain the coding problem: synonyms, sub-castes, surnames and spelling variants. Contrast the open-column method with the list method of the Bihar and Telangana surveys, and note that the tabulation decision rests with the Registrar General, the Home Secretary and the Ministry or Cabinet. 3. Body — constitutional challenges — Explain Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 340, the Indra Sawhney 50% ceiling and the need for quantifiable data, Article 342A(3) and the existence of separate Central and State OBC lists, and the fate of Bihar’s 65% quota in the Patna High Court. 4. Body — safeguards — Propose a published tabulation plan before results, an independent expert committee including sociologists and statisticians, a synonym dictionary mapped to Central and State lists, disclosure of the mobile app’s entry design, confidentiality under Section 15 of the Census Act, and cross-tabulation with socio-economic indicators. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that a caste count is legitimate and overdue, but its credibility depends on fixing the rules before the numbers are known, so that the Census informs policy rather than becomes a new site of contest.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Registrar General. How would you design the tabulation of open-column caste data so that it is credible? Approach: I would constitute an expert committee of statisticians, sociologists and representatives of the National Commissions for Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes to prepare a caste dictionary that maps spelling variants, synonyms and sub-castes onto groups. I would publish the tabulation plan and the dictionary for public comment before any results are released. Unmatched entries would be shown transparently as a residual category rather than silently merged. Finally, I would release caste tables cross-classified with education and occupation so that the data serves targeting, not only headcounts.

Q2. As a District Census Officer, you find that many respondents in your district refuse to disclose their caste or give a clan name instead. What do you do?

Approach: Respondents are entitled to choose “no-caste” or not to disclose, so enumerators must record that choice faithfully and must not pressure or guess. I would retrain enumerators to probe politely only to clarify an ambiguous entry, and to record exactly what is said. I would flag clusters of clan names to the Directorate of Census Operations so that the classification team can handle them. The integrity of the count depends on enumerators recording, not correcting, what citizens say.

Q3. An interview board asks: does a caste census strengthen or weaken the goal of a casteless society?

Approach: In the short run it makes caste more visible, which carries a risk of mobilisation around numbers. But caste already structures opportunity, and policy made without data tends to reward organised groups rather than the most deprived. If the data is used to target benefits within and across castes, it can reduce the political value of unsupported claims. A casteless society will come from equal opportunity, and measuring inequality is a precondition for that, not an obstacle to it.

1.2 Scholars Say Anoop Baranwal Already Binds the 2023 EC Law as the Commission’s Dissent Goes Public

THE NEWS New Delhi. Following the 24 and 25 September cards on the Supreme Court’s split and the Opposition’s removal plan, what is new today is a doctrinal case against the reference, a record of how the Election Commission (EC) decides, and a reform agenda. On Wednesday Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma disagreed on the challenge to the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 and referred it to the Chief Justice of India for a Constitution Bench. In The Indian Express, Faizan Mustafa (CNLU, Patna) and Madhav Anand (NUJS) back Justice Datta. The Act replaced the Chief Justice on the selection panel that Anoop Baranwal (2023) had devised — Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and CJI — with a Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. Justice Datta held that the reference plea surfaced only “in gradual course” of the Attorney General’s arguments, and that applying a settled principle is not interpretation (Thakur Ganga Singh, 1960). The binding principle, he held, is that appointments must be free of exclusive executive control, because “it is not enough for the ECI to be independent, it must also appear to be independent”; the CJI’s inclusion was “signalling advice, and not a mandate”. Asked whether the PM’s nominee would ever oppose the PM, the AG said “probably no”. The authors say the judges should have read the Act down to require unanimous selection decisions. An IE explainer notes that under Section 18 of the 2023 Act business is unanimous “as far as possible”, otherwise by majority, with one vote per member. Dissent is old: T.N. Seshan clashed with M.S. Gill and G.V.G. Krishnamurthy; N. Gopalaswami wrote in January 2009 seeking Navin Chawla’s removal; Ashok Lavasa dissented in 2019 on Model Code clean chits to Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. The Economic Times reports that the Opposition will submit a removal notice against CEC Gyanesh Kumar “within the next two weeks”; the EC says all final decisions, including on the Special Intensive Revision, were unanimous. A Supreme Court petition by advocate Shailendra Mani Tripathi alleges that Electoral Registration Officers were stripped of powers under Sections 13B, 22 and 23 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. Gilles Verniers, in ET, proposes public decision trails, auditable roll data and recorded dissent. The syllabus link is GS2 on constitutional bodies and the RP Act.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Article 324(2) leaves appointments to a law Parliament does not make for seven decades → Anoop Baranwal (2023) sets an interim panel of PM, Leader of the Opposition and CJI → the 2023 Act swaps the CJI for a Cabinet Minister chosen by the PM → two Election Commissioners record objections to SIR-related decisions and the Commission insists every decision was unanimous → a two-judge Bench splits on the Act and refers it, while the Opposition prepares a removal notice and scholars argue the principle is already settled

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. Article 324(2) left appointments to Parliament, and Parliament waited until 2023 — Article 324(1) vests the “superintendence, direction and control” of the preparation of

electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures and the offices of President and Vice-President in an 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, and that appointments shall be made by the President “subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament”. The CEC acts as Chairman of the Commission. In the Constituent Assembly, Shibban Lal Saksena warned that the Commissioner could be “under the thumb of the executive”, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s answer was to leave room for a parliamentary law. No such law on the method of appointment was made until the 2023 Act, so for over seven decades appointments were made by the President on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers.

2. **Anoop Baranwal gave a principle and an interim machinery; the 2023 Act changed the machinery** — In *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India* (2023), a five-judge Constitution Bench held that until Parliament made a law, the CEC and Election Commissioners would be appointed by the President on the advice of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest Opposition party) and the Chief Justice of India. The Court tied this to free and fair elections, which form part of the basic structure. The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 created a Selection Committee of the Prime Minister as chairperson, the Leader of the Opposition and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister, and a Search Committee headed by the Law Minister to prepare a panel of names. The Selection Committee may consider persons outside that panel, and a vacancy in the committee does not invalidate its decisions. The core question in the pending challenge is whether a committee with a two-to-one government majority meets the Baranwal standard of freedom from exclusive executive control.
3. **The Commission is a collegium of equals that decides by majority when it cannot agree** — The Commission was a single-member body for most of its history; two additional Commissioners were appointed in October 1989 and their posts abolished in January 1990, and it became a three-member body again from October 1993. The Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991, in Section 10, required business to be transacted unanimously as far as possible and otherwise by majority. In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), a Constitution Bench upheld the multi-member Commission and the majority rule, holding that the CEC is not superior to the other Commissioners in decision-making. The 2023 Act repealed the 1991 Act and reproduced the rule in Section 18, adding that the Commission may regulate its procedure and allocation of business only by unanimous decision. Section 17 says all business shall be transacted in accordance with the Act.
4. **Removal protection differs for the CEC and the other Commissioners** — Under the proviso to Article 324(5), the CEC can be removed only in the manner and on the grounds on which a Supreme Court judge is removed, and his conditions of service cannot be varied to his disadvantage after appointment. The other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the recommendation of the CEC. The 2023 Act fixes a term of six years or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier, and Section 16 bars civil or criminal proceedings against present or former CECs and ECs for acts done in the discharge of official duty. Electoral Registration Officers, who prepare and revise the rolls for each constituency, draw their powers from the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS
(TREND)

1. **The GS2 syllabus names both the constitutional bodies and the RP Act** — “Appointment to various constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various constitutional bodies” and “salient features of the Representation of People’s

	Act” are explicit syllabus lines. Mains questions on the Election Commission have asked about its independence and its role in free and fair elections, and the appointment law is now the sharpest illustration of that theme. 2. Prelims favours composition and procedure — Who appoints the Election Commissioners, who sits on the selection committee, how a CEC is removed, and whether the CEC can overrule the other members are the facts most likely to be tested. The Seshan judgment on equal votes and the 2023 Act’s committee composition are the two anchors. 3. Ethics and governance papers ask about institutional trust — The difference between an institution being independent and appearing to be independent, and Verniers’s distinction between trust and trustworthiness, map directly onto GS4 themes of transparency, accountability and public confidence in institutions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 324(2), the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners are appointed by the President, subject to any law made by Parliament. ● In Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023), the Supreme Court prescribed an interim selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India for appointing Election Commissioners. ● The Selection Committee under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. ● Under the 2023 Act, the business of the Election Commission is transacted unanimously as far as possible, and otherwise 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 held that the CEC and Election Commissioners have equal say in decisions. ● The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only in the manner and on the grounds on which a judge of the Supreme Court is removed; other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC’s recommendation. ● Electoral Registration Officers prepare and revise electoral rolls under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
ANALYSIS	1. Justice Datta’s distinction between principle and prescription is the stronger reading of Baranwal — A court’s declaration binds through its reasoning, not through every piece of machinery it improvises to fill a gap. Baranwal’s machinery — PM, Leader of the Opposition, CJI — was explicitly temporary, so Parliament was free to replace it; its principle — no exclusive executive control — was not. Testing the 2023 Act against that principle is ordinary application, which a two-judge Bench can do. The Attorney General’s “probably no” to the question of whether a PM’s nominee would ever vote against the PM concedes the factual premise of the challenge. The counter-view, which Justice Sharma accepted, is that whether Parliament must include a neutral selector at all is a new question deserving a larger Bench; that is respectable, but it risks letting a legislative override reopen settled law merely by being enacted. 2. The NJAC analogy cuts the other way — The Solicitor General argued that if the Law Minister’s presence endangered judicial independence in the NJAC case (2015), the executive deserves a corresponding space in choosing Election Commissioners. But the NJAC judgment protected an independent institution from the executive; using it to protect executive control over another independent institution inverts it. The

executive is not a neutral appointer in elections, since the party in government is itself a contestant. The umpire analogy in the op-ed is apt: a referee chosen by one team is suspect even if honest. That is why the appearance standard matters more for the EC than for most bodies.

3. **Unanimity in selection is a good remedy, but it carries a deadlock risk** — Mustafa and Anand propose reading the Act down so that the Selection Committee must decide unanimously, giving the Opposition a veto. That would force consensus candidates and make appointees acceptable to losers, which is the real test of an election body. The difficulty is that a veto can be used to block every name, leaving the Commission short of members before an election. A workable design would pair a unanimity requirement with a time-bound fallback — for instance a panel prepared by a neutral search body, or reversion to including the CJI if the committee cannot agree. Courts usually avoid writing such detail, which is why the better route is legislative amendment.
4. **Majority rule makes dissent normal; hiding it is what damages the Commission** — The 1991 and 2023 laws both assume disagreement, which is why they provide for majority decisions. Seshan's case, the Gopalaswami-Chawla episode and Lavasa's 2019 dissents show that disagreement has always existed. The Commission's present line — that objections were only "observations" and every final decision was unanimous — may be technically true, but it treats dissent as an embarrassment rather than as evidence of deliberation. Lavasa's complaint that his dissents were not recorded in final orders is the precedent that should worry the Commission most. Courts publish dissents without losing authority, as Verniers notes, and an electoral body that records them would gain credibility, not lose it.
5. **The ERO petition shows why internal procedure is a legal question, not only a managerial one** — The Representation of the People Act, 1950 gives Electoral Registration Officers statutory powers over inclusion and deletion, which is why the petition frames centralisation under the Director General (IT) in Delhi as a breach of Sections 13B, 22 and 23. If roll management has moved to a central software system, the legal question is whether the statutory officer still takes the decision or merely signs off on one. The petition also argues that Section 16 immunity covers only acts with a nexus to official duty. Whatever the merits of these allegations, which the Court has yet to examine, they show that the Commission's internal allocation of business under Section 18 has legal consequences for every voter.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"It is not enough for the Election Commission to be independent; it must also appear to be independent." In the light of the Supreme Court's decision in Anoop Baranwal (2023) and the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, discuss whether the present method of appointment and internal decision-making secures the Commission's credibility. Suggest reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — Quote Article 324(2) and note that Parliament made no law on appointments until 2023; mention the Supreme Court's split this week on referring the challenge to the 2023 Act to a Constitution Bench.
2. **Body — appointment** — Contrast the Baranwal interim committee (PM, Leader of the Opposition, CJI) with the 2023 Act's committee (PM, Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM). Present Justice Datta's principle-versus-prescription reasoning, the AG's "probably no", and the NJAC analogy with its limits.
3. **Body — internal decision-making** — Explain Section 18 of the 2023 Act and T.N. Seshan (1995) on equal votes and majority rule. Use the history of dissent — Seshan, Gopalaswami-Chawla, Lavasa — and the present dispute over whether objections were "observations" to show how opacity erodes trust.

	4. Body — reforms — Suggest a unanimous or supermajority selection with a time-bound fallback, a neutral member on the committee, recording of dissent in final orders, public decision trails for major exercises such as SIR, machine-readable roll data, and protection of EROs' statutory role. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the Commission's authority depends on losers accepting defeat, so both its appointment and its deliberations must be visible enough for citizens to judge its impartiality.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are an Election Commissioner who disagrees with a proposed decision of the majority. What do you do? Approach: I would record a reasoned dissent on the file, since the law provides for majority decisions and my duty is to state my view, not to obstruct the Commission. I would ask that the dissent be noted in the final order, as the minority view in a multi-member body should be part of the record. I would not take the disagreement to the media, because that damages the institution more than it helps the argument. If I believed the decision was illegal rather than merely unwise, I would say so explicitly in the note. Q2. As a District Election Officer, how would you maintain public confidence in the rolls when the Commission itself is under attack? Approach: I would publish constituency-wise data on additions, deletions, claims and objections regularly, and hold meetings with all recognised parties before and after each revision. I would ensure that every deletion is backed by a notice and an order of the Electoral Registration Officer as the law requires. Booth-level agents would get copies of draft rolls on time. Transparency at the district level is the part of trust I can control. Q3. An interview board asks: should the Chief Justice of India sit on committees that appoint executive officials? Approach: There is a real concern that judges who may later hear challenges to those appointments should not be party to them. At the same time, a neutral third member breaks the government's built-in majority, which is the problem with the present committee. The CJI is one option, but a panel member chosen jointly by the government and the Opposition, or a unanimity rule, could achieve neutrality without drawing the judiciary into executive choices. What matters is that no single party to an election controls the choice of its referee.

1.3 West Bengal's Anti-Goonda Bill: President Returned It, Says ET; Still With MHA, Says Chief Minister

THE NEWS Kolkata. The two papers carry conflicting accounts of the fate of the West Bengal Public Safety and Control of Anti-Social Activities Bill, 2026, known as the anti-goonda Bill, and neither resolves the conflict. The Economic Times, carrying a Press Trust of India report, says President Droupadi Murmu has returned the Bill to the State government for reconsideration after objecting to a provision that may overlap with a central anti-narcotics law, citing an official speaking on Friday. The Indian Express reports that Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Friday denied such reports, including one in The Indian Express itself, called them "baseless", and said the Bill is "under consideration" of the Union Home Ministry at the level of a joint secretary, which has not sought any clarification. Both papers agree on the Bill's content: passed by the Assembly in June, it substantially expands the State's powers to tackle organised crime, extortion, illegal mining, cybercrime and public disorder. A "goonda Act" is the common name for a State law that allows the police and district magistrates to act against habitual offenders, usually through preventive detention — holding a person to stop a future offence rather than to punish a past one — or through externment from a district. Mr. Adhikari explained why the Bill needs the President at all. "We sent this Bill to the Home Ministry because one section has a provision of three years of imprisonment in the NDPS Act, but it is bailable, and we want to make it non-bailable," he said, referring to the Narcotic

Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985. When a State law on a Concurrent List subject conflicts with a Central law, the State law can prevail in that State only if it is reserved for and receives the President's assent. He said the State framed the law "within the provisions of Article 254(2) of Schedule VII of the Constitution" — as the paper prints it; Article 254(2) is the repugnancy clause and the Seventh Schedule contains the legislative lists — and that when Andhra Pradesh and Kerala brought such laws, "they too needed to get concurrence from the President of India, and they did". He said he was confident of assent. The syllabus link is GS2 on the distribution of legislative powers, the role of the Governor and President in State legislation, and GS3 on organised crime.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Organised crime, extortion and illegal mining become a political issue in West Bengal → the Assembly passes the anti-goonda Bill in June, including a clause making a three-year NDPS offence non-bailable → the Governor reserves the Bill for the President because it conflicts with a Central law on a Concurrent subject → the Home Ministry examines it with the Central ministries concerned → ET reports the President has returned it for reconsideration, while the Chief Minister says it is still pending at the Home Ministry

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Article 200 gives the Governor four options, and reservation is one of them** — When a Bill passed by a State Legislature is presented to the Governor, Article 200 allows the Governor to assent, to withhold assent, to return the Bill (other than a Money Bill) with a message asking the House to reconsider it, or to reserve it for the consideration of the President. If the House passes a returned Bill again, with or without amendment, the Governor shall not withhold assent. Reservation is compulsory where a Bill would derogate from the powers of the High Court. In practice, Bills that conflict with Central laws on Concurrent List subjects are reserved so that they can seek the protection of Article 254(2).
- 2. Article 201 lets the President return a reserved Bill, but the final word stays with the President** — When a Bill is reserved, Article 201 allows the President to declare assent or to withhold it. For a Bill that is not a Money Bill, the President may direct the Governor to return it to the House with a message, and the House must reconsider it within six months of receiving it. If the House passes it again, it is presented once more for the President's consideration — and, unlike the Governor under Article 200, the President is not bound to assent. In *State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu* (2025), a two-judge Bench laid down timelines for Governors and a three-month period for the President to decide on reserved Bills; a later opinion of a Constitution Bench on a Presidential Reference under Article 143 held that courts cannot impose fixed timelines, while leaving room for limited judicial scrutiny of prolonged, unexplained inaction.
- 3. Article 254(2) is the gateway for a State law that conflicts with a Central law** — Article 254(1) says that if a State law on a Concurrent List matter is repugnant to a law made by Parliament, the Central law prevails and the State law is void to the extent of the repugnancy. Article 254(2) creates an exception: if the State law has been reserved for the President and received assent, it prevails in that State. The proviso allows Parliament to later amend, vary or repeal such a State law. In *Kaiser-I-Hind Pvt. Ltd. v. National Textile Corporation* (2002), the Supreme Court held that the protection extends only to repugnancy with those Central laws that were specifically placed before the President when assent was sought. That is why a State must identify the conflicting provision — here, according to the Chief Minister, the NDPS Act.
- 4. Goonda laws sit at the meeting point of State and Concurrent Lists and Article 22** — Public order (Entry 1) and police (Entry 2) are in the State List, but criminal law (Entry 1), criminal procedure (Entry 2) and preventive detention for reasons connected with the security of a State, the maintenance of public order or of essential supplies (Entry 3) are in the Concurrent List. Article 22(4) to (7) permits preventive detention but requires that detention beyond three months be approved by an Advisory Board, that grounds be communicated and that the detenu be allowed to make a representation.

	The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 is the Central law on drug offences, and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988 (PIT-NDPS) provides for preventive detention of traffickers. Several States have their own goonda or anti-social activities laws, such as Tamil Nadu's Act of 1982 and the Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 2007.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Centre-State legislative relations are a staple of GS2 — The syllabus asks about “functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States” and the distribution of powers. Questions on the Governor’s discretion in reserving Bills and on delays in assent have been asked in Mains, and the Tamil Nadu Governor judgment made assent timelines a live topic. A presidential return of a State Bill is a rarer event and shows the second stage of the same process. 2. Prelims tests the Articles and their exact wording — The difference between Articles 200 and 201, the six-month reconsideration period, whether the President is bound after reconsideration, and the effect of Article 254(2) with its proviso are classic Prelims material. The Concurrent List entry on preventive detention is also frequently tested alongside Article 22. 3. GS3 links this to organised crime and drugs — The GS3 syllabus covers linkages of organised crime with terrorism and the challenges of internal security. Drug trafficking laws, preventive detention under PIT-NDPS and State goonda Acts are the legal tools in this area, and their overlap is exactly what this Bill exposes.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 200, a Governor may assent to a State Bill, withhold assent, return a non-Money Bill for reconsideration, or reserve it for the consideration of the President. ● Under Article 201, the President may direct the Governor to return a reserved non-Money Bill to the State Legislature, which must reconsider it within six months; the President is not bound to assent even if the Bill is passed again. ● Under Article 254(2), a State law on a Concurrent List subject that is repugnant to a Central law prevails in that State if it has been reserved for and received the assent of the President. ● Parliament may, by a later law, amend, vary or repeal a State law that has received presidential assent under Article 254(2). ● Preventive detention for reasons connected with the security of a State, the maintenance of public order or the maintenance of essential supplies is Entry 3 of the Concurrent List. ● Under Article 22(4), no law providing for preventive detention can authorise detention beyond three months unless an Advisory Board reports sufficient cause. ● The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988 provides for the preventive detention of persons involved in drug trafficking.
ANALYSIS	1. A return for reconsideration is a correction, not a rejection — If the ET report is accurate, the President has chosen the milder of the two options under Article 201: rather than withholding assent outright, she has asked the Assembly to revisit one provision. That route allows the State to drop or rewrite the NDPS-related clause and send the rest of the Bill back. It also respects the Assembly’s role, since a flat refusal would have killed the entire Bill for one section. The State’s denial suggests that it would prefer to present the process as still open, which is politically understandable but does not change the constitutional route that follows either way.

	2. Making a Central offence non-bailable through a State law is exactly what Article 254(2) was designed to scrutinise — The Chief Minister's own explanation shows that the Bill changes the bail status of an offence created by Parliament. Bail is a core liberty question, and Parliament calibrated the NDPS Act's treatment of different quantities and offences. A State that wants tougher treatment within its borders can seek presidential assent, but the Union is entitled to ask whether such divergence creates uneven criminal law across States and whether it will be applied mainly to small users rather than traffickers. The counter-view is that States bear the policing burden of drug trade and should be allowed stronger tools, and that Andhra Pradesh and Kerala were given similar concurrence according to Mr. Adhikari. 3. Goonda Acts carry a long record of misuse, which justifies central caution — Preventive detention laws allow the State to confine a person without trial on the basis of an apprehension, and courts have repeatedly quashed detentions under State goonda Acts for being used against ordinary law-and-order cases or for political ends. Broad categories such as "cybercrime" and "public disorder" in a new Bill widen the set of people who can be labelled goondas. Presidential scrutiny is one of the few external checks before such a law comes into force. That check is valuable only if it examines the whole Bill, not merely the provision that triggers reservation. 4. The confusion itself points to a transparency gap in the assent process — A citizen cannot tell from public records whether a State Bill has been returned, is pending, or is awaiting comments from a Central ministry; the papers here disagree about a basic fact. The Tamil Nadu Governor litigation arose partly because delays were invisible. Publishing the status of Bills reserved for the President, with dates of receipt, ministries consulted and outcome, would cost little. It would also protect the Union from accusations of sitting on opposition-ruled States' Bills, and States from misreporting their own status.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Article 254(2) allows States to depart from Central laws on Concurrent List subjects, but only under the President's watch." Examine the role of the Governor and the President in the assent process for State Bills, with reference to recent developments on a State's anti-goonda legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Introduce the West Bengal Public Safety and Control of Anti-Social Activities Bill, 2026, its aims, and the two reported versions: returned by the President for reconsideration (ET) and pending with the Home Ministry (Chief Minister, as reported by IE). 2. Body — the constitutional route — Explain Articles 200 and 201, the six-month reconsideration period and the President's freedom after reconsideration. Explain Article 254(1) and (2), the proviso and Kaiser-I-Hind (2002) on the need to point out the conflicting Central law. 3. Body — the subject matter — Explain the Concurrent List entries on criminal law and preventive detention, Article 22 safeguards, the NDPS Act, 1985 and PIT-NDPS Act, 1988, and the concern about making a bailable NDPS offence non-bailable. 4. Body — federal balance — Discuss the Tamil Nadu Governor judgment and the Presidential Reference opinion on timelines, the risk of delay being used politically, and the case for publishing the status of reserved Bills. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that presidential scrutiny under Article 254(2) is a legitimate check for liberty-restricting laws, but it must be time-bound and transparent to remain a check rather than a veto.
ADMINISTRATOR'S	Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry examining a State Bill reserved for

BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

the President. How do you proceed?

Approach: I would identify every provision that conflicts with a Central law and seek comments from the ministries that administer those laws, here the Finance Ministry for the NDPS Act, within a fixed time. I would also examine the Bill for compliance with Article 22 and with Supreme Court judgments on preventive detention. The note to the President would set out options: assent, withholding, or return with specific suggestions. I would record dates at every stage so that any delay can be explained.

Q2. As a District Magistrate empowered under a new goonda Act, how would you prevent its misuse?

Approach: I would insist that every detention order rest on specific, recent and relevant material showing a threat to public order, not merely to law and order. I would ensure that grounds are served in a language the detenu understands and that the case goes to the Advisory Board on time. I would review orders personally and refuse routine proposals from police stations. A detention quashed by the High Court is a failure of the District Magistrate, not only of the police.

Q3. An interview board asks: should States be allowed to make drug offences harsher than the Central law?

Approach: States face the drug problem on the ground and may need stronger tools against trafficking networks. But uniform criminal law across the country is valuable, and harsher bail rules often fall on small users rather than kingpins. The Constitution already answers the question through Article 254(2): a State may diverge, but only with the President's assent and subject to Parliament's later override. I would support targeted divergence aimed at trafficking, not at consumption, with clear safeguards.

1.4 Karnataka Accuses Centre of Withholding ₹2,186.20 Crore in 15th Finance Commission Panchayat Grants Over Portal Gaps

THE NEWS Bengaluru. Karnataka's Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister, Eshwar B. Khandre, on Friday questioned the Centre's decision to withhold ₹2,186.20 crore in grants due to the State under the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission, alleging that Karnataka was being subjected to conditions not applied to Assam, Bihar, Gujarat and Uttarakhand, The Hindu reports. The Finance Commission is a constitutional body, appointed by the President every five years under Article 280, that recommends how tax revenue is shared between the Centre and States and what grants the Centre should give; since the 73rd Amendment it also recommends grants for panchayats, the elected village councils. The rule Mr. Khandre described is this: Finance Commission grants for gram panchayats are released by the Centre to the State, which must transfer them to the panchayats within 10 days; details of receipt are to be uploaded on the e-Gram Swaraj portal, the Panchayati Raj Ministry's online accounting platform for panchayats; if the State fails to transfer on time, the amount must be paid with interest. Karnataka, he said, received ₹2,133.25 crore for gram panchayats in 2024-25, while receipts of ₹1,907 crore were reflected on the portal. The difference of about ₹225 crore arose from technical issues, and the money had reached gram panchayats and been used for works. "Citing such a minor issue as a reason for withholding ₹2,186 crore is an injustice to Karnataka," he said. To show unequal treatment he cited other States, as reported: Uttarakhand received ₹470 crore for 2025-26 even though no receipts were reflected on the portal; Gujarat received ₹2,619 crore against portal receipts of ₹2,104 crore, a gap of ₹515 crore; Assam received ₹1,315 crore against ₹447 crore; and Bihar ₹4,109 crore against ₹1,775 crore. The paper does not state the years for the Gujarat, Assam and Bihar figures. "Why is a condition that is not being applied to Assam, Bihar, Gujarat and Uttarakhand being applied only to Karnataka?" he asked, calling it a "discriminatory policy". He made the remarks while responding to questions on the financial position of gram panchayats, attributing their shortage of funds to the Centre's approach. The Hindu does not carry a response from the Union government. The syllabus link is GS2 on fiscal federalism, the Finance Commission, and devolution of funds to local bodies.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 73rd Amendment (1992) makes panchayats constitutional but leaves their money dependent on State and Central transfers → Article 280(3)(bb) brings panchayat grants into the Finance Commission's remit → the 15th Finance

Commission attaches conditions on timely transfer, audited accounts and online reporting → the Centre uses portal data on e-Gram Swaraj to decide releases → Karnataka's receipts on the portal fall about ₹225 crore short and ₹2,186.20 crore is withheld, which the State calls selective treatment

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Article 280 creates the Finance Commission, and clause (3)(bb) extends it to panchayats** — Article 280 requires the President to constitute a Finance Commission every five years, or earlier if needed, consisting of a Chairman and four other members, whose qualifications are set by the Finance Commission (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1951. Under Article 280(3) it recommends the distribution of the net proceeds of taxes between the Union and the States, the principles governing grants-in-aid to States under Article 275, and other matters referred by the President. The 73rd Amendment inserted clause (3)(bb), asking the Commission to recommend measures to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of panchayats on the basis of the State Finance Commission's recommendations; the 74th Amendment added clause (3)(c) for municipalities. The Commission's recommendations are advisory, but by convention the Union accepts the core of them.
2. **Article 243-I requires every State to have its own Finance Commission for local bodies** — Under Article 243-I, the Governor must constitute a State Finance Commission every five years to review the financial position of panchayats and recommend how State taxes, duties, tolls and fees should be shared with them, which taxes panchayats may levy, and what grants-in-aid they should receive. Article 243H allows the State Legislature to authorise panchayats to levy and collect taxes and to provide grants to them. Article 243Y applies the same scheme to municipalities. Because the Union Finance Commission is meant to build on State Finance Commission reports, delays in constituting State Finance Commissions weaken the whole chain of devolution.
3. **The 15th Finance Commission tied most rural grants to water and sanitation and attached entry conditions** — The 15th Finance Commission, chaired by N.K. Singh, covered 2020-21 and the five years from 2021-22 to 2025-26. For rural local bodies it recommended grants of about ₹2.37 lakh crore for 2021-26, split into untied grants (40%), which panchayats can spend on locally felt needs other than salaries, and tied grants (60%), earmarked for drinking water supply and rainwater harvesting, and for sanitation and maintenance of open-defecation-free status. It made the release of grants conditional on panchayats placing their audited accounts online and, from a later year, on States constituting State Finance Commissions and acting on their recommendations. The Centre also requires States to pass the grants on to local bodies within ten days, with interest for delay. The e-Gram Swaraj portal is the Panchayati Raj Ministry's platform for panchayat planning, accounting and reporting, which is why receipts must show there.
4. **The 16th Finance Commission now shapes local-body transfers** — The 16th Finance Commission, chaired by Arvind Panagariya, was constituted to make recommendations for the five years beginning 1 April 2026, which means the 15th Commission's award period has ended and the present dispute concerns grants from its final years. Each Commission has to decide how much of local-body grants to tie to specific purposes and what conditions to impose. The experience of withheld grants and data mismatches under the 15th Commission is therefore directly relevant to how conditionality is designed under its successor.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS2 asks about the devolution of finances to local levels** — The syllabus names "devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein" and "fiscal federalism". Mains questions have asked why panchayats remain financially weak despite the 73rd Amendment and how State Finance Commissions have performed. This story is a live example of the conditional-grant model and the friction

	it creates. 2. Prelims tests the Articles on Finance Commissions — Articles 280, 243-I and 243Y, the composition of the Finance Commission, and the difference between tied and untied grants are recurrent Prelims topics. The chairpersons of recent Finance Commissions are also frequently tested. 3. Centre-State friction over transfers is a recurring theme — Karnataka has in recent years raised complaints about its share of central taxes and grants. Questions on cooperative versus competitive federalism can use this dispute to show how technical conditions become political grievances.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 280 of the Constitution provides for a Finance Commission to be constituted by the President every five years, consisting of a Chairman and four other members. - Article 280(3)(bb), inserted by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, requires the Finance Commission to recommend measures to augment a State's Consolidated Fund to supplement the resources of panchayats. - Under Article 243-I, the Governor of a State constitutes a State Finance Commission every five years to review the financial position of panchayats. - Article 243H empowers a State Legislature to authorise panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees. - The 15th Finance Commission was chaired by N.K. Singh, and the 16th Finance Commission by Arvind Panagariya. - Tied grants to local bodies can be spent only on specified purposes, whereas untied grants can be used for locally felt needs, except salaries and establishment costs. - e-Gram Swaraj is the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's online application for panchayat planning, accounting and progress reporting.
ANALYSIS	1. Conditionality is sound in principle; the dispute is about whether it is applied evenly — Tying grants to transfer deadlines and online reporting exists because money meant for panchayats has historically been parked in State treasuries. A rule that the State must pass the money on within ten days, or pay interest, protects panchayats against their own State government. Karnataka does not contest the rule; it contests its selective use. If Mr. Khandre's figures are correct, other States with much larger portal gaps received funds, which would make the withholding hard to defend. The Centre has not replied in the report, and its answer — perhaps that other States cleared different conditions, or that the figures relate to different years — is needed before judgment. 2. A data mismatch is being treated as a spending failure — The State says about ₹225 crore of receipts were not reflected because of technical issues, while the funds had reached panchayats and been spent. Withholding ₹2,186.20 crore for a reporting gap of about a tenth of that amount punishes the panchayats, which did nothing wrong, rather than the State officials responsible for data entry. A proportionate response would be to withhold only the unverified amount, or to allow a short window for reconciliation. Portal-based governance works only if the Centre accepts that data systems have glitches and builds in correction mechanisms. 3. The panchayats pay for every Centre-State quarrel — Mr. Khandre was answering questions about the poor financial position of gram panchayats, which shows who bears the cost. Panchayats have very limited own revenue; most depend on Finance Commission and State grants for drinking water, sanitation and basic works. When grants are withheld, contractors go unpaid and works stop, and the villager sees only

	an unfinished tank or drain. The constitutional design of the 73rd Amendment assumed that panchayats would be a third tier with assured funds, but in practice they remain the last link in a chain of discretionary releases. 4. The deeper fix is a stronger State Finance Commission, not a stricter portal — The Union Finance Commission is meant to build on State Finance Commission reports, yet many States constitute them late and implement them partially. If State devolution were predictable and formula-based, panchayats would depend less on Central releases that can be withheld over reporting issues. The counter-view is that Central conditionality is precisely what has forced States to constitute State Finance Commissions and publish panchayat accounts. Both are true, which is why the conditions should reward reform while avoiding punishing local bodies for State-level lapses.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Conditional grants to local bodies strengthen accountability but can weaken fiscal federalism.” Examine this statement with reference to the Finance Commission grants for panchayats. How can the design of such grants be improved? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Mention Karnataka’s allegation that ₹2,186.20 crore of 15th Finance Commission grants was withheld over a gap of about ₹225 crore between releases and receipts shown on the e-Gram Swaraj portal. 2. Body — the constitutional framework — Explain Article 280(3)(bb), Article 243-I and 243H, and the 15th Finance Commission’s tied and untied grants for rural local bodies with conditions on audited accounts, State Finance Commissions and transfer within ten days. 3. Body — accountability gains — Argue that conditions prevent States from parking panchayat money, create online accounts and have pushed States to constitute State Finance Commissions. 4. Body — federal costs — Discuss selective or disproportionate withholding, as alleged by Karnataka against the treatment of Assam, Bihar, Gujarat and Uttarakhand, punishment of panchayats for State lapses, and technical glitches treated as defaults. 5. Conclusion — Suggest proportionate withholding, reconciliation windows, published criteria, and stronger State Finance Commissions, so that the 16th Finance Commission’s grants combine accountability with predictability.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Panchayati Raj Secretary of Karnataka. The Centre has withheld grants over portal mismatches. What steps do you take? Approach: I would first reconcile every panchayat’s receipts with the treasury release data and upload the missing entries, documenting the technical issues with the portal team. I would then send the Union Ministry a reconciled statement showing that the funds reached panchayats, with bank records as proof. At the same time, I would take up the question of parity in writing, citing the treatment of other States. The priority is to release funds for panchayats quickly, not to win the argument. Q2. As a Zila Panchayat Chief Executive Officer, how would you ensure that grants are transferred and reported on time? Approach: I would set up a weekly review of fund flows from the State to each gram panchayat, with alerts when transfers exceed the ten-day limit. I would train panchayat secretaries on e-Gram Swaraj entries and have block-level staff verify uploads. Any delay would be escalated immediately to avoid interest liability. Clean data is now a condition for money, so data entry must be treated as a core duty. Q3. An interview board asks: should the Centre be able to withhold money meant for

panchayats because of a State's failure?

Approach: Withholding is a strong lever, and it has pushed States to pass funds on and publish accounts. But the burden falls on panchayats that did nothing wrong. A better design would release funds directly to panchayats where a State defaults, or charge interest to the State rather than stopping the grant. Accountability should fall on the level of government that failed.

1.5 Omar Abdullah Moves J&K Statehood Resolution Building on the 2000 Autonomy Resolution; BJP Tears Copies

THE NEWS Srinagar. J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday, the fourth day of the autumn session, moved a resolution in the Supplementary List of Business seeking full Statehood. It reads: "In addition to the Resolutions passed by this House on 26th June 2000 and 6th November 2024, this House calls upon the Government of India for the immediate and urgent restoration of full Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and resolves that this Resolution be forwarded to Government of India." The Hindu calls it "in continuation of the 2000 autonomy resolution". The Indian Express explains the two earlier texts: the June 2000 "Autonomy Resolution", passed with Farooq Abdullah as Chief Minister, asked the Centre to revert to the pre-1953 constitutional position, including the designations Wazir-e-Azam (Prime Minister) and Sadr-e-Riyasat (head of State); the November 2024 resolution, passed by voice vote with all parties except the BJP, sought dialogue for the "restoration of special status and constitutional guarantees". The Economic Times reports that the resolution also urged the Centre to reinstate J&K's constitutional position as it existed before August 9, 1953; the text quoted by The Hindu does not contain this line. Mr. Abdullah said it would "neither replace or subsume" the earlier ones, was "not an unconstitutional resolution", and was needed because the Cabinet's resolution was not considered the voice of the people. "We were promised a full state, and we want that returned," he said, rejecting a "half state" or "statehood without law and order"; ET quotes him recalling the Prime Minister's words, "yeh Modi ka waada hai" (this is Modi's promise), and saying the resolution reminds the Centre of promises made to Parliament and the Supreme Court. BJP legislators, led by Leader of the Opposition Sunil Sharma, tore copies of the resolution, entered the Well and climbed onto tables. Mr. Sharma said the BJP had "rejected and torn up" the autonomy resolution and that a "so-called autonomy, so-called resolution of 370" would not be admitted. Mr. Abdullah called all 29 BJP legislators a hurdle to Statehood. The Congress, CPI(M), PDP, Awami Ittehad Party and Peoples Conference backed it. Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather adjourned the House for half an hour, then for the day; ET says it next sits on September 28. A Union Territory is run by the Centre through a Lieutenant Governor, even with an elected Assembly. The syllabus link is GS2 on federalism, Article 3 and special provisions.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Article 370 and the 1952 Delhi Agreement give J&K wide autonomy, which is eroded after Sheikh Abdullah's dismissal on August 9, 1953 → the J&K Assembly passes the Autonomy Resolution on June 26, 2000, which the Centre rejects → in August 2019 Article 370 is rendered inoperative and the State is split into two Union Territories → the Supreme Court upholds this in December 2023 on the Centre's assurance that Statehood will be restored → an elected UT Assembly passes a special-status resolution in November 2024 and now demands full Statehood, amid BJP protests

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- Article 3 lets Parliament remake States, with only a consultative role for the State legislature** — Article 3 empowers Parliament, by ordinary law, to form a new State, increase or diminish the area of a State, and alter its boundaries or name. A Bill for this purpose can be introduced only on the President's recommendation, and where it affects a State, the President must refer it to that State's legislature for its views within a specified period; those views are not binding. Article 4 provides that such laws are not constitutional amendments under Article 368. Restoring Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir would therefore require an Act of Parliament amending the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, not a constitutional amendment. The Assembly's resolution has no legal force; it is a political request to the Union.
- The 2019 Reorganisation Act created a Union Territory with a legislature, on the Puducherry model** — The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 bifurcated the

State into the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, with a Legislative Assembly, and the Union Territory of Ladakh, without one. The Act applies Article 239A, which governs Puducherry, to the J&K UT, so it has an elected Assembly and a Council of Ministers but an administrator — the Lieutenant Governor — appointed by the President. The Assembly can legislate on State List subjects except public order and police, which remain with the Centre through the Lieutenant Governor. This is the “half state” that Mr. Abdullah rejects: an elected government without control of law and order.

3. **In Re Article 370 upheld the abrogation but recorded the Centre’s promise on Statehood** — In In Re: Article 370 of the Constitution (December 2023), a five-judge Constitution Bench upheld the Presidential Orders of August 2019 that applied the whole Constitution to Jammu and Kashmir and rendered Article 370 inoperative, holding that Article 370 was a temporary provision. It upheld the creation of the Union Territory of Ladakh. On the conversion of the State of Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory, the Court did not decide the question because the Solicitor General stated that Statehood would be restored, and it directed that Statehood be restored “at the earliest and as soon as possible”. It also directed the Election Commission to hold Assembly elections by September 30, 2024. The resolution’s appeal to promises made to the Supreme Court refers to this.
4. **The 2000 Autonomy Resolution looked back to the pre-1953 constitutional position** — The State Autonomy Committee, set up by the Farooq Abdullah government in the late 1990s, recommended restoring the constitutional relationship that existed before 1953, when only defence, foreign affairs and communications were with the Union under the Instrument of Accession. The Delhi Agreement of 1952 between Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah had confirmed this limited relationship. Sheikh Abdullah was dismissed as Prime Minister of the State on August 9, 1953, after which Central laws and constitutional provisions were progressively extended to J&K, beginning with the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954. The Assembly adopted the autonomy report on June 26, 2000, and the Union government rejected it the next month.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS2 asks about federalism, special provisions and Article 3** — The syllabus covers “functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure” and “comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries”. Mains has asked about asymmetric federalism and special provisions for certain States. The J&K Statehood debate is now the leading example of how Article 3 can be used to downgrade a State.
2. **Prelims tests Articles 3, 4 and 239A and the UT framework** — Questions on whether Article 3 changes are constitutional amendments, which Union Territories have legislatures, and what the Supreme Court held on Article 370 are all plausible. Knowing that Puducherry, Delhi and J&K are UTs with legislatures, under different provisions, is useful.
3. **This story has international salience** — Jammu and Kashmir’s status is watched abroad, especially by Pakistan and at multilateral forums. A functioning elected Assembly demanding Statehood through constitutional means is itself evidence of democratic normalisation, which India can point to, while disruption in the House is the opposite signal.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Under Article 3, a Bill to form a new State or alter the boundaries of an existing State can be introduced in Parliament only on the recommendation of the President.
- The views of a State legislature on a Bill under Article 3 are not binding on

Parliament.

- Under Article 4, laws made under Articles 2 and 3 are not deemed to be amendments of the Constitution for the purposes of Article 368.
- The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 created the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir with a legislature and the Union Territory of Ladakh without a legislature.
- Article 239A, which enables Parliament to create a legislature and council of ministers for Puducherry, was extended to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir by the 2019 Reorganisation Act.
- In *In Re Article 370* (2023), the Supreme Court upheld the rendering of Article 370 inoperative and directed that Statehood of Jammu and Kashmir be restored at the earliest.
- The Delhi Agreement of 1952 was concluded between Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah on the constitutional relationship of Jammu and Kashmir with the Union.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Linking Statehood to autonomy makes a consensus demand into a divisive one —** Restoration of Statehood is something the Prime Minister and the Supreme Court have both endorsed, and the BJP says it is “ready to discuss Statehood”. By tying the resolution to the 2000 Autonomy Resolution and the 2024 special-status resolution, the National Conference has given the BJP a reason to oppose it and to frame it as a return to Article 370. Mr. Abdullah’s argument is that a legislature should not disown its own past resolutions, which is a defensible point of consistency. The cost is that the resolution becomes about the pre-1953 position, which the Supreme Court’s 2023 judgment made legally unreachable, rather than about the Statehood that is legally and politically attainable.
- 2. The Assembly is using the one power it fully has — its voice —** As a Union Territory legislature under the 2019 Act, the Assembly cannot change J&K’s status, legislate on police or public order, or compel the Centre. A resolution forwarded to the Government of India is a record of the elected House’s will, and that is why Mr. Abdullah distinguishes it from a Cabinet resolution. This is not merely symbolic: when Parliament eventually amends the Reorganisation Act, the recorded view of the elected Assembly will be part of the political legitimacy of that change. The BJP’s demand that members vote rather than disrupt is, in fact, the same point from the other side.
- 3. “Full Statehood” is the substantive question, and “half state” is a live risk —** Mr. Abdullah’s rejection of “statehood without law and order” anticipates a possible outcome in which Statehood is restored but police and public order remain with the Centre for some period, similar to arrangements discussed for sensitive areas. A State without control of policing would be a new category not found in the Constitution for any State. The Centre’s security concerns in a border region are real, but they are already addressed by Union powers under Articles 355 and 356, central armed forces and laws such as AFSPA where applicable. The case for full Statehood is that a partial arrangement would keep the elected government accountable for outcomes it does not control.
- 4. The Supreme Court’s deferral has left the Union with a political, not legal, obligation —** In the Article 370 case the Court avoided deciding whether Parliament can convert a State into a Union Territory, relying on the Solicitor General’s statement. That creates a constitutional grey zone: if Statehood is not restored, the question the Court left open returns, and the precedent that a State can be reduced to a UT without its consent remains unsettled for every State. Timely restoration would close the question without a judicial test. Delay, by contrast, weakens the federal assurance that Article 3

	will not be used to downgrade a State's status.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The use of Article 3 to convert a State into a Union Territory raises questions about the federal character of the Indian Constitution." Discuss with reference to Jammu and Kashmir, and examine the constitutional route and challenges in restoring its Statehood. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that the J&K Assembly has seen a resolution seeking immediate restoration of full Statehood, moved by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in addition to the 2000 and 2024 resolutions, amid BJP protests. 2. Body — the constitutional framework — Explain Articles 3 and 4, the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, the application of Article 239A, and the reserved subjects of police and public order. 3. Body — the judicial position — Summarise In Re Article 370 (2023): abrogation upheld, Ladakh UT upheld, the question of converting a State into a UT not decided because of the Solicitor General's assurance, and the direction to restore Statehood at the earliest. 4. Body — challenges — Discuss the security argument, the risk of a "half state", the political conflict over linking Statehood with autonomy and special status, and the federal precedent for other States. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that restoring full Statehood through an Act of Parliament, with a timeline, would honour the Court's direction and strengthen the federal assurance, while autonomy demands should be separated from the Statehood question.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Chief Secretary of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. How would you prepare the administration for a possible restoration of Statehood? Approach: I would prepare a transition plan covering the transfer of police, public order and the related cadres, the division of assets and liabilities, and the legal changes needed in the Reorganisation Act. I would map every function currently exercised by the Lieutenant Governor that would move to the elected government. I would also work with the Home Ministry on coordination arrangements for counter-terrorism so that security does not suffer during transition. A planned handover reduces the argument that restoration must be delayed. Q2. As the Speaker of the Assembly, how would you handle a resolution that one side sees as a constitutional demand and the other as provocative? Approach: I would admit the resolution if it is within the rules, since a House can express its view on any matter of public importance. I would allot time for debate and insist that every member be heard, including those opposing it. Disruptions such as tearing papers or climbing tables would be dealt with under the rules, applied equally to all parties. My role is to protect the House's ability to decide, not to decide for it. Q3. An interview board asks: should a legislature pass resolutions it knows the Centre will not accept? Approach: A resolution records the will of the elected representatives and places it on the public record, which is a legitimate function of a legislature. It also puts the Centre on notice about the expectations of the people it governs directly. But resolutions that combine achievable demands with unachievable ones can reduce the chance of the achievable part being met. A wise legislature uses resolutions to build consensus, not only to state positions.

2. Economy

Today's economy stories are about the state writing its rules for the capital, ideas and infrastructure it needs. The new model investment treaty decides how far a foreign investor may drag India before an arbitrator, and draws the line at taxation. The borrowing calendar and the RBI Bulletin show a government keeping its fiscal promise while an oil shock pushes up yields and prices. A trade secrets law would protect the know-how that start-ups live on, and the mega-port list and NHAI's highway code decide how cheaply goods can move. In each case the hard part is setting the rule so that it guards the public interest without scaring off the investor.

2.1 Finance Ministry Sends New Model Investment Treaty to Cabinet, Keeping Taxation Outside Investor–State Arbitration

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 25. The Ministry of Finance has finished reviewing India's model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) and sent it to the Cabinet Secretariat, a senior official told The Indian Express; The Economic Times says the Cabinet is expected to take it up soon. A BIT is a treaty between two countries that sets the rules for investment by companies of one country in the other; under such treaties a foreign investor can take a sovereign government to international arbitration, a process called investor–State dispute settlement. A "model" BIT is the template India carries into negotiations. The official said pacts with four or five countries, including Canada, will be finalised soon under the new framework. After the inaugural Canada–India Finance Ministers' Economic and Financial Dialogue late last month, India declared its readiness to start BIT negotiations "at the earliest". India now follows a model approved in December 2015 and adopted in January 2016; about 20 to 25 BITs were signed on it, but in recent pacts, such as the one with the United Arab Emirates, "we have moved far away from it", and the new model will "absorb" those departures. The 2025-26 Budget had ordered a review to make it more investor-friendly. The sticking point is the rule that a foreign investor must pursue domestic legal remedies for five years before seeking international arbitration. Critics want it cut to one year or dropped; the government says the Indian judiciary has "stood the test of time" and "some red lines will not be crossed", though the 2024 UAE treaty cut the period to three years. The second red line is tax. "Tax will not go into the model BIT. It's our sovereign right to tax, and that can't be open to arbitration," the official said. The Indian Express notes that net FDI inflows were \$12 billion in the first six months of 2026, against \$3.1 billion in 2025 and \$2.9 billion in 2024, and far below \$53 billion in 2020. Separately, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told ICAI's first Oceania International Conference that India and Australia are working on a BIT and on widening their 2022 trade agreement into a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, and that the cross-border taxation problem faced by Indian IT firms had been "sorted out". New since the 23 September arbitration card: the Cabinet note. Syllabus: GS3 investment models and GS2 bilateral agreements.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Liberalisation brings a wave of BITs from 1994 → India loses White Industries (2011) and faces Vodafone and Cairn claims over retrospective tax → Model BIT 2015 narrows protections, requires five years of local remedies and old treaties are terminated → FDI slows and partners resist the model; the UAE deal (2024) cuts local remedies to three years → Budget 2025-26 orders a review → revised model goes to Cabinet with tax excluded, and four or five treaties including Canada queued behind it

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. A BIT is a treaty promise that a foreign investor can enforce against the State itself —**
A bilateral investment treaty obliges each State to give investors of the other State standards such as fair and equitable treatment, protection against expropriation without compensation, national treatment and free transfer of funds. Its distinctive feature is investor–State dispute settlement (ISDS): the private investor, not its home government, can sue the host State before an international tribunal, usually under UNCITRAL arbitration rules. This differs from State–State dispute settlement, as in the WTO, where only governments can bring claims. India is not a party to the ICSID Convention of the World Bank, so claims against India run under UNCITRAL rules, often administered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague.
- 2. The 2015 Model BIT was written to shrink India's exposure after costly arbitrations —**
Approved by the Cabinet in December 2015, the model adopts an enterprise-based definition of investment, so that only an enterprise legally constituted in the host State, with real business operations there, is protected, rather than any asset an

	investor holds. It drops the most-favoured-nation clause, which tribunals had used to import better terms from other treaties. It requires the investor to exhaust local remedies for at least five years before starting arbitration. It keeps measures relating to taxation outside the treaty's scope, and it replaces the open-ended fair and equitable treatment standard with a narrower list of prohibited conduct such as denial of justice and manifest arbitrariness. 3. White Industries, Vodafone and Cairn are the cases that changed India's treaty policy — In <i>White Industries v. India</i> (2011), an Australian company won because an ICC arbitral award in its favour against Coal India had been stuck in Indian courts for about nine years; the tribunal used the MFN clause to borrow an “effective means” obligation from the India–Kuwait BIT. The Vodafone and Cairn disputes arose from the 2012 amendment to the Income-tax Act that taxed indirect transfers of Indian assets retrospectively; tribunals under the India–Netherlands and India–UK BITs ruled against India in 2020. Parliament then passed the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021, which withdrew demands raised under the retrospective provision for transfers before 28 May 2012, on condition that the companies dropped litigation. These episodes are why tax is now a stated red line. 4. India terminated its old treaties and is now rebuilding the network one partner at a time — After adopting the 2015 model, India sent termination notices for most of its older BITs and proposed joint interpretative statements to others, so that new treaties could be negotiated on the new template. Terminated treaties carry sunset clauses that continue to protect investments made before termination for a fixed period, often 10 to 15 years. Since then India has signed only a few BITs, including with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the UAE (2024); the UAE treaty reduced the local-remedy period to three years. The India–EFTA trade agreement placed investment commitments inside a trade deal, while protection standards remain the domain of BITs.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 asks about investment models and the effects of liberalisation — The syllabus names “investment models” and the effects of liberalisation, and Mains has asked about FDI trends and the reasons for low investment. The BIT debate is a direct test of whether an aspirant understands that capital responds to legal certainty, not only to tax rates. A good answer places the model BIT alongside FDI policy, dispute resolution and contract enforcement. 2. Prelims tests the vocabulary of investment law and the institutions behind it — UPSC has asked about FDI versus FPI, the automatic and government routes, and bodies such as the World Bank Group. ISDS, MFN, national treatment, exhaustion of local remedies, ICSID and the Permanent Court of Arbitration are the natural next set. The retrospective-tax episode also appears in questions on tax certainty and the General Anti-Avoidance Rule. 3. GS2 links treaty design to sovereignty and India's bilateral relations — Questions on India's relations with Canada, Australia and the Gulf can use investment treaties as evidence of deepening ties. The Canada track is notable because political relations have been strained in recent years, and a BIT is a signal of normalisation. The sovereignty argument over tax is also a GS2 theme on the limits of international obligations.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under investor–State dispute settlement, a private foreign investor can directly bring a claim against the host State before an international arbitral tribunal, unlike WTO dispute settlement where only member governments can bring cases. ● India's Model Bilateral Investment Treaty text was approved by the Union Cabinet in December 2015 and requires a foreign investor to pursue domestic

remedies for at least five years before initiating international arbitration.

- The 2015 Model BIT uses an enterprise-based definition of investment and does not contain a most-favoured-nation clause.
- India is not a party to the ICSID Convention, the World Bank treaty that established the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.
- The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 withdrew tax demands raised under the 2012 retrospective amendment on indirect transfers of Indian assets made before 28 May 2012.
- The India–UAE Bilateral Investment Treaty signed in 2024 reduced the period for pursuing local remedies before arbitration from five years to three years.
- A sunset clause in a bilateral investment treaty continues to protect investments made before the treaty's termination for a specified number of years after termination.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Excluding tax changes less than the headline suggests, because the old model already did it** — The 2015 model already kept taxation measures outside its scope, so the official's red line is a continuation, not a new position. What matters is how the exclusion is worded. If India alone decides whether a measure is a "tax" measure, a partner will fear that expropriation can be dressed up as taxation, as investors argued in the Vodafone and Cairn disputes. The more credible design is a carve-out for genuine taxation with a joint determination by the two tax authorities, which protects India's power to tax while reassuring investors that the label cannot be abused. The counter-view is that any outside review of tax invites the next retrospective-tax fight, and the government has clearly chosen that side.
- 2. The five-year local-remedy clause is a judgement on India's courts, and investors read it that way** — The official defends the clause by saying the Indian judiciary has stood the test of time. Yet White Industries, the case that started this story, was lost precisely because an award sat in Indian courts for years. A foreign investor will count commercial-court backlogs, not constitutional reputation. Five years of litigation before arbitration can also leave an investor with a ruined asset, which is why the UAE got three. A defensible middle path is a shorter period with a guarantee that the local process will be decided within it, so that respect for the courts is paired with a clock.
- 3. The collapse in net FDI makes the review urgent but a treaty will not reverse it alone** — Net FDI of \$12 billion in the first half of 2026 is better than the \$3 billion of the previous two years but far below the \$53 billion of 2020. Net FDI is gross inflows minus repatriation by foreign investors and outward investment by Indian firms, so part of the fall reflects profitable exits and Indian companies investing abroad, not only lack of interest. Treaty protection matters most to long-horizon investors in infrastructure and manufacturing who fear regulatory change after they have sunk capital. But tax policy, tariff stability and contract enforcement at home matter as much. The treaty is a necessary signal, not a sufficient cause.
- 4. Absorbing the UAE-style departures into the model is an admission that the 2015 text did not work** — The official says the new model will absorb agreements where India "moved far away" from the old template. That means India's practice already diverged from its policy, and partners knew that the model was an opening bid rather than a floor. A model that no partner accepts weakens the negotiating position it was meant to strengthen. By aligning the model with what India actually signs, the government gains credibility and speed, which is why four or five treaties are said to be queued behind it.
- 5. Investment treaties and tax treaties solve different problems and should not be confused** — Mr. Goyal's remark that the cross-border taxation problem of Indian IT

	firms in Australia has been sorted out concerns double taxation, which is handled through a tax treaty and the mutual agreement procedure between tax authorities. A BIT, by contrast, protects an investor from unfair treatment by the host State. Keeping tax out of the BIT is coherent only if tax disputes have a working channel elsewhere, such as advance pricing agreements and mutual agreement procedures. The two instruments together, not the BIT alone, determine how safe a foreign investor feels.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“India’s investment treaty policy has swung from investor protection to regulatory sovereignty and is now seeking a balance.” Discuss with reference to the proposed revision of the Model Bilateral Investment Treaty. Should taxation and the exhaustion of local remedies remain red lines? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Define a BIT and ISDS in one line. State that the Finance Ministry has sent a revised model to the Cabinet, that four or five treaties including Canada are queued, and that tax exclusion and local remedies are the stated red lines. 2. Body — the swing — Trace the arc: BITs signed after 1994; White Industries (2011), Vodafone and Cairn (2020) awards; Model BIT 2015 with enterprise-based definition, no MFN, five-year local remedies and tax exclusion; termination of older treaties; the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021. 3. Body — the case for balance — Use the net FDI data (\$12 billion in the first half of 2026, \$53 billion in 2020) and the UAE treaty’s three-year period to show why partners resisted. Explain that the new model absorbs such departures and that the Budget 2025-26 sought an investor-friendly review. 4. Body — the red lines — Argue that tax exclusion is defensible if paired with joint determination and working tax-dispute channels. Argue that local remedies are defensible only with a shorter, time-bound process, citing commercial-court delays. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that a credible model is one partners can sign without extensive renegotiation, and that the best guarantee for investors is a faster domestic justice system, which also reduces India’s arbitration exposure.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Joint Secretary negotiating a BIT, the partner insists on dropping the local-remedy clause entirely. What do you offer? Approach: I would hold that the host State’s courts must get the first chance, but offer to shorten the period to around three years, as in the UAE treaty. I would add a clause that if the domestic proceedings are not concluded within that period, the investor may proceed to arbitration. I would also offer early consultation and mediation windows. This protects the principle while answering the partner’s real fear, which is indefinite delay. Q2. A State government cancels a foreign-owned mining lease citing environmental violations, and the company threatens treaty arbitration. What should the Chief Secretary do? Approach: First, ensure that the cancellation followed the law, with notice, hearing and a reasoned order, because procedural fairness is the heart of most treaty claims. Second, inform the Department of Economic Affairs, which coordinates India’s treaty defence, and preserve every record. Third, offer the company the statutory appeal route so that local remedies are available and used. A defensible, well-documented decision is the State’s best protection before any tribunal. Q3. An interview board asks: is it fair for India to refuse arbitration on tax when it asks investors to trust its courts? Approach: Taxation is the core of sovereignty, and no major economy lets foreign

tribunals set its tax policy. The fairness problem arises only when tax is used retroactively or arbitrarily, as in 2012. India's answer should be to guarantee tax certainty through law, advance rulings and the mutual agreement procedure, rather than through investment arbitration. Refusing arbitration is fair if the domestic system is itself fair and fast.

2.2 Centre Trims FY27 Borrowing to ₹15.99 Lakh Crore as RBI Flags War-Driven Inflation Risk

THE NEWS New Delhi and Mumbai, September 25. The Centre has cut its gross market borrowing for 2026-27 to ₹15.99 lakh crore, ₹1.2 lakh crore below the budget estimate of ₹17.2 lakh crore, the borrowing calendar for the second half shows, The Economic Times reports. Gross borrowing is the total raised through government bonds; net borrowing is what remains after repaying bonds that fall due, and it is net borrowing that finances the fiscal deficit. After the Reserve Bank of India's switch auctions, in which the government swaps bonds maturing soon for longer-dated ones, gross borrowing had already been reduced to about ₹16.09 lakh crore, with ₹8.2 lakh crore, or 51%, planned for the first half. An official told PTI the cut mainly reflects switching ₹1.14 lakh crore of 2026-27 maturities. In October-March the Centre will raise ₹7.86 lakh crore through dated securities, including ₹15,000 crore of sovereign green bonds, over 23 weekly auctions, in tenors from 3 to 50 years; a greenshoe option allows retaining up to ₹2,000 crore extra per security. Treasury bills will raise ₹23,000 crore a week for 13 weeks in the third quarter, and the Ways and Means Advances limit is ₹50,000 crore for the half. "Net market borrowings (market borrowings for fiscal deficit financing) are kept at budget levels," said Department of Economic Affairs Secretary Anuradha Thakur, despite "incipient fiscal pressures"; the FY27 fiscal deficit target is 4.3% of GDP. Longer tenors will lift the weighted average maturity and cut rollover risk, she said. The 10-year yield closed at 7.1194% on Friday, rising for a sixth straight week, after touching 7.14%, its highest since May 20. The RBI's monthly Bulletin, reported by The Hindu, said the economy stayed resilient, but the escalation of conflict in West Asia in September sharply raised crude prices, reviving inflation concerns; headline CPI inflation picked up in August and core inflation excluding precious metals rose from ultra-low levels. It put reserves at a record \$766 billion on September 18, cover for 11.2 months of goods imports; ET and IE report the same figure as a fall of nearly \$15 billion in that week from a \$785 billion peak. The RBI also withdrew a planned 15-month window for realising export proceeds, keeping nine months from October 1. An Indian Express editorial says the mix "should tilt the scales towards tighter policy". Syllabus: GS3 mobilisation of resources and monetary policy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

West Asia conflict escalates in September and crude prices jump → inflation risk returns and global bond yields rise, pushing India's 10-year yield above 7.1% → Centre uses switch auctions to cut gross borrowing by ₹1.2 lakh crore while keeping net borrowing and the 4.3% deficit target unchanged → RBI defends the rupee, drawing down reserves and shortening the export-proceeds window → agencies and editorials expect the MPC to tilt towards a rate hike

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Gross borrowing is a debt-management choice while net borrowing is a fiscal one —** The fiscal deficit is the excess of total expenditure over revenue receipts and non-debt capital receipts, and it is financed mainly by net market borrowing through dated securities. Gross borrowing adds the repayment of maturing bonds to net borrowing. Switch operations, which exchange near-term bonds for longer ones, and buybacks reduce repayments due in a year, so gross borrowing can fall without any change in the deficit. This is why the government can cut gross borrowing by ₹1.2 lakh crore while saying net borrowing is unchanged.
- 2. Dated securities and Treasury bills are the two instruments of Central government debt —** Dated government securities are long-term bonds with maturities typically from 2 to 50 years, carrying a fixed or floating coupon. Treasury bills are short-term, zero-coupon instruments issued at a discount in 91-day, 182-day and 364-day tenors. Ways and Means Advances are temporary overdrafts from the RBI to cover mismatches between receipts and payments, provided under Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934, with limits fixed by the RBI in consultation with the government. Sovereign green bonds, first issued in 2023 under a framework notified in 2022, raise money

	earmarked for eligible green projects. 3. The RBI is the government's debt manager by statute, and the FRBM Act sets the fiscal rules — Under Sections 20 and 21 of the RBI Act, 1934, the RBI transacts the Central government's banking business and manages its public debt; Section 21A lets it do the same for State governments by agreement. The Government Securities Act, 2006 governs the issue and transfer of G-secs. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 required the Centre to reduce its fiscal deficit to 3% of GDP, and its 2018 amendment made debt the main anchor with a 40% of GDP target for the Centre. Critics of the dual role argue that the RBI's interest as debt manager, wanting low yields, can conflict with its role as inflation-targeter, which is why an independent Public Debt Management Agency has been proposed several times. 4. The MPC sets the policy rate to hit a statutory inflation target — The RBI Act was amended in 2016 to create flexible inflation targeting. Under Section 45ZA the Central government, in consultation with the RBI, fixes the inflation target once every five years; it has been set at 4% CPI inflation with a tolerance band of 2% to 6%. Under Section 45ZB the six-member Monetary Policy Committee, three from the RBI including the Governor, who has a casting vote, and three external members appointed by the Centre, decides the repo rate. If inflation stays outside the band for three consecutive quarters, the RBI must report to the government the reasons and the remedial action.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 asks about government budgeting and the mobilisation of resources — Mains has asked about fiscal consolidation, the FRBM framework and the link between public debt and growth. This story lets an aspirant distinguish gross and net borrowing, explain switches, and connect deficit financing to bond yields and crowding out, the process in which government borrowing raises interest rates and squeezes private investment. 2. Prelims repeatedly tests monetary and fiscal definitions — UPSC has asked about Treasury bills, Ways and Means Advances, the MPC's composition, the inflation target and the difference between revenue, fiscal and primary deficits. Sovereign green bonds and the greenshoe option are newer terms likely to appear. Questions on foreign exchange reserves and their components also recur. 3. The external sector links an oil shock to domestic policy — Questions on the impact of global crude prices on the current account, the rupee and inflation are a steady feature. The RBI's tightening of the export-proceeds window, its forex intervention and the reserve cover of 11.2 months of imports give current examples of external-sector management.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Net market borrowing of the Central government, not gross borrowing, finances the fiscal deficit; gross borrowing also includes repayment of maturing securities. ● Treasury bills in India are zero-coupon instruments issued at a discount in 91-day, 182-day and 364-day tenors. ● Ways and Means Advances from the RBI to the Central government are temporary advances to meet mismatches in receipts and payments, provided under Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934. ● Under Section 45ZA of the RBI Act, 1934, the Central government, in consultation with the RBI, determines the inflation target once every five years. ● The Monetary Policy Committee constituted under Section 45ZB of the RBI Act has six members, and the RBI Governor has a casting vote in case of a tie. ● A switch operation exchanges government securities maturing in the near term

	for securities of longer maturity, reducing rollover risk without changing the fiscal deficit. ● Under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, the RBI prescribes the period within which exporters must realise and repatriate the full value of exports.
ANALYSIS	1. The borrowing cut is debt management, not fiscal tightening — The ₹1.2 lakh crore reduction comes mainly from switching ₹1.14 lakh crore of this year's maturities into later years. The government still needs the same net amount to fund a 4.3% deficit; it has pushed repayment into the future. That is prudent when the calendar is bunched, and it lowers supply in a weak bond market. But it is not a sign that the deficit is shrinking, and a reader who treats it as fiscal consolidation has misread the numbers. The honest claim, which Ms. Thakur makes, is that net borrowing has not risen despite pressure. 2. Long tenors lock in high costs, and that is a deliberate trade-off — Borrowing at 30, 40 and 50 years raises the weighted average maturity and cuts rollover risk, the danger of having to refinance large sums at a bad moment. The price is that the government borrows long when yields are at a four-month high above 7.1%, locking in expensive money for decades. If inflation and yields fall later, short-term borrowing would have been cheaper. Debt managers accept this cost as insurance, and insurance is worth buying when war, oil and global yields are all uncertain. The counter-view is that long bonds suit insurers and pension funds, so supply at the long end is also meeting natural demand. 3. The reserve figure is being described two ways, and both are true — The Hindu quotes the RBI Bulletin calling \$766 billion a record, while ET and IE report a fall of nearly \$15 billion in a week from a \$785 billion peak. The difference is timing: the level is high because FCNR(B) deposits under the special scheme swelled it, and the weekly fall reflects the RBI selling dollars to hold the rupee near 96. Reserves built from deposits that must be repaid are borrowed buffers, not earned surpluses. The cover of 11.2 months of imports is comfortable, but the direction of the weekly numbers matters more for markets than the level. 4. Shortening the export-proceeds window is capital-flow management by another name — By reverting from 15 months to 9 before the relaxation took effect, the RBI forces exporters to bring dollars home sooner, adding supply to the currency market. It is a quiet tool that avoids raising interest rates or spending reserves. The cost falls on exporters, especially small ones selling on long credit to overseas buyers, whose working capital tightens just as the editorial credits a weak rupee for 17.8% export growth. A regulator reversing a notified rule before it starts also dents predictability, which is the currency of good regulation. 5. The case for a rate hike is strong but not settled — S&P Global expects inflation to average 5.1% and a 25 basis-point hike, the OECD projects temporary rate increases, and the Bulletin confirms rising headline and core inflation. A hike would support the rupee and anchor expectations. Against this, the inflation is largely an imported supply shock from oil, which monetary policy cannot reverse, and growth is expected to slow in the second half as tax-cut tailwinds fade. The MPC's mandate is flexible inflation targeting, so the choice depends on whether it sees second-round effects spreading into wages and core prices; the Bulletin's note on core inflation suggests they have begun.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Keeping net borrowing at budgeted levels while an external shock raises yields and inflation tests the coordination of fiscal and monetary policy." Examine this statement in the context of India's revised borrowing programme for 2026-27 and the RBI's recent

	assessment of the economy. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that the Centre has cut gross borrowing to ₹15.99 lakh crore from ₹17.2 lakh crore while keeping net borrowing and the 4.3% deficit target, as the RBI Bulletin warns that the West Asia conflict has revived inflation risk. 2. Body — fiscal side — Explain gross versus net borrowing, the role of switches (₹1.14 lakh crore), long tenors to raise the weighted average maturity, sovereign green bonds and the greenshoe option. Link to the FRBM Act and crowding out as yields cross 7.1%. 3. Body — monetary and external side — Discuss rising headline and core CPI, the MPC's mandate under Section 45ZA and 45ZB, the reserves at \$766 billion with a weekly fall, rupee defence near 96 and the shortened export-proceeds window. 4. Body — coordination — Argue that the RBI's twin roles as debt manager and inflation-targeter can pull in different directions; cite the case for a Public Debt Management Agency and the risk that a hike raises borrowing costs. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that credibility on the deficit gives the MPC room to act on inflation, and that the policy mix should protect the inflation target while using debt-management tools to smooth the fiscal cost.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Joint Secretary (Budget), would you advise cutting capital expenditure to reduce borrowing further? Approach: I would advise against cutting capex, which has grown almost 30% in April-July and supports growth when private investment is cautious. The better levers are rationalising revenue spending, improving disinvestment and non-tax receipts, and using switches and buybacks to manage the maturity profile. Cutting capex to please bond markets would trade a small saving in yields for a larger loss in growth. Fiscal credibility comes from meeting the deficit target, not from shrinking investment. Q2. An MSME exporters' association complains that the nine-month repatriation rule will squeeze its working capital. How do you respond as a regulator? Approach: I would explain that the rule strengthens dollar supply at a time of pressure on the rupee and that nine months was the standard period before the relaxation was notified. I would examine genuine cases of long-credit sales and allow extensions through authorised dealer banks on documented grounds. I would also work with banks to expand export credit in foreign currency. The aim is to protect the currency without punishing exporters who are not holding dollars abroad by choice. Q3. An interview board asks: should the RBI raise rates when inflation is driven by imported oil? Approach: Monetary policy cannot bring down the world oil price, but it can stop an oil shock from becoming a general rise in prices and wages. If core inflation is rising and inflation expectations are drifting up, a measured hike is justified. If the shock stays confined to fuel and food, the MPC can look through it for a while. The judgement depends on second-round effects, which is why the Bulletin's observation on core inflation matters.

2.3 DPIIT Revisits a Dedicated Trade Secrets Law, Weighing Whistleblower Protection Against Compliance Burden

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 25. India will soon begin consultations with industry, including start-ups, on provisions to protect whistleblowers and enforce contracts as it revisits the drafting of a trade secrets law, The Economic Times reports. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has begun consultations on a dedicated law to protect unpatented inventions currently covered by contract law. A trade secret is commercially valuable information, such

as a formula, a process, a customer list or source code, that a business keeps confidential rather than publishing in a patent. At present, trade secrets are protected through a combination of court precedents and legislation, chiefly the Indian Contract Act, 1872, which gives recourse when a non-disclosure agreement is breached, sensitive information is exposed or private information is disclosed inappropriately. Officials said some start-ups and industry participants raised concerns about a higher compliance burden, contract enforcement and the balance between trade secret protection and whistleblower rights. The fear is that a strict secrecy law could silence an insider who exposes wrongdoing. "There is a thinking in some parts of the government that no separate law is needed to ensure contract fulfilment and the extant Indian Contract Act, 1872, can be amended to achieve that aim but industry has concerns," an official said. "While some startups have concerns about a higher compliance burden under a new law, some established firms have issues about how the contracts will be fulfilled," the official added. The US, the UK, Japan, China and the EU already have dedicated laws. An intellectual property expert told the paper that such a law could include a digital timestamp proving that the owner and the regulator held a specific piece of confidential data at an exact date and time without revealing its contents, with the government maintaining a repository of such documents. The law could be simple, without detailed compliance requirements or return filings, the expert said. A trade secret grants no legal monopoly; it guards against unauthorised disclosure, improper use or acquisition of confidential information. Unlike patents, copyright and trademarks, which are limited to a fixed period, trade secrets can be protected in perpetuity so long as confidentiality is maintained. The syllabus link is GS3 on intellectual property rights and the start-up ecosystem.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India's IPR law covers patents, copyright and trademarks but leaves confidential know-how to contracts and equity → start-ups and technology firms, whose value lies in unpatented know-how, face weak remedies when employees or partners leak it → TRIPS Article 39 obligations and foreign partners press for clearer protection → the Law Commission recommends a dedicated statute → DPIIT revisits the draft, with whistleblower protection and compliance burden as the open questions

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. TRIPS Article 39 obliges India to protect undisclosed information but not to write a separate statute** — The WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) deals with "undisclosed information" in Article 39. It requires members to allow persons to prevent information lawfully in their control from being disclosed, acquired or used by others without consent in a manner contrary to honest commercial practices. The information qualifies if it is secret, has commercial value because it is secret, and has been subject to reasonable steps to keep it secret. Article 39 also protects test data submitted to regulators for approval of pharmaceutical and agricultural chemical products against unfair commercial use. TRIPS leaves each member free to choose the legal method, so India's reliance on contract and equity is not itself a violation.
- 2. India protects trade secrets through contract, equity and a few scattered statutes** — Indian courts protect confidential information through claims for breach of contract under the Indian Contract Act, 1872, and through the equitable action for breach of confidence, which applies even without a contract when information is imparted in confidence. Section 27 of the Contract Act makes agreements in restraint of trade void, so post-employment non-compete clauses are generally unenforceable, while confidentiality obligations can be enforced. Courts grant injunctions under the Specific Relief Act, 1963 to stop misuse. There is no criminal offence of trade secret theft as such, and there is no statutory definition of a trade secret.
- 3. The Law Commission has recommended a standalone trade secrets law** — The 22nd Law Commission of India, in its 289th Report on trade secrets and economic espionage submitted in 2024, recommended a separate law on the subject and attached a draft bill. It proposed a statutory definition of trade secrets, civil remedies such as injunctions and damages, and exceptions including disclosure in the public interest. The report treated a dedicated statute as a way to give certainty to businesses and to align India with practice in major economies. Its recommendations are advisory and require legislation to take effect.

	4. India's whistleblower law covers public servants, not private employees — The Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 provides a mechanism to receive complaints of corruption or wilful misuse of power against public servants and to protect those who make such disclosures, with the Central Vigilance Commission as a competent authority for many cases. It does not cover disclosures by employees of private companies about corporate wrongdoing. An amendment bill introduced in 2015 to restrict disclosures touching national security and other sensitive matters was not enacted. The National Intellectual Property Rights Policy, 2016, anchored in DPIIT, set the aim of a strong and effective IPR framework and brought all IP laws under a single department.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 asks about IPR, innovation and the start-up economy — The syllabus includes issues relating to intellectual property rights. Mains has asked about India's IPR regime, the balance between patents and access to medicines, and the conditions for innovation. A trade secrets law is a fresh angle: it protects innovators who choose not to patent, which is common in software and process industries. 2. Prelims tests the architecture of IP protection — UPSC has asked about the terms of patents and copyright, geographical indications, TRIPS provisions and the National IPR Policy. The distinction between a trade secret, which lasts as long as secrecy holds and gives no monopoly, and a patent, which is published and lasts 20 years, is a classic statement-type question. 3. The ethics paper tests whistleblowing and loyalty — GS4 has asked about whistleblowing, conflicts between organisational loyalty and public interest, and corporate governance. A trade secrets law with a public-interest exception is a concrete example of how law tries to reconcile confidentiality with accountability.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 39 of the WTO TRIPS Agreement deals with the protection of undisclosed information, including trade secrets and test data submitted to regulators. - Under TRIPS Article 39, information is protected if it is secret, has commercial value because it is secret, and has been subject to reasonable steps to keep it secret. - India has no dedicated statute on trade secrets; protection rests on the Indian Contract Act, 1872, the equitable doctrine of breach of confidence and judicial precedents. - Section 27 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872 declares agreements in restraint of lawful trade, profession or business void, subject to a limited exception for the sale of goodwill. - A trade secret confers no exclusive right against independent discovery or reverse engineering and can last indefinitely so long as confidentiality is maintained. - The Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 applies to disclosures about corruption or misuse of power by public servants. - The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is the nodal department for the National Intellectual Property Rights Policy, 2016.
ANALYSIS	1. The real case for a law is certainty, not new rights — Indian courts already protect confidential information through contract and equity, so a statute would not create protection from nothing. What it would add is a definition, predictable remedies and a clear list of exceptions. A start-up negotiating with a large investor or a foreign partner can then point to a statute rather than a line of judgments that vary across High Courts. The officials who say the Contract Act could simply be amended miss that

breach of confidence reaches third parties who never signed a contract, which contract law alone cannot do well.

- 2. Whistleblower protection is the test of whether the law protects innovation or secrecy** — A trade secrets law without a clear public-interest exception could let a company sue an employee who reports unsafe drugs, falsified emissions data or financial fraud. India's whistleblower statute protects only those who report on public servants, so private-sector employees have no general shield. The law should say plainly that disclosure of wrongdoing to a regulator or the police is not misappropriation. The counter-view from firms is that a broad exception invites employees to leak and later claim to be whistleblowers; the answer is to protect disclosure to authorities, not to the press or competitors.
- 3. The start-ups' fear of compliance is well founded and points to a light design** — The expert's suggestion of a simple law without return filings recognises that small firms cannot afford compliance departments. A registration-style regime would also defeat the point of secrecy, since trade secrets are valuable precisely because nobody registers them. The timestamp repository is useful as optional proof of possession at a date, not as a condition for protection. If the law makes protection depend on paperwork, large firms will benefit and start-ups will be left behind.
- 4. Employee mobility is the hidden stake** — Section 27 of the Contract Act makes post-employment non-compete clauses largely void, which keeps India's labour market for skilled workers mobile and has helped its technology sector. A trade secrets law must not become a back door to non-competes by treating general skill and experience as secrets. The line drawn in mature systems is that an employee may use general knowledge but not specific confidential information. Getting that line right protects both firms and the careers of workers.
- 5. Economic espionage and national security raise the stakes beyond commerce** — Confidential know-how in semiconductors, defence components and pharmaceuticals is a strategic asset, and theft by foreign actors is a security concern. A civil-only regime offers weak deterrence against organised espionage. There is an argument for a criminal offence for serious, deliberate theft, but criminal provisions invite misuse in ordinary commercial disputes. A calibrated law would reserve criminal sanctions for wilful theft for the benefit of foreign entities, leaving ordinary disputes to civil remedies.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"India protects patents, copyright and trademarks by statute but leaves trade secrets to contracts and courts." Examine the case for a dedicated trade secrets law in India. How should such a law balance the interests of innovators, employees and whistleblowers? (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Define a trade secret and state that DPIIT is revisiting a draft law, with consultations on whistleblower protection, contract enforcement and compliance burden.
- 2. Body — present position** — Explain protection through the Indian Contract Act, 1872, breach of confidence and injunctions, the effect of Section 27 on non-competes, and TRIPS Article 39. Note that the US, UK, Japan, China and the EU have dedicated laws.
- 3. Body — case for a law** — Argue for certainty through a statutory definition, remedies against third parties, protection for start-ups' unpatented know-how and deterrence against economic espionage. Mention the Law Commission's recommendation of a standalone law.
- 4. Body — balancing** — Discuss a clear public-interest exception for disclosures to authorities, protection of employees' general skills, a light compliance design with an

optional timestamp repository, and calibrated criminal sanctions.

- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that a short, principle-based law with strong exceptions would protect innovation without chilling employee mobility or accountability.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As a DPIIT officer drafting the law, a large industry body wants criminal penalties for any unauthorised disclosure. What do you do?

Approach: I would limit criminal penalties to wilful theft or theft for the benefit of a foreign entity, where civil remedies are inadequate. Ordinary disputes between employers and former employees should remain civil, since criminal provisions are easily used to intimidate. I would add explicit exceptions for disclosures to regulators and investigating agencies. The law's purpose is to protect innovation, not to criminalise job changes.

Q2. A pharmaceutical company employee in your district tells you, as DM, that the firm is falsifying quality data, but fears being sued for breach of confidentiality. How do you respond?

Approach: I would receive the complaint formally and forward it to the drug regulator and the State drugs controller for inspection, keeping the employee's identity confidential. I would advise the employee that disclosure of wrongdoing to a statutory authority is in the public interest and is defensible. Public health requires that such information reach regulators quickly. I would also ensure the inspection is independent, so that the complaint is tested on facts.

Q3. An interview board asks: why should a start-up keep a secret rather than file a patent?

Approach: A patent gives a 20-year monopoly but requires full public disclosure and is costly to obtain and defend. A trade secret costs little and can last indefinitely, but it offers no protection if a competitor discovers the same thing independently or reverse-engineers it. Processes and algorithms that cannot be seen in the final product suit secrecy; products that can be taken apart suit patents. Many firms use both for different parts of the same technology.

2.4 Four Ports Named India's First 'Mega Ports'; NHAI Codifies Design for 50,000-km Expressway Network

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 25. The Centre has notified four "mega ports", a first-of-its-kind classification for the sector, The Economic Times reports. In a gazette notification issued on Friday, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways listed the major ports of Deendayal (Kandla) and Jawaharlal Nehru (Nhava Sheva) in the west, Paradip in Odisha, and Adani Group's Mundra Port in Gujarat, the fourth and the only private-sector-owned asset on the list. Major ports are governed by the Central government; non-major ports fall to the States. The mega port status will be valid for five years, and it rests on a July 30 gazette notification that defined the criteria for the category; the report does not state the criteria. On the same day The Indian Express reported that the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued detailed guidelines on the design, standards and specifications of high-speed corridors, also known as access-controlled national highways or expressways. These are special sections of national highways that provide uninterrupted, end-to-end travel. Until now, consultants have prepared detailed project reports (DPRs) on varying standards. India targets 50,000 km of high-speed corridors by 2036-37 under Vision 2047; the length stood at 3,052 km in December 2025. Traffic assessment must include existing, generated, induced and diverted traffic, validated against toll transactions, while freight and the vehicle damage factor, a measure of how much wear a vehicle causes the road, are to be checked against GST portal and mining department data. Lane width depends on traffic measured in passenger car units (PCU), which convert trucks, buses and two-wheelers into car equivalents: up to 15,000 PCU means a four-lane highway with four-lane structures; 15,000 to 25,000 PCU means a four-lane highway with six-lane structures such as bridges; 25,000 to 40,000 PCU means a six-lane highway with six-lane structures. There shall be no at-grade intersection, and access will be only through designed ramps. Underpasses may be 4.50 metres high where harvesters and loaded tractors operate; built-up sections get service roads on

both sides with a drain-cum-footpath. Layouts must provide for multi-lane free flow (MLFF), or barrier-less, tolling, and a one-metre reinforced cement concrete wall will run along the outer edge of the right of way, the land legally held for the highway, to prevent encroachment. Median drip irrigation and tree plantation are built into the DPR. The syllabus link is GS3 infrastructure: ports, roads and logistics.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

High logistics costs weaken the competitiveness of Indian goods → Sagarmala, Bharatmala and PM Gati Shakti push integrated port and road investment → port governance is reformed through the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021 and new port legislation, while expressways are built on uneven, consultant-driven standards → the Centre defines “mega port” criteria on July 30 and names four ports, including private Mundra → NHAI issues one design code for a planned 50,000-km high-speed network

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Constitution splits port governance between the Union and the States** — Entry 27 of the Union List covers ports declared by or under law made by Parliament to be major ports, including their delimitation and the constitution and powers of port authorities. Entry 31 of the Concurrent List covers ports other than major ports, which are administered by State maritime boards. This is why a private port such as Mundra, a non-major port in Gujarat, sits in a different legal regime from Kandla or JNPA. A mega port label that spans both categories is therefore a performance classification, not a change in legal status.
- 2. Major ports are now run by port authorities under the 2021 Act** — The Major Port Authorities Act, 2021 replaced the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 and converted port trusts into Boards of Major Port Authority with greater autonomy to fix tariffs, raise funds and use land. The Tariff Authority for Major Ports was abolished, and tariffs for public-private partnership projects are set by the market with an adjudicatory board for disputes. The Indian Ports Act, 1908 was replaced by new legislation in 2025 that provides for coordinated planning of major and non-major ports, including a council of the Centre and coastal States. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways oversees the sector.
- 3. Sagarmala, Gati Shakti and the National Logistics Policy form one logistics strategy** — The Sagarmala programme, approved in 2015, aims at port-led development through port modernisation, port connectivity, port-linked industrialisation and coastal community development. The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, launched in October 2021, is a GIS-based digital platform that brings ministries together to plan infrastructure jointly. The National Logistics Policy of September 2022 aims to reduce logistics costs to global benchmarks and to improve India's ranking in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index. Together they treat ports, roads, railways and warehouses as a single network.
- 4. NHAI builds national highways under a 1988 statute and the Bharatmala programme** — The National Highways Authority of India was constituted under the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988 and became operational in 1995; it develops, maintains and manages national highways entrusted to it. The National Highways Act, 1956 empowers the Centre to declare national highways and acquire land for them under Section 3A. Bharatmala Pariyojana, approved in 2017, is the umbrella programme for economic corridors, expressways and border and coastal roads. Land for highways must be acquired with compensation governed by the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, which applies to acquisitions under the 1956 Act.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 lists infrastructure — ports, roads and airports — by name** — Mains has asked about port-led development, the role of Sagarmala, logistics costs and public-private partnerships in infrastructure. A question on whether India's infrastructure push is improving competitiveness can use both stories: port classification and highway

	standardisation are two sides of the same cost problem. 2. Prelims tests schemes, statutes and constitutional entries — UPSC has asked about Sagarmala, Bharatmala, PM Gati Shakti and the location of ports. The split between major and non-major ports under the Seventh Schedule and the replacement of port trusts by port authorities are likely statement questions. Location-based questions on Paradip, Kandla and Nhava Sheva are also common. 3. Governance and land acquisition link infrastructure to GS2 — Highway projects raise questions of land acquisition, rehabilitation and the rights of farmers, which appear in GS2 and GS3. The requirement of 4.5-metre underpasses for harvesters and tractors shows how design choices affect rural communities cut through by access-controlled roads.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Entry 27 of the Union List, ports declared by or under law made by Parliament to be major ports are a Union subject, while ports other than major ports fall under Entry 31 of the Concurrent List. ● The Major Port Authorities Act, 2021 replaced the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 and converted port trusts into Boards of Major Port Authority. ● The National Highways Authority of India was constituted under the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988. ● Land for national highways is acquired under Section 3A of the National Highways Act, 1956. ● The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan is a GIS-based digital platform for integrated planning of infrastructure across ministries, launched in 2021. ● Sagarmala is the Central programme for port-led development, covering port modernisation, port connectivity, port-linked industrialisation and coastal community development. ● A passenger car unit (PCU) is a measure that converts different vehicle types into the equivalent number of passenger cars for assessing road capacity.
ANALYSIS	1. Putting a private port on the mega list is a quiet but significant policy statement — Mundra is a non-major port under Gujarat's jurisdiction, yet the Centre has classified it alongside three Centrally governed major ports. This signals that the State treats port capacity as national infrastructure regardless of ownership. It also rewards scale, since only ports with high capacity are likely to meet the criteria. The counter-concern is concentration: when one private group owns a port ranked with the country's largest public ports, regulators must watch for pricing power and preferential access to connectivity. 2. The label matters only if it brings something with it — ET does not report what mega status confers, and the July 30 criteria are not described. If the label unlocks priority connectivity under Gati Shakti, faster clearances or deeper-draft dredging, it will shape investment. If it is only a name, it risks being a ranking without consequences. The five-year validity suggests the Centre intends to review performance, which is sensible, since port rankings change quickly as new capacity such as Vadhavan comes up. 3. A single highway code is overdue because varying DPRs waste money — When each consultant designs to its own standards, corridors end up with mismatched lane widths, inconsistent signage and structures that must be rebuilt when traffic grows. Tying lanes to PCU thresholds, and building six-lane bridges on four-lane roads where traffic is expected to rise, avoids costly rework, since widening a bridge is far harder than widening a road. Validating traffic with toll and GST data reduces the old habit of inflating traffic forecasts to justify projects. This is the kind of unglamorous reform that lowers lifetime cost.

	4. Access control saves lives but can divide the countryside — No at-grade crossings and ramp-only access make high-speed corridors safer and faster. But they also cut villages off from their fields, which is why the rule on 4.5-metre underpasses for harvesters and loaded tractors matters. The boundary wall along the right of way prevents encroachment, yet it can turn a highway into a barrier for people and animals. Design must include frequent enough crossings, or local resentment and illegal breaches will follow. 5. The 50,000-km target is ambitious against a base of about 3,000 km — Going from 3,052 km in December 2025 to 50,000 km by 2036-37 means building roughly 4,000 km of high-speed corridor every year, many times the pace so far. Land acquisition, financing and contractor capacity are the constraints, not design rules. The uniform code helps speed approvals, but the target's credibility depends on land and money. A realistic reading is that the code ensures whatever is built is built well, whether or not the full length arrives on schedule.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“India's logistics costs are shaped as much by rules and standards as by investment.” Discuss in the light of the notification of India's first mega ports and NHAI's uniform design guidelines for high-speed corridors. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that the Ports Ministry has notified Deendayal, JNPA, Paradip and private Mundra as mega ports for five years, and NHAI has issued uniform design standards for a planned 50,000-km high-speed network. 2. Body — ports — Explain the major and non-major port split under the Seventh Schedule, the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021, the 2025 ports law and Sagarmala. Discuss what a performance label can do and the questions of criteria, benefits and private concentration. 3. Body — highways — Explain the PCU-based lane rules, access control, underpass heights, MLFF tolling, boundary walls and data-validated traffic forecasts, and how standardisation reduces rework and lifetime cost. 4. Body — the system — Link both to PM Gati Shakti and the National Logistics Policy; mention land acquisition under the National Highways Act, 1956 and the RFCTLARR Act, 2013 as the binding constraint. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that standards and classifications are cheap reforms with large effects on cost, but that land, finance and inter-agency coordination decide whether targets are met.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a District Collector, farmers protest that a new access-controlled corridor will cut their village off from its fields. What do you do? Approach: I would map the village's field access and cattle routes with the NHAI project director and the farmers themselves. Where crossings are too far apart, I would press for additional underpasses of adequate height under the new guidelines, which provide for 4.5-metre underpasses where harvesters and tractors operate. I would ensure that land compensation and rehabilitation are completed before work starts. Early engagement prevents the illegal breaches and delays that follow neglected grievances. Q2. As Secretary, Ports, a public port not on the mega list complains that the classification will divert traffic to a private competitor. How do you respond? Approach: I would explain that the classification rests on published criteria and is reviewed every five years, so it is open to any port that meets them. I would share the gap between the port's performance and the criteria and help it build a plan to close it. At the same time I would ensure that mega status does not give any port preferential treatment in rail or road connectivity beyond what its traffic justifies. Fair competition

among ports is itself a logistics reform.

Q3. An interview board asks: should highways be built for today's traffic or tomorrow's?

Approach: Roads should be built for today's traffic but structures such as bridges and underpasses should be built for tomorrow's, because widening a road is cheap and rebuilding a bridge is expensive. NHAI's rule of six-lane structures on some four-lane roads follows exactly this logic. Overbuilding the whole road wastes capital and land. The right answer is phased capacity backed by honest traffic forecasts.

3. Agriculture & Food

India enters a failed-monsoon year with more grain in its warehouses than at almost any time in its history, and two sets of economists read that fact in opposite directions. One says the stocks make export bans unnecessary; the other says stocks from last year's harvest tell us nothing about next year's. Both agree on the real problem: Indian food trade policy has been run by reflex, opening and shutting borders on the latest estimate. The case for rules over reflexes is the lesson of the day.

3.1 Grain Stocks Far Above Buffer as Rice Harvest Falls 6.5%: Two Op-eds Split on Keeping Exports Open

THE NEWS New Delhi. Two opinion pieces take opposite positions on grain exports in a drought year. In The Indian Express, Shweta Saini and Vansh Oberoi of Arcus Policy Research note that on August 24 wheat exports moved from “prohibited” to “free”, after calibrated permissions of 2.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) each in February and April. Production is officially 120.7 MMT, though trade estimates are closer to 110 MMT; procurement reached 35.76 MMT against about 30 MMT last year; and Central Pool wheat stocks stood at nearly 48 MMT on September 1, more than twice the October 1 buffer norm of 20.5 MMT. A buffer norm is the minimum stock the government wants to hold for the public distribution system and emergencies. “But a buffer surplus is not an export surplus,” they write: the crop that must replenish stocks will be sown in the next two months, the monsoon is about 15% below normal, NOAA's September 14 update keeps El Niño through January–March 2027, and March heat during grain filling cuts yields. They recall 2022: a record estimate of 111.3 MMT in February, export promotion as late as May 12, a ban the next day, and the estimate cut to 106.4 MMT on May 19. Their prescription: a calibrated export window, revisited as information improves. In The Economic Times, Purnadev Jena, economic adviser in the Uttarakhand Chief Minister's office, writes that industry estimates put 2026-27 rice output at about 144 MT, down 10 MT or 6.5% from last year's record 154 MT — the steepest fall since the 2009-10 El Niño drought. Paddy sowing was 42.68 million ha on September 11 against 44.38 million ha, with Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu accounting for 12.3 lakh of the 17 lakh ha lost. Yet rice stocks, including unmilled paddy, were a record 59.6 MT on September 1, 5.8 times the 10.3 MT buffer for October 1. He opposes an export ban — last year's 24.5 MT of exports made India about 40% of world rice trade — preferring a published minimum export price if needed, and objects that the Food Corporation of India (FCI) sold 6.35 MT to ethanol distilleries between June 2025 and June 2026 at about ₹23 a kg against a cost of about ₹36, an implicit subsidy of roughly ₹9,700 crore “for burning grain”. The syllabus link is GS3 on food security, buffer stocks and agricultural trade.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

A record 154 MT rice crop last year and wheat procurement of 35.76 MMT swell the Central Pool far beyond buffer norms → wheat exports freed on August 24 while rice exports reached 24.5 MT last year → monsoon falls about 15% short under a strengthening El Niño, and the rice crop is set to shrink by about 10 MT → one camp says the huge stocks make export curbs unnecessary, the other says tomorrow's wheat crop is too uncertain to commit today → the government must choose between rule-based export policy and the reflex bans of 2022 and 2023

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Buffer norms are set by the Centre for each quarter, and the FCI holds the stock —** The Food Corporation of India, set up under the Food Corporations Act, 1964, procures, stores and moves foodgrains for the Central Pool along with State agencies. The Centre fixes buffer stocking norms separately for the first day of each quarter — April 1, July 1, October 1 and January 1 — because stocks are highest after harvests and lowest before them. The norms cover operational stock for the public distribution system and a strategic reserve for shortfalls. Stock far above the norm is costly, since the economic cost of holding grain includes interest, storage and losses, which is why surplus is sold through the Open Market Sale Scheme.
- 2. The Open Market Sale Scheme is the tool for cooling prices from Central stocks —** Under the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic), the FCI sells surplus wheat and rice from the Central Pool in the open market, mainly through e-auctions, at a reserve price fixed by the government. Its aims are to cool open-market prices in the lean season and to reduce the carrying cost of excess stocks. Jena's proposal to sell rice in deficit States at a reserve price that recovers cost is a variant of this scheme. The Centre has

also used the same stocks to supply rice to ethanol distilleries under the biofuel programme.

3. Minimum support prices and the NFSA are the two ends of the procurement pipeline

— Minimum support prices are announced by the Union government on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), an attached office of the Agriculture Ministry, and are approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs. Grain procured at MSP feeds the National Food Security Act, 2013, which covers up to 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population with 5 kg of grain per person per month, and 35 kg per household for Antyodaya Anna Yojana families. Since January 2023 this grain is free under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Open-ended procurement at MSP in surplus States is the main reason stocks overshoot the buffer.

4. Export bans rest on the Foreign Trade Act and are watched by the WTO — The Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992 empowers the Central Government to prohibit, restrict or regulate exports and imports, and the Directorate General of Foreign Trade notifies such changes in export policy, such as moving an item from 'prohibited' to 'free' or fixing a minimum export price. A minimum export price is a floor below which an item cannot be exported, a softer tool than a ban. At the WTO, Article 12 of the Agreement on Agriculture requires a member imposing food export restrictions to consider the food security of importing members and to notify them. Separately, the Bali Ministerial Conference of 2013 adopted an interim 'peace clause' protecting developing countries' public stockholding programmes for food security from legal challenge even if they breach subsidy limits.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. GS3 names buffer stocks and food security in so many words — The syllabus lists 'public distribution system — objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security'. Mains has asked whether India's food stocks are excessive, and about the costs of procurement and the case for direct income support. These two op-eds together supply both sides of that answer with numbers.

2. Prelims tests the institutions, not the tonnage — UPSC has asked about the CACP, the crops covered by MSP, the coverage of the NFSA and the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture boxes. The Open Market Sale Scheme, the quarterly nature of buffer norms and the peace clause are natural statement questions.

3. Trade reliability is a new angle in agricultural questions — The wheat ban of May 2022 and the rice curbs that followed drew criticism from importing countries. Questions on India's role in global food security, including in G20 and WTO debates, can use the idea that abrupt bans erode India's reputation as a supplier.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Buffer stocking norms for the Central Pool are fixed by the Central Government separately for April 1, July 1, October 1 and January 1 of each year.
- Under the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic), the Food Corporation of India sells surplus wheat and rice from the Central Pool in the open market, mainly through e-auctions, at reserve prices fixed by the government.
- Minimum support prices are announced on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.
- The National Food Security Act, 2013 provides for coverage of up to 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of the urban population under the Targeted Public Distribution System.
- The Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992 empowers the Central Government to prohibit, restrict or regulate the export and import of

	goods. ● A minimum export price is a floor price below which a commodity cannot be exported. ● The 'peace clause' on public stockholding for food security purposes was adopted at the WTO Ministerial Conference held in Bali in 2013.
ANALYSIS	1. The two op-eds disagree less than their headlines suggest — Saini and Oberoi do not ask for a ban; they ask for a calibrated window that can be widened later. Jena does not ask for unlimited exports; he accepts a published minimum export price if domestic prices heat up. Both reject the pattern of 2022 and 2023, when exports were promoted one day and banned the next. The real difference is the crop: Jena writes about rice, where stocks of 59.6 MT dwarf a 10 MT harvest loss, while Saini and Oberoi write about wheat, where the next crop has not been sown and stocks are only about twice the buffer. Read together, they suggest freer rice exports and more cautious wheat exports this year. 2. Huge stocks and rising prices at the same time mean the problem is distribution, not supply — Rice prices are already 7-8% above a year ago even as stocks are at a record. That paradox shows grain sitting in FCI godowns does not reach consumers unless it is released. Jena's proposal to trigger open-market sales when retail rice inflation crosses a threshold such as 8% turns a discretionary decision into a rule that traders can anticipate. The counter-argument is that pre-committed rules can be gamed and that sales below cost weaken FCI finances, which is why he insists on a reserve price that recovers cost. 3. Selling rice to distillers at 40% below cost is a hidden subsidy that deserves a Budget line — If the FCI's rice costs about ₹36 a kg and it sold 6.35 MT to distilleries at about ₹23, the loss of roughly ₹9,700 crore sits in the food subsidy rather than in energy policy, where it belongs. The ethanol blending programme may be worth supporting, but its costs should be visible. Using grain for fuel in a drought year also invites the food-versus-fuel objection. Jena's proposal to freeze diversion at the 7.2 MT already allocated is a modest correction; the larger lesson is that surplus stock management needs transparent pricing, whatever the buyer. 4. The stock overhang is the product of procurement policy, and the drought is an opportunity to fix it — Stocks at 5.8 times the rice buffer are not a sign of prudence; they reflect open-ended procurement at MSP in a few States, which locks up capital and pushes farmers towards water-intensive paddy. Jena's long-run agenda — direct income support, right-sized buffers, direct-seeded rice and drought-tolerant varieties, and a shift to pulses, oilseeds and maize — addresses the cause. The political difficulty is that procurement is a guaranteed income for farmers in Punjab and Haryana, and any reform must replace that security rather than simply withdraw it. 5. Credibility in trade policy is an economic asset India keeps spending — Saini and Oberoi warn that opening exports fully and then shutting them abruptly erodes India's reliability as a supplier. Importers that sign long-term contracts need predictability, and each sudden ban pushes them towards Thailand, Vietnam or the Black Sea. A rule-based approach — a minimum export price or a quota announced in advance with clear triggers — protects domestic consumers without the reputational cost of a ban. The counter-view is that no government can let food prices rise at home in a drought year, so the rules must be credible enough that they are not abandoned at the first price spike.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's foodgrain stocks are far above buffer norms, yet its agricultural export policy remains reactive." Critically examine this statement in the context of a deficient monsoon, and suggest a rule-based framework for managing food stocks and exports. (15

	marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Give the numbers: wheat stocks of nearly 48 MMT on September 1 against an October 1 buffer of 20.5 MMT, rice stocks of 59.6 MT against a buffer of 10.3 MT, and a rice crop estimated to fall 6.5% to about 144 MT in a monsoon about 15% below normal. 2. Body — why stocks overshoot — Explain open-ended procurement at MSP recommended by the CACP, the NFSA and PMGKAY offtake, quarterly buffer norms and the cost of carrying surplus. Mention the sale of 6.35 MT of rice to distilleries below cost. 3. Body — the reactive pattern — Use the 2022 wheat episode — exports promoted until May 12, banned on May 13 — the rice curbs of 2022 and 2023, and this year's sugar reversal to show policy by reflex. Explain the reputational cost and India's obligations under Article 12 of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. 4. Body — a rule-based framework — Propose minimum export prices instead of bans, calibrated export windows reviewed against crop data, pre-announced OMSS triggers linked to retail inflation, satellite-based crop estimates, and a gradual shift from price support to direct income support with right-sized buffers. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that full granaries are a cushion, not a policy, and that India's food security and its credibility as a supplier both depend on replacing discretion with announced rules.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are Joint Secretary in the Department of Food and Public Distribution. Retail rice prices are rising despite record stocks. What do you recommend? Approach: I would recommend immediate Open Market Sale Scheme releases targeted at deficit States, at a reserve price that recovers cost, with weekly e-auctions so traders know supply will keep coming. I would review the pace of rice allocation to distilleries this year. I would publish stock and sale data weekly to cool speculative hoarding. An export ban would be my last option, since stocks are several times the buffer. Q2. As a District Collector in a rain-fed rice district of Telangana, how would you respond to the crop loss? Approach: I would order a quick crop-cutting and satellite-based damage assessment so that insurance claims under the crop insurance scheme are settled before rabi sowing. I would work with the agriculture department to supply seeds of pulses, oilseeds and short-duration varieties suited to low residual moisture. I would ensure the public distribution system and MGNREGA works are functioning so that farm labourers have food and income. Speed matters, because a late claim cannot finance the next sowing. Q3. An interview board asks: should India ever ban food exports? Approach: A ban is justified only in a genuine domestic shortage when other tools have failed, because it hurts farmers, importers and India's credibility. In most situations a minimum export price, a quota or release of domestic stocks can protect consumers at lower cost. The government should announce in advance the conditions under which it would restrict exports, so that traders and importing countries can plan. Predictable restriction is far less damaging than a surprise ban.

4. International Relations

All three stories today are about India trying to write rules in a system where the powerful ignore the rules that already exist. At sea, India is building a coalition of flag states and crew-supplying states because missiles are killing Indian sailors on ships that fly other countries' flags. At the WTO, India has taken a seat as a third party in the first formal legal test of the EU's carbon border tax, and it has done so while the EU's green rules quietly cut Indian recyclers off from European scrap. In New York, the UN turned 81 looking, in The Hindu's words, "overweight and weak", and India's realistic ambition has shrunk from a permanent seat to winning a two-year one against Tajikistan.

4.1 India and Liberia Launch a UN 'Group of Friends' to Protect Ships and Seafarers

THE NEWS United Nations, New York. India and Liberia on Friday, September 25, launched the 'Group of Friends on Safety & Security of Shipping & Seafarers' at a ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, the Indian Express (PTI) and The Economic Times report. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar co-chaired the inaugural meeting with Liberia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Sara Beysolow Nyanti, and the two countries will serve as co-chairs. A 'group of friends' at the UN is an informal, voluntary club of member states that agree to push one issue together; it has no treaty powers. The pairing is deliberate: India is a major source country for seafarers, and Liberia hosts the largest shipping registry by tonnage. The group brings together major ship-owning states, the countries with the largest ship registries and those that supply the most seafarers. "From the Black Sea to the Red Sea to the Gulf, attacks on civilian shipping have become a growing cause of concern. These actions that disrupt maritime commerce and cost innocent lives are simply indefensible," Mr. Jaishankar said. Two days earlier, the Antigua and Barbuda-flagged bulk carrier MV Cape Dao was attacked in the Gulf of Oman, killing an Indian sailor; earlier, the Panama-flagged oil tanker El Gaia was struck while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, and an Indian crew member went missing. The Express identifies the dead sailor as Suraj Yadav, 22, of Deoria in Uttar Pradesh, who had joined the ship on August 19, and Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said all surviving crew, including 19 Indian nationals, had been evacuated. In June another Deoria seafarer, Shivanand Chaurasia, was killed in an attack on a tanker off Oman, and a review chaired by Mr. Sonowal has launched a 'Seafarer-First' initiative for Indian sailors in conflict zones. Mr. Jaishankar said nearly two million seafarers operate the world's merchant fleet and that shipping carries four-fifths of global trade. The group is to be an "inclusive, voluntary, and action-oriented platform". This continues the 24 September card on the Cape Dao attack; what is new is India's move from consular response to multilateral rule-building. The syllabus link is GS2 (India and multilateral bodies, effect of other countries' policies on Indian interests) and GS3 (security challenges in maritime space).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

West Asia war spreads to shipping lanes in the Gulf, Hormuz and the Red Sea → ships flying flags of Antigua and Barbuda and Panama are hit, with Indian crews aboard → Indian sailors killed in June and on September 23, one missing → India, a crew-supplying state with no flag-state jurisdiction over these ships, pairs with Liberia, the largest flag registry → a UN Group of Friends to press for deterrence and protection of seafarers

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Under UNCLOS the flag state, not the crew's country, is primarily responsible for a ship** — The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS) gives every state the right to sail ships under its flag and requires a "genuine link" between the state and the ship (Article 91). Article 94 places on the flag state the duty to exercise jurisdiction and control over administrative, technical and social matters, including manning and labour conditions. On the high seas a ship is subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of its flag state (Article 92). This is why India, whose nationals die on foreign-flagged ships, has limited legal handles and must work through flag states such as Liberia and Panama.
- 2. Open registries, or 'flags of convenience', dominate world shipping** — An open registry lets a shipowner of any nationality register a vessel under its flag, usually for lower taxes, fees and labour costs. Liberia, Panama and the Marshall Islands are the largest open registries, and Liberia's registry is administered commercially from outside the country. Critics say the genuine-link requirement is honoured in form rather than substance, and that weak flag-state oversight leaves crews exposed to abandonment and unsafe conditions. The International Transport Workers' Federation

	has long campaigned against flags of convenience on these grounds. 3. The IMO sets safety rules while the ILO's Maritime Labour Convention protects the crew — The International Maritime Organization (IMO), a UN specialised agency headquartered in London, is responsible for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution; its key instruments include SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) and the ISPS Code on ship and port security. The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC), adopted by the International Labour Organization, is often called the seafarers' bill of rights; it sets minimum standards on employment agreements, wages, hours of rest, repatriation and medical care. India has ratified the MLC. Port states can inspect foreign ships for MLC compliance, which gives crew-supplying and port states a lever independent of the flag. 4. India has rewritten its shipping law and treats seafarers as a national asset — Per a PIB release, Parliament passed the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2025, which replaces the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, the principal law on registration of Indian ships, certification of seafarers and safety. The Directorate General of Shipping under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways regulates seafarer training and certification. India is among the leading suppliers of officers and ratings to the global fleet, and its maritime outlook, articulated as SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and later MAHASAGAR, presents India as a first responder and security provider in the Indian Ocean. Freedom of navigation, a customary principle codified in UNCLOS, is a stated pillar of India's Indo-Pacific policy.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks about India's role in multilateral and issue-based coalitions — UPSC has asked about India's participation in plurilateral groupings and about the effect of the policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests. A Group of Friends co-chaired with an African registry state is a live example of issue-based coalition building, and fits answers on India as a 'voice of the Global South'. 2. Maritime security is a recurring GS3 theme — Questions have asked about maritime security challenges for India, piracy in the Western Indian Ocean and the importance of sea lines of communication. The Red Sea and Hormuz attacks on merchant shipping, with Indian crews killed, are a stronger case than piracy because the attackers are state or state-backed actors. 3. Prelims tests maritime institutions and conventions — Expect questions on UNCLOS zones and flag-state jurisdiction, on the IMO versus the ILO, and on which body adopted the Maritime Labour Convention. Chokepoints — the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Oman — are standard map questions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 91 of UNCLOS, 1982, there must exist a genuine link between a state and a ship flying its flag. ● Under UNCLOS, ships on the high seas are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of their flag state, save in exceptional cases provided in the Convention or other treaties. ● The International Maritime Organization, headquartered in London, is the UN specialised agency responsible for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships. ● The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 was adopted under the International Labour Organization and sets minimum working and living standards for seafarers. ● Liberia operates an open ship registry and hosts the largest shipping registry in the world by tonnage.

	● The Bab-el-Mandeb strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, while the Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman. ● The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 was replaced by new legislation passed by Parliament in 2025.
ANALYSIS	1. India has a crew problem but no flag, so it has chosen a coalition over unilateral escort — Both ships named by Mr. Jaishankar flew other countries' flags — Antigua and Barbuda and Panama — so under UNCLOS India cannot claim primary jurisdiction over them. India's navy can and does escort Indian-flagged ships, but most Indian seafarers work on foreign-flagged vessels. Pairing with Liberia, the largest registry, links the country that supplies the people with a country that supplies the legal flag. That is a clever design: flag states have the legal standing, crew states have the political motive, and together they can move the IMO and the Security Council more than either alone. 2. A 'voluntary' platform can raise costs of attacks only if it names attackers — Mr. Jaishankar listed attacks from the Black Sea to the Gulf but, as reported, did not name who fired the missiles. A group that avoids attribution will produce statements, not deterrence. The counter-view is that India is deliberately neutral in the West Asia war and needs working relations with Iran, the Gulf states and the United States, so a platform that could name one side would lose members. The honest assessment is that the group's first value is humanitarian — evacuation, repatriation, compensation — not military. 3. Seafarers are India's overseas labour force at sea, and their deaths are a livelihood issue — Suraj Yadav was the first person from his village to work on a commercial vessel, the Express reports, and a second Deoria seafarer died in June. Seafaring is a route into the middle class for young men from inland districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, just as Gulf migration is for Kerala. When war risk rises, insurers raise premiums, shipowners seek cheaper or more desperate crews, and the risk is pushed down to the lowest-paid ratings. The 'Seafarer-First' initiative must therefore deal with contracts and insurance, not only with evacuation. 4. Open registries are part of the problem the group is trying to solve — Flags of convenience exist because they reduce owners' costs, often by reducing oversight. Liberia leading a safety initiative is a sign of reform in the registry business, but it also shows the contradiction: flag states profit from registration fees while their capacity to protect ships in a war zone is minimal. If the group pushes flag states to accept real responsibilities — war-risk clauses, crew repatriation, compensation — it will be meaningful. If it stays at declarations, the gap between legal responsibility and practical protection will remain. 5. The initiative also serves India's Security Council campaign — The launch came in the week India was campaigning for the 2028-29 elected seat. Co-chairing with an African state on a practical issue gives India a talking point with small island and coastal states, many of which operate registries or supply crews. That is legitimate diplomacy, but the group will be judged by whether it continues after the General Assembly week ends. A standing secretariat or a regular meeting schedule would be the test.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Freedom of navigation is guaranteed in law but is increasingly denied in practice to the seafarers who make global trade possible." In the light of recent attacks on merchant shipping in the Gulf and the Red Sea, examine the gaps in the international legal framework for protecting seafarers, and assess India's response. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the September 23 attack on the Antigua and Barbuda-flagged MV Cape Dao in the Gulf of Oman that killed Indian sailor Suraj Yadav, and the launch of the India-Liberia Group of Friends on Safety and Security of Shipping and

Seafarers at UNGA-81.

2. **Body — the legal framework and its gaps** — Explain flag-state primacy under UNCLOS (Articles 91, 92, 94), the IMO's safety and security instruments and the MLC 2006's crew protections. Show the gap: crew states such as India have no jurisdiction over foreign-flagged ships; open registries have weak enforcement capacity; none of these instruments deters state or militia attacks in a war zone.
3. **Body — India's response** — Cover the Group of Friends (pairing the largest crew supplier with the largest registry by tonnage), the 'Seafarer-First' initiative after the June and September deaths, naval escort for Indian-flagged ships, and India's new merchant shipping law. Evaluate the absence of attribution and the voluntary nature of the group.
4. **Body — what more is needed** — Suggest war-risk insurance and compensation standards under the MLC, stronger flag-state obligations through the IMO, port-state inspection leverage, and coordination with naval task forces in the Red Sea and Gulf.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that protecting seafarers requires uniting flag states, crew states and naval powers, and that India's coalition is a sound first step whose value depends on continuity beyond the General Assembly week.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Director General of Shipping. Families in Deoria ask why their sons are being sent into a war zone. What do you do?

Approach: I would first ensure the body is repatriated and compensation under the employment agreement and the Maritime Labour Convention is paid without delay, with the recruitment agency held accountable. I would issue an advisory requiring manning agencies to disclose war-zone routing to seafarers before they sign, and to secure the seafarer's right to decline such voyages without penalty. I would audit whether war-risk bonuses and insurance are being paid. Finally, I would set up a helpline for families so that news does not come only from the company.

Q2. As India's representative at the IMO, what would you push for?

Approach: I would seek a resolution recognising seafarers as key workers who must be protected and repatriated in conflict, and standard war-risk clauses in crew contracts. I would push for stronger flag-state accountability, since the ships were registered in Antigua and Barbuda and Panama but crewed by Indians. I would build support among crew-supplying states such as the Philippines and among registries. Coordination with the Group of Friends in New York would give the IMO work political backing.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India name the attackers in such incidents?

Approach: Naming attackers without firm evidence can damage India's relations with parties it needs for energy and diaspora safety. But silence also weakens deterrence and can look like indifference to Indian lives. A balanced position is to state facts established by investigation, call for accountability under international law, and let multilateral mechanisms attribute where India alone would pay a price. Credibility depends on applying the same standard whoever the attacker is.

4.2 WTO Panel to Hear Russia's Challenge to EU Carbon Border Tax; India Joins as Third Party

THE NEWS Geneva and New Delhi. The World Trade Organization's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) agreed on Friday, September 25, to Russia's request for a panel to review the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and an alleged export subsidy under the EU's emissions-trading scheme, The Economic Times reports. India, along with 17 other countries including the United States, the United Kingdom and China, reserved its third-party rights to participate in the proceedings. A third party is a member with a substantial interest that may make submissions to the

panel without being a party. CBAM is a charge the EU levies on imports of carbon-intensive goods, such as steel and aluminium, equal to the carbon price an EU producer would have paid, so that production does not simply shift to countries with weaker climate rules. Moscow alleges that CBAM creates significant trade barriers for covered goods in breach of WTO rules, and that free allowances to certain companies under the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) amount to an export subsidy. The EU CBAM commenced on January 1, 2026. The India–EU FTA gives no CBAM concession, only a promise that any future flexibility for another country will extend to India. India and the EU are building domestic CBAM-verification capacity, including recognition of at least 10 Indian verification agencies, with six applications submitted; India is also discussing carbon pricing with the EU. A second EU green rule also hits India. On September 18 the European Commission published a draft list of non-OECD countries allowed to import specific non-hazardous EU waste under its revised Waste Shipment Regulation. India is on the list but is not approved to receive metal waste. From May 21, 2027 the EU will prohibit exports of non-hazardous waste to non-OECD countries not on the list; comments on the draft are due by October 16. The EU supplied around 20% of India's aluminium scrap imports last fiscal, 22% of copper and copper-alloy scrap, 20% of lead and 40% of zinc; of about 8.45 million tonnes of ferrous and stainless-steel scrap imported in FY26, 0.79 million tonnes came from the EU. The Material Recycling Association of India has written to the commerce, steel and mines ministries warning of higher costs, more use of virgin materials and harm to small recyclers, since domestic scrap cannot meet demand. The syllabus link is GS2 (effect of developed countries' policies on India) and GS3 (trade and climate).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

EU adopts a carbon price through its Emissions Trading System and fears 'carbon leakage' → CBAM designed to charge importers the same carbon cost, with a reporting-only phase from October 2023 → full CBAM begins January 1, 2026, hitting Indian steel and aluminium → India–EU FTA gives no CBAM exemption, only a most-favoured clause on future flexibility → Russia takes CBAM to the WTO and a panel is set up, with India as one of 18 third parties

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. CBAM puts a carbon price on imports of six carbon-intensive product groups —** The EU's CBAM Regulation of 2023 covers iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen. A transitional phase from October 1, 2023 to December 31, 2025 required importers only to report the embedded emissions of their goods. From January 1, 2026, importers must buy CBAM certificates priced to track the EU ETS carbon price, less any carbon price actually paid in the country of production. At the same time, the free ETS allowances given to EU producers in the same sectors are to be phased out gradually, which is the link Russia is attacking as a subsidy.
- 2. GATT's non-discrimination rules and the Article XX exceptions frame the legal fight —** Article I of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade requires most-favoured-nation treatment, meaning no discrimination between WTO members; Article III requires national treatment, meaning imported goods must not be treated less favourably than domestic 'like' products after they enter the market. A measure that breaches these can still be justified under Article XX, notably paragraph (b) on measures necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health and paragraph (g) on the conservation of exhaustible natural resources. The measure must also satisfy the introductory 'chapeau' of Article XX, which bars arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination and disguised restrictions on trade. Export subsidies are separately prohibited under Article 3 of the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM Agreement).
- 3. The WTO dispute system has a working first stage and a broken appeal stage —** Under the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), a member first seeks consultations; if these fail, it can ask the Dispute Settlement Body, which is the General Council of all members, to establish a panel, usually of three experts. Article 10 of the DSU allows members with a substantial interest to join as third parties. Panel reports could be appealed to the seven-member Appellate Body, but the Appellate Body has been unable to function since December 2019 because the United States has blocked appointments, so a losing party can appeal 'into the void' and stall the result. Some members created the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA) as a stopgap; India is not a member.
- 4. Climate law rests on common but differentiated responsibilities, and the EU's waste**

	rules rest on the Basel Convention — The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) sets out the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC): all countries must act, but developed countries, which emitted most historical carbon, must lead. India argues that CBAM shifts the cost of EU climate policy onto developing-country exporters and is a unilateral trade measure inconsistent with this principle. Separately, the Basel Convention (1989) controls transboundary movement of hazardous wastes; the EU's revised Waste Shipment Regulation goes further by restricting even non-hazardous waste exports to non-OECD countries unless they are listed. India's domestic response on carbon is the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023, notified under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. UPSC has asked directly about CBAM and green trade barriers — Mains has asked about the implications of carbon border taxes for India's exports and about the trade-environment link in the WTO. This panel is the first formal legal test of CBAM, so answers can now cite a live dispute rather than only arguments. 2. The WTO's crisis is a standard GS2 question — Questions have asked about the Appellate Body impasse and the future of the WTO. Knowing that a panel can rule but an appeal 'into the void' can block enforcement explains why even a Russian win may not change EU policy quickly. 3. Circular economy and critical minerals connect to GS3 — Scrap metal is a secondary raw material for steel, aluminium and copper. Questions on the circular economy, the Steel Scrap Recycling Policy and resource security can use the EU waste list as an example of how a partner's environmental rule becomes a supply shock for Indian MSMEs.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism covers iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen. • CBAM ran in a transitional, reporting-only phase from October 2023, and its definitive phase requiring purchase of CBAM certificates began on January 1, 2026. • Article III of GATT deals with national treatment, while Article XX sets out general exceptions, including measures relating to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources. • Under Article 10 of the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding, a member having a substantial interest in a matter before a panel may participate as a third party. • The WTO Appellate Body has been non-functional since December 2019 because of a block on the appointment of its members. • The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities is enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992. • India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023 was notified under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
ANALYSIS	1. India is fighting CBAM in the FTA and watching it in Geneva, and that is the right division of labour — India did not file its own dispute; it reserved third-party rights, which lets it argue its view without owning the case. Russia is under sanctions and has little to lose from confronting the EU; India has just concluded an FTA with the EU and needs the relationship. As a third party India can press the development angle, CBDR-RC, while leaving the confrontation to Moscow. The weakness is that India gets no

remedy of its own even if Russia wins.

2. **The subsidy claim may be stronger than the discrimination claim** — The EU has designed CBAM so that importers pay roughly what EU producers pay, which makes a national-treatment challenge harder. But while free ETS allowances continue for EU producers, the EU is both charging importers and cushioning its own firms, which is the heart of Russia's export-subsidy argument. If the panel agrees, the EU may be forced to speed up the phase-out of free allowances rather than scrap CBAM. For India, that would mean a cleaner but still costly CBAM, not relief.
3. **The FTA clause reveals the limits of India's leverage** — The ET reports that the India-EU FTA gives no CBAM concession, only a promise that any future flexibility for another country will reach India too. That is a most-favoured clause on a unilateral measure, not a carve-out. India's real leverage is technical: getting at least 10 Indian verification agencies recognised so that Indian exporters can certify emissions at home rather than pay European verifiers, and building a domestic carbon price under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme that the EU would deduct. Every rupee of carbon price paid in India is a rupee not paid to Brussels.
4. **The scrap exclusion shows how green rules become supply shocks for small firms** — India is listed for non-hazardous waste but not approved for metal waste, and the EU supplies 40% of India's zinc scrap and about a fifth of its aluminium, lead and copper scrap. Recyclers are mostly MSMEs with thin margins, and switching to virgin metal raises both costs and emissions. The irony is that recycling is exactly what climate policy should encourage. The counter-view is that the EU wants assurance that its waste is processed to environmental standards, and India's informal recycling sector gives it grounds to worry. India's answer should be a verifiable standard for recyclers before the October 16 deadline, not only diplomatic protest.
5. **Unilateral climate trade measures are becoming the norm, so India needs a doctrine, not case-by-case reactions** — CBAM and the waste list are two instances of a larger trend in which rich economies use access to their markets to export their environmental standards. India can oppose the principle, but it cannot stop the trend. A durable response has three parts: a credible domestic carbon price, recognised domestic certification bodies, and alliances with other developing exporters in the WTO. Protest without capacity will leave Indian exporters paying twice — once in cost and once in lost market share.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is a climate measure in form but a trade barrier in effect." Critically examine this view in the context of the WTO panel established on Russia's challenge, and suggest how India should respond to such unilateral green trade measures. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — State that CBAM entered its definitive phase on January 1, 2026, and that on September 25 the WTO DSB set up a panel at Russia's request, with India among 18 third parties including the US, UK and China.
2. **Body — the case for CBAM as a climate measure** — Explain carbon leakage, the matching of the ETS price, the deduction for carbon prices paid abroad, and the possible defence under GATT Article XX(b) and (g).
3. **Body — the case that it is a trade barrier** — Cover national-treatment and MFN concerns, Russia's export-subsidy argument on free ETS allowances, compliance and verification costs for Indian steel and aluminium exporters, and inconsistency with CBDR-RC under the UNFCCC. Add the EU waste-shipment list as a parallel example affecting Indian recyclers.
4. **Body — India's response** — Recommend third-party advocacy at the WTO, the FTA's

	verification-agency recognition, a domestic carbon price through the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, support to MSME exporters, and coalition-building with other developing countries. Note that the Appellate Body impasse limits the enforcement of any ruling. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India should contest the unilateralism of CBAM while building the domestic carbon and certification capacity that reduces what its exporters pay.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry. Steel exporters say CBAM will wipe out their EU margins. What do you do? Approach: I would first quantify the exposure, product by product, using exporters' emission data. I would fast-track recognition of Indian verification agencies under the FTA so exporters are not dependent on costly European verifiers. I would work with the Power and Environment Ministries to align the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme so that carbon prices paid in India can be deducted. And I would support cleaner production through energy-efficiency finance, because lower emissions are the only permanent reduction in CBAM cost. Q2. As District Industries Centre head in a scrap-recycling cluster, how would you prepare firms for the EU waste rules? Approach: I would map how many units depend on EU scrap and for which metals. I would help them document environmentally sound processing — pollution clearances, hazardous-waste handling and worker safety — because the EU listing turns on such standards. I would connect them with alternative suppliers and with domestic scrap sources under vehicle scrappage and collection systems. I would also send their evidence to the Commerce Ministry before the October 16 comment deadline. Q3. An interview board asks: is it hypocritical for India to oppose CBAM while claiming climate leadership? Approach: It is not hypocritical to accept the goal but contest the method. India has taken on emission-intensity targets and is building a carbon market, but CBAM places the cost of European policy on exporters in poorer countries without climate finance or technology transfer. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is part of the climate treaty India signed. The credible position is to cut emissions at home while arguing for multilateral rather than unilateral carbon rules.

4.3 At 81 the UN Is 'Overweight and Weak'; India Targets the 2028-29 Elected Council Seat

THE NEWS New Delhi. Three commentaries today assess the UN's decline as the 81st UN General Assembly (UNGA) session winds down. The Hindu, in an editorial titled 'Overweight and weak', says this session carries "a unique sense of urgency" because it is Secretary-General António Guterres's final session; it cites one study recording more than 65 conflicts across 35 countries in 2025, the highest since 1946. Polarisation, superpower wars in violation of the Charter and "unilateral and illegitimate sanctions" have left the UN "overweight, weak and unrepresentative", it argues. Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman is President of the 81st session and will oversee the selection of the next Secretary-General. It notes that U.S. President Donald Trump again claimed to have negotiated peace in the 2025 India-Pakistan four-day war, the Russian President skipped the session and the U.S. denied visas to the Palestinian delegation. The EU-led Partnership for Multilateralism (P4M), co-sponsored by India, was "well-meaning" but "drowned out". The Hindu calls it "surprising" that Prime Minister Narendra Modi skipped the UNGA speech and side summits while his government campaigns for an elected Security Council term in 2028-29. In The Indian Express, Syed Akbaruddin, former Permanent Representative of India to the UN, argues that "a declining United Nations is not good news for a rising India". The veto lets each permanent member block action; Ukraine, Gaza and the Iran-Gulf war expose the Council. He warns that "weaponised interdependence" exposes Indian firms to rules their government did not write. Since Charter amendments require ratification by all five

permanent members, “an elected seat is the nearer prospect”; India’s opponent for 2028-29 in the June 2027 election is Tajikistan, which has never served on the Council. India, a founding member in 1945, has contributed more than 275,000 personnel to UN peacekeeping. India helped launch P4M on September 21 with Brazil, Canada, Kenya, the EU, Australia and Barbados. Ram Madhav, BJP national vice-president, writes in the same paper that Mr. Guterres, in Delhi for the BRICS summit, said the Council is “paralysed” and that the UN needs not reform but “an overhaul”; he proposes that Global South leaders draft an “Indo-Pacific Charter” recognising multipolarity, as the 1941 Atlantic Charter preceded the UN. This continues cards of 22-25 September on P4M, the Tajikistan contest and veto restraint; what is new is the assessment. The syllabus link is GS2: important international institutions, their structure and mandate.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

UN Charter of 1945 freezes the victors of the Second World War as permanent members with a veto → Council expanded once, in 1965, but permanent membership never changed → reform talks stuck in the IGN process since 2009 as G4, UfC and the African Group disagree → wars in Ukraine, Gaza and the Gulf paralyse the Council, and leaders skip UNGA-81 → India shifts its near-term goal to an elected 2028-29 seat while co-founding P4M

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Charter fixes the Council’s structure and makes reform hostage to the permanent five** — Article 23 of the UN Charter sets the Security Council’s membership at 15: five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) and ten non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, not eligible for immediate re-election. Article 27(3) requires decisions on substantive matters to have the concurring votes of all permanent members, which is the basis of the veto. Under Article 108, an amendment requires a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of member states, including all five permanent members; Article 109 provides for a general review conference on the same terms. The only expansion so far, from 11 to 15 members, came into force in 1965.
- 2. Reform is negotiated in the IGN, where four blocs have competing models** — Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) on Security Council reform began in the General Assembly in 2009. The G4 — India, Brazil, Germany and Japan — seek permanent seats for themselves and support each other’s bids. The Uniting for Consensus group, led by Italy and including Pakistan, opposes new permanent members and prefers longer-term elected seats. The African Union’s Ezulwini Consensus of 2005 demands two permanent seats with all prerogatives including the veto and five non-permanent seats for Africa, while the L.69 group of developing countries, of which India is part, supports expansion in both categories.
- 3. Elected seats are won by a two-thirds secret ballot in the General Assembly** — Non-permanent members are elected each June by secret ballot in the General Assembly, and a candidate needs two-thirds of members present and voting. Seats are allocated by regional groups; India contests from the Asia-Pacific group. India has served eight terms as a non-permanent member: 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92, 2011-12 and 2021-22. In 1996 India lost the Asia-Pacific seat to Japan, a reminder that such contests are not certain.
- 4. The Secretary-General is chosen by the Council and the Assembly together** — Under Article 97 the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council, so the recommendation is subject to the veto. By convention terms are five years and renewable once, and there has been an informal practice of regional rotation. António Guterres took office on January 1, 2017, and his second term ends on December 31, 2026. Since 2016 the General Assembly has made the selection more transparent with public candidate dialogues.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. UNSC reform is among the most repeated GS2 questions** — UPSC has asked about the obstacles to India’s permanent membership and the need for reform of the Security Council. Today’s pieces add a sharper argument: that the ratification rule under Article

	108 makes permanent membership distant, which is why India is concentrating on the elected seat. 2. Prelims tests the UN's structure — Questions have asked about the composition of the Security Council, the veto and the organs of the UN. Articles 23, 27, 97 and 108, and the difference between the G4 and Uniting for Consensus, are high-probability material. 3. Multilateralism and the Global South are PSIR and GS2 themes — Answers on India's role in a multipolar world can contrast reformist positions (Mr. Akbaruddin) with revisionist ones (Mr. Madhav's call for an 'Indo-Pacific Charter'), and use P4M as evidence of India working through issue-based coalitions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 23 of the UN Charter, the Security Council has 15 members, of which ten non-permanent members are elected for two-year terms and are not eligible for immediate re-election. ● Article 27(3) of the UN Charter requires the concurring votes of the permanent members for decisions on non-procedural matters, which is the legal basis of the veto. ● An amendment to the UN Charter under Article 108 requires adoption by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including all permanent members of the Security Council. ● Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. ● The G4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support one another's bids for permanent membership of the Security Council. ● The Ezulwini Consensus of the African Union seeks two permanent seats with veto and five non-permanent seats for Africa in the Security Council. ● Non-permanent members of the Security Council are elected by the General Assembly by a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.
ANALYSIS	1. India has quietly accepted that permanent membership is a long game — Mr. Akbaruddin, who led India's UN mission, now writes that an elected seat is "the nearer prospect" because Charter amendments need all five permanent members to ratify. That is a realistic reframing from someone who spent years on the reform campaign. It means India's near-term strategy is to win elections in the Assembly and prove itself in the Council, rather than wait for a structural change that China, at least, can block. The risk is that reformist rhetoric continues at the top while the practical agenda shrinks, and small states notice the gap. 2. Skipping UNGA sends a signal India may not intend — The Hindu finds it surprising that Mr. Modi skipped the UNGA speech in a year India is seeking votes, and Mr. Madhav notes this was the second successive absence. Elected-seat contests are won by courting many small states, each with one vote, and personal leadership presence matters in that courtship. The counter-view is that India's External Affairs Minister is a heavyweight and that India hosted the BRICS summit weeks earlier. Still, a contest against Tajikistan, which has never served, should be comfortable, and India should not let it become close. 3. Weaponised interdependence is the most practical threat the pieces identify — Mr. Akbaruddin's example — an Indian company legal under Indian law but refused payment by a foreign bank or cover by an insurer — describes how sanctions now reach India through private networks rather than state decisions. The UN does not authorise these measures, and the Council cannot stop them. That is a sharper argument for UN relevance than abstract appeals to multilateralism: without a rules

	forum, India will be governed by rules written in Washington, Brussels or Beijing. The limit is that the UN has no power over payment systems either, so India must also build alternatives. 4. Ram Madhav's 'Indo-Pacific Charter' is a provocation rather than a plan — The Atlantic Charter worked as a founding text because the two powers that signed it were about to win a world war and could impose a new order. The Global South today has no comparable unity or power, and 'Indo-Pacific' is itself a term China rejects. The proposal is useful as a signal that India's governing party sees the 1945 order as exhausted. But India also benefits from the Charter's protection of sovereignty and non-intervention, and a new charter would reopen those principles too. 5. P4M's failure to be heard shows that coalitions of middle powers need an agenda, not only a name — The Hindu says P4M was drowned out; Mr. Akbaruddin says its members span diplomatic camps and can help India persuade countries it otherwise could not. Both can be true. A coalition of the EU, Brazil, Canada, Kenya, Australia, Barbados and India can matter only if it produces concrete proposals — on climate finance or protection against economic coercion, as Mr. Akbaruddin suggests. Its test will be whether it tables text in the next session, not whether it met this week.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Security Council was designed to work when the major powers could agree." In the light of this statement, discuss why reform of the United Nations Security Council has stalled, and evaluate India's strategy of pursuing an elected seat alongside its claim to permanent membership. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Begin with UNGA-81: Mr. Guterres's last session, more than 65 conflicts in 35 countries in 2025 by one count, and The Hindu's description of the UN as "overweight and weak". 2. Body — why reform has stalled — Explain Articles 23, 27 and 108; the need for all five permanent members to ratify; the IGN process since 2009; and the competing models of the G4, Uniting for Consensus, the Ezulwini Consensus and L.69. Add regional rivalries, including Pakistan and China on India's bid. 3. Body — India's dual strategy — Discuss the 2028-29 candidature against Tajikistan in the June 2027 election, India's eight earlier terms, its peacekeeping contribution of more than 275,000 personnel, and P4M as coalition-building. Contrast Mr. Akbaruddin's reformism with Mr. Madhav's call for a new charter. 4. Body — risks — Note the Prime Minister's absence from UNGA, weaponised interdependence that the UN cannot restrain, and the danger that the permanent-seat campaign becomes rhetorical. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India should use elected terms to demonstrate responsible leadership on peacekeeping mandates, AI rules and economic coercion, building the case for permanent membership through performance.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the UN division of the Ministry of External Affairs managing the 2028-29 campaign. What is your plan? Approach: I would map every vote, especially in Africa, Latin America and the small island states, and match each with a concrete offer — capacity-building, peacekeeping training, development projects or support on their priorities. I would use initiatives such as the Group of Friends on seafarers and P4M to show India delivers on practical issues. I would schedule leader-level contacts, since small states value personal attention. And I would avoid complacency against an opponent that has never served. Q2. As a peacekeeping contingent commander, how would you strengthen India's claim

at the UN?

Approach: India's standing rests on disciplined, effective peacekeepers, so I would ensure strict conduct standards, zero tolerance for abuse and good relations with local communities. I would report honestly when a mandate cannot be carried out with the resources given, as Mr. Akbaruddin argues mandates must be achievable. I would deploy women officers in community engagement roles. Such performance is remembered by host countries when they vote.

Q3. An interview board asks: is the UN still relevant for India?

Approach: The Security Council is often paralysed, but the UN's universal membership, its agencies and its scientific assessments remain valuable to a developing country. Without the UN, rules on trade, technology and climate would be written by a few powers alone, as Mr. Akbaruddin warns. India therefore gains more by reforming and using the UN than by abandoning it. Relevance is not given; it has to be earned by making the institution deliver.

5. Environment & Ecology

Both stories today are about who pays for conserving a mountain range and who decides the price. In the Western Ghats, States are bargaining the protected area down, village by village, because the costs fall on their farmers while the benefits are national. In Arunachal Pradesh, a Central expert panel has accepted the loss of over 1.35 lakh trees for 1,605 MW of hydropower, with the replacement forest planned more than a thousand kilometres away. In both cases the clearance machinery works; what it does not yet do is measure the whole landscape before signing off on one piece of it.

5.1 Keralam Asks the Centre to Shrink Its Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Area to 8,590.69 sq km of Forest Only

THE NEWS Thiruvananthapuram. After Karnataka's special Assembly session against the Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) draft, carded here on September 21, the Keralam government has made its own formal move: it has urged the Centre to limit the ESA in its part of the Ghats to forest areas covering 8,590.69 sq km, The Hindu reports. An ESA is a tract notified by the Centre under environmental law in which activities such as mining, quarrying and large construction are banned or regulated because the ecosystem is fragile. M.G. Rajamanickam, Special Secretary, Environment and Climate Change, formally placed the State's recommendations and suggestions before the Centre on Thursday. Minister for Electricity and Environment Sunny Joseph said in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday. "Our stand is that populated areas, farmlands and plantations should be excluded and the ESA limited to forest regions," Mr. Joseph said. The history he recounted: in 2013 the K. Kasturirangan Committee proposed an ESA of 13,108 sq km covering 123 villages in the State, which sparked widespread protests; after a study, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests issued a draft notification that reduced the area to 9,993.7 sq km. Keralam now wants it brought down to 8,590.69 sq km and the number of villages to 98. It is also seeking a final notification, because every notification issued from 2014 to July 2026 has been a draft. The Minister called Keralam's case "unique" given its small size, dense population and large forest cover (29.15% of total area), and said that adding another law to the existing stringent laws protecting forests, the environment, paddy fields and wetlands could hurt development, agriculture and everyday life. If needed, Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan will lead a delegation to New Delhi. The Hindu's editorial the same day ("Narrowed posture") supplies the wider map: as of mid-2026 Gujarat was reportedly close to agreement with the Centre, Tamil Nadu had no substantive disagreement, Kerala wanted its ground-truthed 9,993 sq km cut to 8,805 sq km — a smaller cut than today's 8,590.69 sq km ask — and Maharashtra and Goa wanted 378 and 21 villages omitted. Citing the Centre's 2024 decision to notify ESAs State by State, it argues that Karnataka, which holds the largest share of the proposed ESAs by area, cannot keep rejecting the framework without an equally considered alternative map. The syllabus link is GS3 on conservation and environmental impact assessment, and GS2 on Centre-State relations.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Gadgil panel (2011) proposes near-total protection of the Western Ghats and is shelved → Kasturirangan panel (2013) confines the ESA to about 37% of the Ghats using satellite data and a 20% village rule → protests in Keralam and Karnataka lead to ground-truthing and a smaller 9,993.7 sq km draft for Keralam → a decade of lapsing drafts and the Centre's 2024 decision to notify State by State → Keralam now asks for 8,590.69 sq km of forest only, while Karnataka rejects the framework outright

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. The legal basis for an ESA is Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, not a separate forest law — Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Central Government to take all measures it considers necessary to protect and improve the environment, and Section 3(2)(v) specifically covers restricting the areas in which industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to safeguards. Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 lists the factors the Centre must consider in imposing such restrictions, including the biological diversity of the area and its proximity to protected areas. The same Rule requires the Centre to publish its intention as a draft and invite objections before a final notification, which is why the Western Ghats process has produced a series of drafts. Because the Act is a Central law, the final notification is the Centre's decision, though in practice it has sought State agreement.

	2. Gadgil and Kasturirangan disagreed on how much of the Ghats needs protection and how to decide it — The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, chaired by ecologist Madhav Gadgil, reported in 2011 and treated the entire Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive, grading it into three zones with graded restrictions and recommending a strong role for gram sabhas and a statutory Western Ghats Ecology Authority. The High-Level Working Group chaired by K. Kasturirangan, set up after States objected, reported in 2013. It divided the Ghats into a ‘cultural landscape’ of settlements, farms and plantations and a ‘natural landscape’, and proposed that about 37% of the Ghats, roughly 59,940 sq km, be notified as ESA. Within the ESA it recommended a ban on mining, quarrying, sand mining, red-category industries and large townships; its use of remote-sensing data and a rule including a whole village if 20% of its area was sensitive are what Karnataka now disputes. 3. The Western Ghats are a global biodiversity hotspot and a UNESCO World Heritage Site — The Western Ghats run for about 1,600 km parallel to the west coast through six States: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Together with Sri Lanka they form one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots, with very high endemism among amphibians, reptiles, fish and flowering plants. UNESCO inscribed the Western Ghats as a serial natural World Heritage Site in 2012, made up of component sites in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. The range is also the water tower of peninsular India: the Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri rise on its slopes. 4. An ESA is not the same as an eco-sensitive zone around a sanctuary — Eco-sensitive zones are buffer areas notified, also under the Environment (Protection) Act, around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, following the National Wildlife Action Plan and Ministry guidelines of 2011; they act as shock absorbers around a protected area. The Western Ghats ESA is a landscape-scale notification covering villages whether or not they adjoin a protected area. Kerala already has overlapping protections, including the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, which is the basis of the Minister’s ‘another law’ argument. The Wayanad landslides of July 2024, which killed more than 200 people in Mundakkai and Chooralmala, sharpened the debate on building and quarrying on steep, rain-soaked slopes.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 conservation questions keep returning to the Western Ghats — The syllabus names conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, and environmental impact assessment. Mains has asked candidates to compare the Gadgil and Kasturirangan approaches and to assess why landslides and floods in the Ghats have intensified. Kerala’s submission gives a live example of how the final map is actually negotiated. 2. Prelims tests the legal source and the geography — UPSC has asked which States the Western Ghats pass through, which rivers rise there, and under which Act eco-sensitive zones are notified. The distinction between an ESA, an eco-sensitive zone and a protected area under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 is exactly the sort of statement-based trap the paper sets. 3. Environmental federalism is a GS2 theme hiding inside a GS3 topic — The Hindu’s editorial frames the ESA as a collective-action problem: States bear the local cost, the nation captures the benefit. That argument fits GS2 questions on cooperative federalism and the Centre’s power to legislate on subjects in the Concurrent List, where ‘forests’ and ‘protection of wild animals and birds’ were moved by the 42nd Amendment.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	Section 3(2)(v) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Central Government to restrict the areas in which any industries, operations or

processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to safeguards.

- Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 sets out the factors the Central Government must consider before prohibiting or restricting industries and processes in an area, and requires a draft notification inviting objections.
- The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel was chaired by Madhav Gadgil and the High-Level Working Group on the Western Ghats was chaired by K. Kasturirangan.
- The Kasturirangan High-Level Working Group divided the Western Ghats into a cultural landscape and a natural landscape and proposed that about 37% of the Ghats be notified as an ecologically sensitive area.
- The Western Ghats pass through six States: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- The Western Ghats were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2012 as a serial natural site.
- The Forty-second Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 moved 'forests' and 'protection of wild animals and birds' from the State List to the Concurrent List.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Keralam is asking for the ESA to cover land that is already protected, which would make the notification largely redundant** — Limiting the ESA to forest areas sounds moderate, but forests are already governed by the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, wildlife laws and State forest rules. The purpose of a landscape-scale ESA is to regulate what happens at the edges — quarries on slopes above villages, resorts on stream banks, roads cut into unstable hillsides — which is where Wayanad-type disasters begin. Excluding plantations and settlements removes exactly those edges. The counter-view is serious: in a State where farms and forests interlock, blanket restrictions on houses and farm roads hurt poor settlers far more than they hurt quarry owners, and a notification the State will not enforce protects nothing.
- 2. The editorial's strongest point is that the ESA is a textbook public good, so States will always bargain it down** — A State that gives up mining royalties and construction activity bears the cost alone, while the benefits — rainfall regulation, river flows to other States, biodiversity — are shared by the whole peninsula. Each State therefore has an incentive to shrink its share, and Keralam's number has in fact moved from 13,108 to 9,993.7 to 8,805 and now 8,590.69 sq km. The Centre's 2024 decision to notify State by State speeds agreement but removes the logic of a continuous range, since a corridor broken in one State loses value in the next. A fair solution would compensate conserving States, for instance through forest-cover weight in Finance Commission transfers, rather than rely on persuasion.
- 3. Twelve years of drafts is itself a policy outcome, and it has favoured the extractive lobby** — Keralam's complaint that every notification from 2014 to July 2026 has been a draft cuts both ways. Uncertainty discourages legitimate farm and housing investment, as the editorial says, but it also means no final, enforceable ban on mining in the most sensitive villages has ever come into force. Interim directions of 2013 preserve some protection, yet a regime of repeated drafts invites litigation and lobbying at every round. A final notification, even a smaller one, would be better than an indefinite draft that is ignored on the ground.
- 4. The '20% rule' dispute shows that the unit of mapping, not the principle, is the real quarrel** — Kasturirangan used the revenue village as the unit and included the whole village if a fifth of its area was ecologically sensitive. That was an administrative convenience, because land records and permissions are issued village-wise, but it inevitably swept farmland into the ESA. Ground-truthing at plot or survey-number level would resolve many complaints, and Keralam's reduction from 123 to 98 villages

	suggests such mapping is possible. The lesson for policy is that a scientifically sound boundary drawn crudely produces political resistance that ends up weakening the science. 5. Keralam's 'unique' plea is partly true and partly a template other States will copy — Keralam is small, densely populated and heavily dependent on plantations along the Ghats, so a given ESA area touches more households there than in Gujarat or Tamil Nadu. But Karnataka, Maharashtra and Goa have made similar pleas in different words, and if each State's uniqueness is accepted, the continuous range becomes a patchwork. A better test than uniqueness is risk: slope, rainfall and past landslide history should decide where restrictions bite hardest, whatever the State boundary.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Western Ghats ecologically sensitive area has been negotiated down State by State for over a decade without ever being finally notified." Examine the reasons for this deadlock and suggest how conservation of the Western Ghats can be reconciled with the livelihoods of the people who live there. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with Keralam's September 2026 submission asking the Centre to limit its ESA to 8,590.69 sq km of forest across 98 villages, against the Kasturirangan panel's 13,108 sq km and 123 villages, and note that every notification since 2014 has remained a draft. 2. Body — the legal and scientific frame — Explain Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Rule 5 of its Rules, then contrast the Gadgil and Kasturirangan approaches, including the 37% figure, the cultural and natural landscape division and the 20% village rule. 3. Body — reasons for the deadlock — Cover livelihood fears of farmers and plantation workers, the disputed 2012 satellite data, the village as the unit of mapping, the public-good problem that makes States bargain the area down, lobbying by mining and construction interests, and the Centre's 2024 decision to notify State by State. 4. Body — way forward — Suggest plot-level ground-truthing, risk-based zoning using slope, rainfall and landslide history, gram sabha participation as Gadgil proposed, fiscal compensation to conserving States, and a firm date for the final notification. Use the Wayanad landslides of 2024 as evidence of the cost of delay. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that a smaller but final and enforced ESA serves the Ghats better than a larger draft that nobody obeys, and that conservation will hold only when those who bear its cost are compensated.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the District Collector of Kottayam. Villagers in Koottickal fear they will not be able to repair their houses once the ESA is notified. What do you do? Approach: I would first explain, with the draft in hand, what the ESA actually prohibits: mining, quarrying, large construction and polluting industries, not the repair of existing homes or ordinary farming. I would hold ward-level meetings with the panchayat and revenue officials and publish a simple list of what remains permitted. Where specific plots have been wrongly classified, I would record them for the State's ground-truthing submission. Rumour does more damage than the notification itself, so clear information is the first duty. Q2. As Secretary, Environment, Government of India, would you agree to Keralam's request to exclude all plantations from the ESA? Approach: I would not accept a blanket exclusion, because some plantations sit on steep, landslide-prone slopes where regulation matters most. I would ask the State for plot-level maps and agree to exclude settlements and flat farmland while keeping high-risk slopes inside, whatever their current use. I would also offer a firm timeline for the

final notification so that the State gains certainty in exchange. A negotiated, risk-based map is defensible in court and on the ground; a political one is not.

Q3. An interview board asks: should the Centre simply notify the Western Ghats ESA over the States' objections?

Approach: Legally it can, since the power lies in a Central Act, but a notification the States will not enforce would exist only on paper. Land records, building permissions and policing are all State functions. The better course is to use the Centre's legal authority as leverage for a time-bound agreement, backed by fiscal incentives for States that conserve. If a State refuses indefinitely, the Centre should notify at least the scientifically undisputed core so that the most sensitive areas are not left unprotected.

5.2 Expert Panel Recommends Clearance for 1,605 MW Subansiri Upper Dam Despite 1,35,733 Trees Marked for Felling

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Union Environment Ministry has recommended environmental clearance for the Subansiri Upper Hydroelectric Project (SUHEP), a run-of-the-river project on the Subansiri basin in Arunachal Pradesh, even as it expressed concern over the felling of a "substantial" number of trees, The Indian Express reports from the minutes of the EAC meeting. An environmental clearance is the Centre's permission for a large project to proceed after its effects on air, water, land and people are studied. The final clearance will be subject to a Stage-1 forest clearance — an in-principle approval given by the Centre under the Forest Conservation Act — because the project requires the diversion of 2,733 hectares of forest land and the felling of approximately 1,35,733 trees. The EAC observed that the felling may affect forest structure, habitat continuity, biodiversity, wildlife movement and associated ecosystem services, and advised the project proponent, National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited (NHPC), to prepare a comprehensive, site-specific and time-bound Ecosystem Restoration and Biodiversity Management Plan. Compensatory afforestation — new planting to make up for forest lost — has been proposed across as many as 14 districts of Madhya Pradesh, on about 5,466 hectares of degraded forest land. Normally, an equivalent patch of non-forest land must be found locally, but since Arunachal Pradesh already has high forest cover, Ministry guidelines allow it to meet the obligation on non-forest land in lower-cover States; where no equivalent non-forest land is available, the Act requires a plantation twice the size of the diverted land on degraded land. The Indian Express had reported in February that until February 2026 Arunachal Pradesh had not complied with compensatory afforestation conditions for the Subansiri Lower project, also built by NHPC downstream, and the Ministry had sent six reminders. The standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife had cleared Subansiri Lower on condition that no upstream projects would follow, but the Supreme Court modified this on Arunachal Pradesh's plea; its August 2009 directive says any upstream proposal "would be considered independently on its own merit by the Standing Committee". The EAC noted assessments of glacial lake outburst flood discharge, peak flood discharge and dam-breach impacts on Subansiri Lower. Power generation and flood moderation are the stated objectives of the 1,605 MW plant near Menga, which envisages a 237 m-high storage dam. The syllabus link is GS3 on infrastructure, conservation and environmental impact assessment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Arunachal Pradesh's steep, high-discharge rivers draw a push for hydropower → Subansiri Lower cleared on condition of no upstream dams, then the Supreme Court in 2009 allows upstream proposals to be judged on their own merit → Arunachal Pradesh still has not met compensatory afforestation conditions for Subansiri Lower by February 2026 → NHPC seeks clearance for the 1,605 MW, 237 m Subansiri Upper project needing 2,733 ha of forest → EAC recommends environmental clearance, leaving forest clearance and compensatory afforestation in Madhya Pradesh as the next test

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The EIA Notification, 2006 sends large hydropower projects to the Centre's Expert Appraisal Committee** — The Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006, issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, classifies projects into Category A, appraised by the Centre, and Category B, appraised by State-level authorities. River valley projects with hydroelectric capacity of 50 MW or more fall in Category A and are examined by a sectoral Expert Appraisal Committee, which recommends grant or rejection to the Ministry. The process runs through four stages: screening, scoping

(fixing the terms of reference for the study), public consultation and appraisal. The EAC's recommendation is advisory; the clearance itself is issued by the Ministry, often with conditions.

- 2. Forest clearance is a separate, two-stage approval under the 1980 forest law —** Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 requires the Central Government's prior approval before forest land is used for any non-forest purpose. In practice approval comes in two stages: Stage-1 is in-principle approval with conditions such as compensatory afforestation and payment of the net present value of the forest, and Stage-2 is final approval once those conditions are met. The 2023 amendment renamed the law the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, and exempted certain categories such as strategic linear projects within 100 km of international borders. The amendment's narrowing of which land counts as 'forest' has been challenged before the Supreme Court.
- 3. Compensatory afforestation money is held in statutory funds —** The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 created a National Compensatory Afforestation Fund and a State fund for each State in the public accounts, into which user agencies deposit money for compensatory afforestation and the net present value of diverted forest. Most of the money collected for a State goes to that State's fund, with a smaller share to the National Fund, and it is administered by authorities known as CAMPA. The general rule is afforestation on equal non-forest land, or on degraded forest land of twice the area where non-forest land is not available. Critics have long argued that a young plantation elsewhere cannot replace the ecological functions of an old, contiguous natural forest.
- 4. The Subansiri is the Brahmaputra's largest tributary and runs through a seismically active, glaciated basin —** The Subansiri rises in the Tibetan Himalaya, flows through Arunachal Pradesh and joins the Brahmaputra in Assam, and is its largest tributary by discharge. The region lies in the highest seismic zone and has many glacial lakes, which is why glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) — sudden releases of water when a moraine or ice dam holding a glacial lake gives way — are now part of dam appraisal. The October 2023 GLOF from South Lhonak lake in Sikkim destroyed the Chungthang dam of the Teesta-III project, showing how a single event can cascade down a river with several dams. Run-of-the-river projects use the river's flow with limited storage, whereas storage dams hold large volumes behind high walls.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 pairs infrastructure with environmental impact assessment —** The syllabus lists infrastructure (energy) alongside conservation and EIA. Mains questions have asked about the EIA process's weaknesses, the environmental costs of Himalayan hydropower, and disasters such as the Chamoli and Sikkim floods. A single project with numbers for forest area, trees and afforestation lets a candidate make those arguments concretely.
- 2. Prelims tests the institutions in the clearance chain —** UPSC has asked about the National Board for Wildlife, the CAMPA framework, and which projects need Central environmental clearance. The EAC, Stage-1 and Stage-2 forest approvals and the rule of twice the area on degraded land are all direct statement material.
- 3. The Northeast's hydropower is also a strategic and water-security question —** China's dam building on the Yarlung Tsangpo upstream has led India to push projects in Arunachal Pradesh for power and as a buffer, as seen in the Siang Upper project carded on September 24. Questions on India-China relations and water security in the Brahmaputra basin can draw on the Subansiri projects as evidence.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Under the EIA Notification, 2006, river valley projects with hydroelectric capacity of 50 MW or more are Category A projects appraised at the Central level by an

Expert Appraisal Committee.

- The four stages of environmental clearance under the EIA Notification, 2006 are screening, scoping, public consultation and appraisal.
- Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, now titled the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, requires prior approval of the Central Government for diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.
- When non-forest land is not available for compensatory afforestation, plantation is required on degraded forest land of twice the area diverted.
- The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 established a National Compensatory Afforestation Fund and State Compensatory Afforestation Funds in the public accounts.
- The National Board for Wildlife is constituted under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and is chaired by the Prime Minister.
- The Subansiri, which rises in Tibet and flows through Arunachal Pradesh into Assam, is the largest tributary of the Brahmaputra.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Planting in Madhya Pradesh to replace a forest in Arunachal Pradesh compensates the national accounts, not the ecosystem** — The EAC itself lists what the felling will damage: forest structure, habitat continuity, wildlife movement and ecosystem services in the Subansiri basin. A plantation on 5,466 hectares of degraded land in 14 districts of Madhya Pradesh restores none of these locally; it only restores a number in the national forest-cover tally. The rule allowing high-cover States to afforest elsewhere was a practical answer to land scarcity, but in a biodiversity hotspot it converts a local loss into a paper gain. The counter-view is that Arunachal genuinely lacks non-forest land and that a well-run plantation in central India still sequesters carbon, which is a real, if different, benefit.
- 2. The Subansiri Lower record is the best predictor of how Subansiri Upper's conditions will be met** — The Indian Express reports that compensatory afforestation conditions for the downstream project were still unmet in February 2026 after six reminders. A clearance regime that grants new approvals while earlier conditions remain unfulfilled signals that conditions are negotiable. The EAC's demand for a time-bound Ecosystem Restoration and Biodiversity Management Plan is sensible, but its value depends on monitoring and penalties, which the clearance system has historically lacked. The Ministry could make compliance on the earlier project a precondition for Stage-2 approval of the new one.
- 3. A 237 m 'run-of-the-river' storage dam is a contradiction the appraisal should resolve** — The report describes the project both as run-of-the-river and as envisaging a 237 m-high storage dam for flood moderation. Run-of-the-river projects are usually presented as low-impact because they store little water, but flood moderation requires storage, and storage changes downstream flows, sediment and fisheries. The distinction matters for Assam, where downstream communities opposed Subansiri Lower precisely over altered flows and dam safety. The appraisal should state plainly how much water the reservoir will hold and how releases will be managed in the lean season and in floods.
- 4. Project-by-project clearance cannot capture what a chain of dams does to a river** — The Supreme Court's 2009 direction to judge upstream proposals 'on its own merit' was meant to be fair to each project, but rivers do not work project by project. With Subansiri Lower downstream and more projects planned across the basin, the relevant question is the cumulative effect on flows, sediment, fish migration and flood risk. The EAC has taken a step by assessing dam-breach effects on Subansiri Lower and GLOF discharge, which is more than many appraisals do. A basin-wide carrying-capacity

	study, updated before each new dam, would make that step systematic rather than occasional. 5. The case for the dam is real and should be stated honestly — The Northeast has large untapped hydropower potential, hydropower is a firm, non-fossil source that can balance solar and wind, and a storage dam can moderate floods in Assam. There is also a strategic argument given China's dam building upstream on the Yarlung Tsangpo. None of this makes 1,35,733 trees irrelevant; it means the trade-off should be made openly, with the costs to forests and downstream communities priced in and the benefits delivered, rather than hidden behind the language of compensation.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Large hydropower projects in the Eastern Himalaya are appraised one at a time, while their impacts accumulate across the river basin." Critically examine this statement with reference to the Subansiri projects in Arunachal Pradesh, and suggest reforms to India's environmental and forest clearance process. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that the Environment Ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee has recommended environmental clearance for NHPC's 1,605 MW Subansiri Upper project, which requires 2,733 ha of forest and the felling of about 1,35,733 trees, with a 237 m-high dam near Menga. 2. Body — the clearance chain — Explain Category A appraisal under the EIA Notification, 2006, the two-stage forest clearance under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, the compensatory afforestation rules and the CAF Act, 2016, and the role of the National Board for Wildlife. 3. Body — the cumulative problem — Use the NBWL's original no-upstream-projects condition, the Supreme Court's 2009 modification, the unmet afforestation conditions on Subansiri Lower, and the GLOF and dam-breach assessments to show how basin-level risks are handled piecemeal. Mention the Teesta-III destruction of 2023 as an example of cascade risk. 4. Body — reforms — Propose mandatory basin-wide cumulative impact and carrying-capacity studies, afforestation within the same landscape wherever possible, compliance on earlier projects as a condition for new approvals, independent post-clearance monitoring, and genuine consultation with downstream communities in Assam. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India's energy transition needs Himalayan hydropower, but its legitimacy depends on appraising rivers as systems and on enforcing the conditions attached to clearances.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of a district in Assam downstream of the Subansiri projects. Residents fear sudden water releases. What steps do you take? Approach: I would ask NHPC and the State Water Resources Department for the dam's release protocol and insist on a written early-warning system with sirens, SMS alerts and village-level contact points. I would include dam-release and dam-breach scenarios in the district disaster management plan and hold mock drills with the District Disaster Management Authority. I would also set up a grievance channel for fishers and farmers affected by changed flows. Communities trust a dam more when they know exactly what will happen and when. Q2. As the Member Secretary of the Expert Appraisal Committee, how would you handle a proponent whose earlier project has unmet clearance conditions? Approach: I would place the compliance report of the earlier project before the committee as part of the new appraisal. I would recommend that final approval for the new project be linked to demonstrable progress on the pending conditions, including

compensatory afforestation. I would specify measurable milestones in the new clearance, with periodic compliance reports reviewed by the Ministry's regional office. Clearances lose credibility when conditions are routinely ignored without consequence.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it right to fell over a lakh trees in Arunachal Pradesh for hydropower when India needs clean energy?

Approach: Both goals are legitimate, so the question is how the trade-off is made. Hydropower gives firm, low-carbon electricity and flood moderation, but old-growth Himalayan forest and downstream river systems cannot be recreated by planting elsewhere. I would support the project only if cumulative impacts are studied, the design minimises forest loss, restoration is done as close to the site as possible, and downstream communities are protected. Clean energy that destroys a biodiversity hotspot without full accounting is not truly clean.

6. Health & Life Sciences

India's mental-health problem is not a shortage of ideas but a shortage of people and of places close to patients. The new BRICS network NIMHANS will coordinate is built on that premise: task-sharing with non-specialist workers, tele-consultation and treatment inside primary care, borrowed and adapted from partners who have faced the same gap. The value of the exercise will be judged at the primary health centre, not at the summit table.

6.1 India to Pilot a BRICS Network of Mental-Health Centres of Excellence, With NIMHANS as Coordinating Centre

THE NEWS New Delhi. A newly established BRICS Network of Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in mental health will be piloted by India, with the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, as the coordinating centre, The Indian Express reports. BRICS is the grouping that began with Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa and has since expanded. NIMHANS is developing the network's governance protocol, while a multi-country steering committee and technical working groups are being formed; centres of excellence, agreements, contact points and governance mechanisms are being worked out. "The hope is that this network will mitigate the existing treatment gaps across BRICS countries by scaling task-sharing models and digital tele-health platforms. It will also aim to integrate mental healthcare into primary health centres, bringing services to hard-to-reach and rural populations," said Dr Naveen Kumar C, professor of psychiatry at NIMHANS. Task-sharing means training non-specialist health workers to identify common mental disorders, offer basic support and refer serious cases, so that scarce psychiatrists are not the only point of care. The report describes approaches members bring: an educational manga created in China to fight stigma, telling the story of a 17-year-old schoolgirl, Xiaoyu, whose anxiety and depression are dismissed as laziness until a classmate helps her reach a counselling clinic; a 24x7 digital platform in Indonesia for mental-health crises and suicide prevention; pictorial, story-based screening by community health workers in South Africa; virtual-reality clinical simulations in the UAE; and tech-assisted assessment in Russia using heart-rate variability, galvanic skin response and biofeedback. India brings its tele-mental-health services. Collaboration will span "technical expertise, joint research, capacity building, and knowledge exchange rather than pure monetary grants", Dr Naveen said. Possible joint research includes AI-assisted screening, digital interventions, suicide prevention, biomarkers and epidemiological mapping; a compendium of evidence-based clinical protocols, culturally adaptable tools and public-education strategies is envisaged, as are common approaches to data privacy, cybersecurity, ethical AI and rights-based policy. Dr Naveen said an estimated 197.3 million Indians were affected by mental disorders in 2017, with a treatment gap of 70%-92%, a shortage of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and psychiatric nurses concentrated in cities, and projected economic losses of \$1.08 trillion between 2012 and 2030. The syllabus link is GS2 on health and on groupings involving India, and GS3 on technology in public services.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Mental disorders affect an estimated 197.3 million Indians, with a 70%-92% treatment gap and specialists concentrated in cities → the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 makes access to care a legal right, and Tele-MANAS takes counselling to the phone → other BRICS members develop low-cost tools of their own, from manga to pictorial screening → the grouping sets up a Network of Centres of Excellence with India piloting it and NIMHANS coordinating → success will depend on whether shared protocols reach primary health centres and frontline workers

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 turned access to mental healthcare into an enforceable right** — The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 replaced the Mental Health Act, 1987 and was framed to align Indian law with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which India has ratified. Section 18 gives every person the right to access mental healthcare and treatment from services run or funded by the government, which must be affordable, of good quality and available without discrimination. The Act allows a person to make an advance directive on how they wish to be treated and to appoint a nominated representative. It establishes a Central Mental Health Authority, State Mental Health Authorities and Mental Health Review Boards to regulate institutions and hear complaints.
- 2. Section 115 of the 2017 Act effectively decriminalised attempted suicide** — Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act presumes, unless proved otherwise, that a person who attempts suicide is under severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under

the then Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. It also places a duty on the government to provide care, treatment and rehabilitation to such a person to reduce the risk of a recurrence. The shift treats a suicide attempt as a health emergency rather than a crime. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced the IPC, does not carry over a general offence of attempting suicide.

3. NIMHANS is an Institute of National Importance and the backbone of India's tele-mental-health service — NIMHANS in Bengaluru was declared an Institute of National Importance by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences, Bengaluru Act, 2012, which gives it the status of a deemed university able to award degrees. It conducted the National Mental Health Survey of 2015-16, which estimated the treatment gap for mental disorders at between 70% and 92%, the range Dr Naveen quotes. It is the nodal centre of Tele-MANAS, the National Tele Mental Health Programme launched in October 2022, which provides free counselling through the toll-free number 14416 in several languages. Tele-MANAS routes callers to trained counsellors and, where needed, to specialists and in-person services.

4. India's public mental-health programmes build from the district and the primary centre — The National Mental Health Programme was launched in 1982 to integrate mental healthcare with general health services. Its District Mental Health Programme, begun in 1996, created district-level teams for outpatient care, community outreach and awareness. Mental, neurological and substance-use disorders are part of the expanded service package of Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, the renamed health and wellness centres, which is where task-sharing by community health officers would operate. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy of 2022 was India's first such national strategy. The World Health Organization's Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) provides the standard guidance for non-specialists to identify and manage priority conditions.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS2 lists health as a social sector and BRICS as a grouping involving India** — The syllabus asks about development and management of services relating to health, and about important international institutions and groupings. Mains has asked about the treatment gap in mental health, the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 and the role of technology in extending care. This story connects domestic health policy with India's role in BRICS, which it chairs this year.
- 2. Prelims tests provisions of the 2017 Act and national programmes** — UPSC and State commissions have set statements on the decriminalisation of attempted suicide, the rights conferred by the Mental Healthcare Act, the Tele-MANAS helpline and the status of institutes of national importance. These are durable facts that recur.
- 3. Essay and GS4 draw on stigma and dignity** — The Chinese manga's theme of 'losing face' and family blame is a ready illustration for essays on mental health, youth pressures and the dignity of persons with illness. GS4 case studies on students under exam stress and on compassionate administration use the same material.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Section 18 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 confers on every person the right to access mental healthcare and treatment from mental health services run or funded by the appropriate government.
- Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides that a person who attempts suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished.
- The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides for advance directives and nominated representatives for persons with mental illness.
- The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences, Bengaluru was

ANALYSIS

declared an Institute of National Importance by an Act of Parliament in 2012.

- Tele-MANAS, the National Tele Mental Health Programme, is accessible through the toll-free number 14416, with NIMHANS as its nodal centre.
- The National Mental Health Programme was launched in 1982, and its District Mental Health Programme component in 1996.
- Task-sharing in mental health refers to training non-specialist health workers to identify, support and refer persons with common mental disorders.

- 1. The network's real product is a protocol for task-sharing, and India needs that more than it needs research papers** — A 70%-92% treatment gap will never be closed by training more psychiatrists alone, because specialists take a decade to produce and concentrate in cities. The only scalable path is for community health officers, ASHAs and nurses to handle identification, basic counselling and referral, with specialists supervising. South Africa's pictorial screening and Indonesia's crisis platform are practical tools for exactly this. If the network produces a tested, adaptable compendium for primary-care workers, it will have justified itself; if it produces mainly conferences and joint papers, it will not.
- 2. A network built on knowledge exchange without money is realistic, but it limits ambition** — Dr Naveen's point that collaboration will be technical rather than 'pure monetary grants' suits BRICS, which lacks a health fund of the kind the World Bank or Global Fund offer. Knowledge sharing is cheap and can be sustained through changes of government. The limitation is implementation: protocols need trained staff, drugs and supervision at primary centres, and those cost money that each country must find domestically. The network can shape how India spends its own mental-health budget, but it cannot substitute for that budget.
- 3. AI screening and physiological biomarkers raise privacy questions the network rightly puts on its agenda** — Mental-health data are among the most stigmatising a person can have, and tools that read heart-rate variability or skin response, or AI models trained on patient conversations, create new risks of profiling and leakage. India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 does not create a special category for health data, so a shared BRICS framework on privacy and ethical AI could fill a practical gap for clinicians. The counter-view is that BRICS members have very different standards of state access to data, so a common approach may converge on the lowest standard rather than the highest.
- 4. Stigma is a larger barrier than supply in many families, which is why the manga matters** — The Chinese story of a girl whose depression is called laziness would be familiar to many Indian households, where seeking help can be seen as a mark of weakness or a threat to marriage and career prospects. Culturally adapted public education — comics, stories, local-language messages — is cheaper than clinics and can raise demand for care that already exists, including Tele-MANAS. India could adapt such material for schools and coaching hubs, where exam stress is acute. Awareness without services, however, only frustrates, so education and supply must grow together.
- 5. India's leadership in health diplomacy works best when it exports systems it has actually run at scale** — India's tele-mental-health service is a genuine asset to bring to the table, having been built on a public platform with a single national number. Leading the network lets India shape norms on digital health for a large part of the developing world, much as it has done with digital public infrastructure. The risk is presenting pilots as achievements before evaluation; Tele-MANAS's outcomes on referral and follow-up need independent study. Credibility abroad will depend on measurable results at home.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“India’s mental-health challenge is less about the absence of law than about the absence of services close to where people live.” In the light of this statement, discuss how task-sharing, tele-mental health and international cooperation such as the BRICS Network of Centres of Excellence can help close India’s mental-health treatment gap. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Cite Dr Naveen Kumar C of NIMHANS: an estimated 197.3 million Indians affected by mental disorders in 2017, a 70%-92% treatment gap and projected losses of \$1.08 trillion between 2012 and 2030. Note that India will pilot a BRICS Network of Centres of Excellence with NIMHANS as coordinator. 2. Body — the legal framework is already strong — Explain the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017: the right to access care under Section 18, advance directives, Mental Health Review Boards and the decriminalisation of attempted suicide under Section 115. Argue that the gap lies in implementation. 3. Body — closing the service gap — Discuss task-sharing through community health officers and ASHAs at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, the District Mental Health Programme, Tele-MANAS on 14416, and the WHO’s mhGAP guidance. Mention the shortage and urban concentration of specialists. 4. Body — what BRICS cooperation adds — Use the examples from member countries — China’s anti-stigma manga, Indonesia’s crisis platform, South Africa’s pictorial screening, the UAE’s VR simulations and Russia’s tech-assisted assessment — and the proposed compendium of protocols, joint research and common rules on data privacy and ethical AI. Note the limit of a network without funding. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India needs to convert its rights-based law into services at the primary level, and that international cooperation is most useful when it supplies tested, adaptable tools for that task.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the District Collector of a district with no psychiatrist in the government system. How do you use the tools available to improve mental-health care? Approach: I would ensure the District Mental Health Programme team is in place and that medical officers and community health officers at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs are trained to screen and refer common conditions. I would publicise Tele-MANAS on 14416 in schools, colleges and primary centres so that counselling is available immediately. I would arrange periodic visits or tele-consultation links with the nearest medical college psychiatry department. I would track the number of people identified, treated and followed up, not just the number of camps held. Q2. As a Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry, what safeguards would you insist on before AI-based mental-health screening is used in public facilities? Approach: I would require that any tool be validated on Indian populations and languages before use, and that it only support, not replace, a trained health worker’s judgement. Data would be collected with informed consent, stored securely and used only for treatment, in line with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. I would require an independent audit of errors and bias. A false label of mental illness can harm a person’s job and family life, so caution must come first. Q3. An interview board asks: why should India lead a BRICS mental-health network when its own treatment gap is so large? Approach: Leading the network is not a claim that India has solved the problem; it is a way to learn faster from countries that have tried different approaches. India brings a working national tele-mental-health service and a premier institution in NIMHANS, which gives it something real to contribute. The network also allows India to shape shared norms on data and ethics in digital health. The test of leadership will be

whether India applies what it learns at its own primary health centres.

7. Science & Technology

Both stories today are about who owns the design of a critical technology and what India must give up to get it. In nuclear power India has rewritten its liability law to bring foreign reactor vendors back to the table, and the French are now asking for a fleet order before they localise. In chips a university lab has shown a working graphics processor on reconfigurable hardware, while Indian phone buyers pay for the fact that the world's memory chips are being diverted to AI data centres. Technology sovereignty is bought either with law, with orders or with patient design capability; India is trying all three at once.

7.1 France's EDF pitches European Pressurised Reactors as India finalises draft rules under the SHANTI Act

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 25. Senior officials of the Union Ministry of Power met the French government-owned utility Électricité de France (EDF) on Friday to discuss deploying its European Pressurised Reactors (EPRs) in India, The Indian Express reports. The Economic Times adds that Power Secretary Pankaj Agarwal met Bernard Fontana, Chairman and CEO of EDF. An EPR is a large pressurised water reactor design, the family of reactors in which ordinary water under high pressure both cools the core and carries heat to a steam generator, without being allowed to boil in the core. Officials of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Central Electricity Authority, NTPC and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) also attended. According to the Power Ministry's statement, "the discussions centred on the deployment of EPR technology, India's regulatory reforms for the nuclear sector, cooperation on pumped hydro storage projects, and the way forward for a robust, mutually beneficial partnership." EDF briefed Indian officials on its efforts to build an ecosystem and supply chain in India to enable large-scale localisation, and reiterated that "a sizeable programme involving multiple nuclear reactors would provide suppliers with confidence and enable economies of scale by leveraging the capabilities of Indian industry." Mr. Agarwal, in turn, briefed the French side on progress in finalising the regulatory framework, including the draft SHANTI (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India) Rules and Regulations, which the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) placed in the public domain last month for stakeholder consultation. The Indian Express says these drafts lay out the framework for a wider nuclear power ecosystem, covering private participation, captive nuclear generation (a plant built by an industrial user to supply its own electricity), foreign reactor technology, licensing, safety oversight and nuclear liability. India has "recently opened up its tightly-regulated civil nuclear sector for private players", renewing interest among nuclear majors from France, the U.S. and Russia. New since this magazine's September 21 card on RAPP-8 is the commercial side: a foreign vendor now negotiates against a draft rulebook under the new law. Per PRS Legislative Research, the SHANTI Bill, 2025 repealed and replaced both the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010; per a PIB release, the Rajya Sabha passed it on December 18, 2025, after the Lok Sabha. The syllabus link is GS3 on energy infrastructure and indigenisation of technology, and GS2 on India-France relations.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 2008 NSG waiver and India-France civil nuclear agreement open the door to foreign reactors → the 2010 liability law's supplier-recourse clause keeps vendors away and Jaitapur stalls for over a decade → the SHANTI Act of December 2025 repeals the 1962 and 2010 laws, opens plants to Indian private companies and narrows supplier recourse → DAE releases draft SHANTI rules for consultation in August 2026 → EDF returns to pitch EPRs and asks for a multi-reactor fleet order

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The SHANTI Act replaced two laws and ended the government monopoly on running reactors** — Per the PRS summary of the Bill, the SHANTI Act repeals the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA) and consolidates both into one statute. The Central government may now license any company incorporated in India, and joint ventures between government entities and private companies, to build, own or operate nuclear plants and to fabricate, transport, trade or store nuclear fuel; companies incorporated outside India are excluded. Mining of atomic minerals and production and trade of specified atomic substances remain with the Central government and its companies. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), earlier created by an executive order under the 1962 Act, gets statutory status, with a chairperson, one whole-time member and up to seven part-time members

chosen on the advice of a search-cum-selection committee.

2. **The CLNDA's Section 17(b) was the reason foreign vendors stayed away** — The CLNDA, 2010 channelled liability for a nuclear accident to the operator on a no-fault basis, capped the operator's liability at ₹1,500 crore for reactors of 10 MW thermal and above, and left the balance to the Central government. Its Section 17(b) went further than international practice by giving the operator a right of recourse against the supplier if the accident resulted from equipment or material with patent or latent defects, or sub-standard services. Section 46 also left room for claims under other laws, including tort law. Vendors from the United States, France and Japan argued that this exposed them to unlimited and uninsurable risk. Per PRS, the SHANTI Act removes recourse against suppliers for defective equipment or materials, keeping it only where a contract provides for it or where damage results from a deliberate act, and replaces the flat cap with graded caps of ₹100 crore to ₹3,000 crore depending on plant capacity.
3. **India joined the global liability convention in 2016 and the SHANTI Act moves closer to it** — The Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC), adopted under the International Atomic Energy Agency in 1997, creates a common framework in which operators bear exclusive liability and an international fund tops up compensation beyond national limits. India signed the CSC in 2010 and ratified it in February 2016, after issuing a memorandum arguing that Section 17(b) was compatible with it. The CSC's model channels liability to the operator and permits recourse against suppliers only where a contract says so or where damage results from an intentional act, which is the position the SHANTI Act now adopts. The new law also extends compensation, subject to conditions, to damage in a foreign state caused by an incident in India.
4. **Jaitapur and the three-stage programme frame what an EPR fleet would mean** — The Jaitapur project in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra was planned as six EPRs of about 1,650 MW each, which would make it the largest nuclear site in the world; it followed the India-France civil nuclear cooperation agreement of 2008 and has not reached construction. NPCIL, a public sector enterprise under the DAE, operates India's power reactors, most of them Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) that use natural uranium. India's three-stage programme, conceived by Homi Bhabha, moves from PHWRs to fast breeder reactors that breed plutonium and then to thorium-based reactors, because India has limited uranium and large thorium reserves. Imported light water reactors such as EPRs and the Russian VVERs at Kudankulam sit outside this sequence and add capacity quickly, while indigenous 220 MW Bharat Small Reactors and Small Modular Reactors are meant for captive industrial use.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS3 asks about energy security and the growth of nuclear power** — UPSC has asked candidates to discuss the need for nuclear energy in India's energy mix and the concerns over safety and cost. The SHANTI Act and a foreign vendor's pitch give a current case for the supply side: capacity will come only if liability, private capital and localisation line up. Per the Minister of State Jitendra Singh in the Rajya Sabha, as reported by PIB, India has nearly 9 GW of nuclear capacity against a target of 100 GW by 2047.
2. **Prelims repeatedly tests nuclear institutions and conventions** — Questions have covered the IAEA safeguards, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and the fuel used in different reactor types. The statutory AERB, the CSC and the difference between PHWRs and light water reactors are natural Prelims targets now that the law has changed. The distinction between operator and supplier liability is exactly the kind of definitional point the paper likes.
3. **GS2 treats France as India's most consistent strategic partner** — India-France

	relations are usually examined through defence, space and civil nuclear cooperation. An answer on the partnership can use Jaitapur as the test case of whether the 2008 agreement delivers electricity, not just diplomatic goodwill.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The SHANTI Act, 2025 repealed the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, and consolidated the law on nuclear energy and nuclear liability into a single statute. ● Under the SHANTI Act, companies incorporated in India, including joint ventures of government entities and private companies, may be licensed to build, own or operate nuclear power plants, while companies incorporated outside India are not eligible. ● The SHANTI Act gives statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, which was earlier constituted by an executive order under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. ● Section 17(b) of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 gave the operator a right of recourse against a supplier for nuclear damage caused by equipment or material with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services. ● Under nuclear liability law, liability for nuclear damage is channelled to the operator of the installation on a no-fault basis, meaning the victim need not prove negligence. ● The Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC) was adopted under the International Atomic Energy Agency, and India ratified it in 2016. ● The European Pressurised Reactor (EPR) is a pressurised water reactor design using ordinary (light) water as coolant and moderator, unlike India's indigenous Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors that use natural uranium and heavy water.
ANALYSIS	1. The liability fix was necessary but EDF has now named the next price: a fleet order — For fifteen years foreign vendors cited Section 17(b) as the obstacle; the SHANTI Act removes it, and the vendors are back within months. But EDF's message on Friday was not about liability at all. It said a "sizeable programme involving multiple nuclear reactors" would give suppliers confidence, which is a request for a committed multi-unit order before it builds an Indian supply chain. That shifts the risk from the vendor's balance sheet to India's planning: if the government commits to a fleet and costs overrun, Indian consumers pay. The counter-view is that no reactor has ever been built cheaply as a one-off, and serial construction of one design is how France itself brought costs down in the 1970s and 1980s. 2. Removing supplier recourse transfers risk to the public purse, not away from it — The CLNDA's supplier clause was a lesson drawn from Bhopal, where the victims' struggle for compensation from a foreign company lasted decades. Under the new law the operator is liable up to a graded cap and the Central government pays the rest, while the supplier is liable only if the contract or a deliberate act makes it so. This is the international norm and it is insurable, which is why it attracts vendors. It also means that a design defect in an imported reactor will be paid for by Indian taxpayers beyond the operator's cap. Whether the graded caps of ₹100 crore to ₹3,000 crore are adequate for a large plant such as an EPR is a legitimate question for the rules now under consultation. 3. The EPR's own record is the strongest argument for caution — The EPR is one of the most powerful reactor designs in service, but its first-of-a-kind builds in Europe, at Olkiluoto in Finland and Flamanville in France, ran years late and far over budget. The units in China were quicker, which suggests that the problem lay in lost construction

	skills and first-of-a-kind engineering rather than in the design itself. India's own PHWR fleet programme, which NPCIL now builds in batches, is a cheaper and more predictable way to add capacity. The case for EPRs is speed at scale: one large unit adds more capacity than several indigenous units, and India needs a steep ramp to approach its 2047 target. 4. Localisation is the real prize and it depends on India's private industry — EDF spoke of large-scale localisation and of leveraging Indian industry. That can only work if Indian forgings, pumps, valves and control systems meet nuclear-grade quality standards, which few firms outside the DAE's traditional supplier base currently do. The SHANTI Act's opening to private operators matters here, because a larger market of buyers gives component makers the volume to invest. If the rules allow captive nuclear generation for industries, demand for smaller reactors could build that supplier base faster than a handful of mega-projects. The two tracks, imported large reactors and indigenous small ones, should be seen as complementary rather than competing. 5. The rule-making stage will decide whether the reform is credible — An Act sets principles; the draft rules on licensing, safety oversight and liability decide how long a project waits and who bears which risk. A statutory AERB is an improvement, but its members are still appointed by the Central government, which also owns NPCIL, and the regulator's independence will be judged by how it treats a government operator's application. Stakeholder consultation is an opportunity for States hosting plants, local communities and independent experts to be heard. A regulator seen as captured would damage public trust in exactly the areas, such as Ratnagiri, where earlier protests stalled projects.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"By replacing the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, the SHANTI Act has removed the principal legal obstacle to foreign participation in India's nuclear power programme, but not the economic ones." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent negotiations with foreign reactor vendors. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Note that the SHANTI Act, passed in December 2025, repealed the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the CLNDA, 2010, and that on September 25, 2026 the Power Ministry held talks with EDF on EPRs while the DAE consults on draft SHANTI rules. 2. Body — the legal obstacle removed — Explain Section 17(b) and supplier recourse, the flat ₹1,500 crore operator cap, and how the SHANTI Act narrows recourse to contract or deliberate act, introduces graded caps of ₹100 crore to ₹3,000 crore, opens licensing to Indian companies and gives the AERB statutory status. Link to the CSC ratified in 2016. 3. Body — the economic obstacles that remain — Discuss EDF's demand for a multi-reactor programme, cost and time overruns in first-of-a-kind EPRs at Olkiluoto and Flamanville, the tariff at which EPR power can be sold, the depth of the Indian nuclear-grade supply chain, and land and local acceptance issues seen at Jaitapur. 4. Body — the counter-view — Argue that serial construction lowers costs, that large imported reactors complement the three-stage programme and indigenous PHWRs, and that the 100 GW by 2047 target cannot be met by indigenous capacity alone. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the law has fixed the entry question, and the rules, an independent regulator and a clear public-private risk allocation will decide whether reactors are actually built.
ADMINISTRATOR'S	Q1. You are the District Collector of Ratnagiri. News of renewed EPR talks revives local

BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

anxiety about the Jaitapur project. What do you do?

Approach: I would first establish facts with NPCIL and the State government, so that my office does not amplify rumours in either direction. I would hold open meetings with fishing and farming communities on land, livelihoods and the emergency preparedness plan, with AERB and NPCIL experts answering questions directly. Pending compensation or rehabilitation grievances from the earlier land acquisition would be reviewed and closed on a time-bound basis. Trust is built by delivering on old promises before asking for new cooperation.

Q2. As a Joint Secretary drafting the SHANTI rules, how would you handle a foreign vendor's demand for a guaranteed multi-reactor order?

Approach: I would separate the rulebook from the commercial negotiation, because rules that favour one vendor invite legal challenge and distrust. The rules should set transparent licensing timelines, safety standards and liability procedures that apply to all. Any fleet commitment should be a separate, competitively tested decision based on tariff, localisation and financing terms, and approved through the normal Cabinet process. I would also insist on technology transfer and local content milestones linked to each order in the series.

Q3. An interview board asks: was it right to dilute supplier liability after Bhopal?

Approach: Bhopal is a warning about corporate accountability, but supplier recourse in the CLNDA did not produce a single safe reactor; it produced no imported reactors at all. The SHANTI Act follows the international model in which the operator is strictly liable and the state stands behind it, so victims are paid quickly without suing a foreign company. The honest cost is that the public purse bears risk beyond the cap, which must be managed through strict regulation, adequate insurance and contractual warranties. I would support the change, but with a regulator strong enough to make the trade-off safe.

7.2 IIT Delhi demonstrates a university-built programmable micro-GPU on FPGA as AI demand lifts phone prices

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 25. Researchers in the Department of Electrical Engineering at IIT Delhi claim to have developed a programmable micro-graphics processing unit (GPU) designed in India, which they say could eventually enable locally designed graphics hardware for low-cost embedded devices, The Indian Express reports. A GPU is a processor built to do many simple calculations at the same time, which suits drawing images and, in larger forms, training AI models. All GPUs are currently imported. "To the best of our knowledge, this is the first working, demonstrable indigenously designed micro-GPU from a university in India," one of the researchers said. The chip is meant for graphics and display, not high-end AI computing. Suggested uses include industrial control displays, e-rickshaw dashboard navigators, inland-water navigation terminals for small fishing boats and educational e-book readers. The system currently runs on a Spartan-7 Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA), a chip whose internal circuits can be rewired by software after manufacture, rather than as a standalone silicon chip. The hardware was described in RTL, the code specifying how data moves between registers. The design could also be converted into an Application-Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC), meaning the processor would be manufactured as a dedicated silicon chip; the work is still at the FPGA stage. M Tech students Nammi Akash and M Ravi Teja led the project under Professors Jayadeva and Kaushik Saha. The team is now exploring an 8-16-core vector-style graphics processor, an optimised compiler and graphics software toolchain, and a proof of concept on a 65-nanometre ASIC process. The same day, The Hindu reported from New Delhi on the consumer end of the chip market, taking forward this magazine's September 23 card on the memory-chip "supercycle". Because AI companies and data centres are buying memory chips, phone makers — the paper obtained notices from Vivo, Samsung, Realme, Oppo, Nothing, Poco and Xiaomi through the All India Mobile Retailers Association (AIMRA) — have sent retailers progressively larger price-hike notices since February. The latest tranche ranges from ₹1,000 to ₹5,000, and some budget handsets have more than doubled in price. AIMRA's founder chairman Kailash Lakhyani said companies expect the situation to last till 2028 or even 2030. Counterpoint Research said on Thursday that global sub-\$200 smartphone shipments are forecast to fall about 40% between 2025 and 2030. The syllabus link is GS3 on indigenisation of technology and developing new technology.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India builds chip design talent but imports every GPU and memory chip → India Semiconductor Mission and design-linked incentives from 2021 push design and packaging → AI data centres absorb global memory supply and GPUs become strategic assets → phone prices in India rise by ₹1,000-5,000 a tranche → an IIT Delhi team demonstrates a programmable micro-GPU on an FPGA and plans a 65-nm ASIC

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. A GPU wins by doing many simple things at once, a CPU by doing complex things in sequence** — A central processing unit (CPU) has a few powerful cores optimised to run varied instructions quickly one after another, which suits operating systems and general software. A graphics processing unit (GPU) has many simpler cores that apply the same operation to large amounts of data in parallel, originally to calculate the colour of millions of pixels. The same parallelism suits the matrix multiplications at the heart of machine learning, which is why large GPUs became the engine of the AI boom. A micro-GPU of the IIT Delhi kind targets small displays and embedded devices, where low power and cost matter more than raw speed.
- 2. An FPGA proves a design; an ASIC turns it into a product** — A Field Programmable Gate Array is a chip containing blocks of logic whose connections can be configured after manufacture, so the same FPGA can host many designs. An Application-Specific Integrated Circuit is fabricated for one design, which makes it faster, smaller and cheaper per unit but requires heavy one-time costs for masks and fabrication. Designers therefore describe hardware in a hardware description language at the register-transfer level (RTL), test it on an FPGA, and move to an ASIC only when volumes justify it. The process node, such as 65 nanometres, refers to the generation of manufacturing technology; older nodes are cheaper and adequate for many embedded chips.
- 3. The India Semiconductor Mission funds fabs, packaging and design** — The Union Cabinet approved the Semicon India Programme in December 2021 with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore, and the India Semiconductor Mission under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology implements it. It supports semiconductor fabs, display fabs, compound semiconductors and assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP/OSAT) units, and runs a Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme that offers financial support and access to design infrastructure to domestic start-ups and firms designing chips and IP cores. The Chips to Startup programme funds chip-design training and projects in academic institutions. Indigenous processors such as SHAKTI, developed at IIT Madras, and VEGA, developed by C-DAC, are built on the open RISC-V instruction set, which requires no licence fee.
- 4. Memory chips are the commodity layer of the AI boom** — Dynamic Random-Access Memory (DRAM) is the working memory of phones and computers; it is volatile, losing data when power is off, unlike NAND flash storage. High Bandwidth Memory (HBM) stacks several DRAM dies vertically and places them next to an AI processor, giving the enormous data throughput that AI training needs. The market is dominated by a small number of manufacturers, notably Samsung, SK Hynix and Micron, so when they divert capacity to high-margin HBM for data centres, supply of ordinary DRAM for phones tightens. The IndiaAI Mission, approved in 2024, subsidises access to GPU compute for Indian researchers and start-ups, but those GPUs and their memory are imported.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. The GS3 syllabus asks about indigenisation of technology** — UPSC has asked why India lags in semiconductor manufacturing and what the India Semiconductor Mission seeks to achieve. A university GPU demonstration is a concrete example of the design layer, where India has talent but little intellectual property of its own. Answers that separate design, fabrication and packaging score better than generic answers about “chips”.

	2. Prelims tests the vocabulary of computing hardware — Questions on terms such as RISC-V, quantum computing and AI chips have appeared, and the difference between FPGA and ASIC, or CPU and GPU, is a natural next step. The memory-chip story adds DRAM and HBM, which appear repeatedly in current affairs on the AI supply chain. 3. Global supply chains affecting household prices fit GS3 economy questions — The phone price story shows how a demand shock in one sector, AI data centres, reaches Indian consumers through a concentrated supply chain. This is useful for questions on inflation drivers, the digital divide and the resilience of electronics manufacturing under the Production Linked Incentive scheme.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● A graphics processing unit (GPU) contains a large number of simpler cores that perform the same operation on many data elements in parallel, which makes it suitable for graphics rendering and machine learning. ● A Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) is an integrated circuit whose logic can be reconfigured after manufacture, whereas an Application-Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) is fabricated for a single fixed design. ● The Semicon India Programme, with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore, was approved in December 2021 and is implemented through the India Semiconductor Mission under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. ● The Design Linked Incentive scheme under the Semicon India Programme supports domestic companies and start-ups in the design of semiconductor chips and IP cores. ● SHAKTI (IIT Madras) and VEGA (C-DAC) are indigenous microprocessors based on the open-source RISC-V instruction set architecture. ● Dynamic Random-Access Memory (DRAM) is volatile memory, while High Bandwidth Memory (HBM) stacks multiple DRAM dies vertically to provide high data throughput to AI accelerators. ● Register-transfer level (RTL) description is the stage of chip design in which the flow of data between hardware registers is specified in a hardware description language.
ANALYSIS	1. The achievement is design capability, not a product, and that is the right place to start — A micro-GPU on a Spartan-7 FPGA will not compete with commercial graphics chips, and the researchers do not claim it will. Its value is that an Indian team now owns a programmable graphics architecture, its RTL and, if they build it, its compiler. Intellectual property of this kind is what India lacks most: the country has many chip designers working for foreign companies, but few Indian-owned designs. The honest limit is that a GPU without a software ecosystem is hard to use, which is why the planned compiler and toolchain matter as much as the silicon. 2. Targeting e-rickshaws and fishing boats is a smart market choice — The team is aiming at low-cost embedded displays, a segment that global chip firms serve with cheap imported parts but do not design for. Indian products such as e-rickshaw dashboards, small-boat navigation terminals and school e-readers need modest graphics at very low cost and long product life. A domestic design that can be tailored for these uses, and supported locally, has a real niche. The risk is scale: these markets are price-sensitive, and an ASIC only becomes cheaper than an off-the-shelf part at large volumes, which a university project cannot guarantee without industry partners. 3. The phone price shock shows the cost of being a price-taker in chips — India assembles most of the phones it sells but designs and fabricates almost none of the memory inside them. When memory makers shift capacity to HBM for AI data centres, Indian buyers pay ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 more per handset, and some budget models have

	more than doubled. The Hindu's report that 20% of customers are settling for less powerful or second-hand phones is a digital-divide story, because the budget phone is the main internet device for poorer households. No university GPU fixes this in the near term, but it illustrates why policy is moving from assembly subsidies to design and fabrication. 4. Price data from retailers should be read with care — The figures come from an association of retailers, and Mr. Lakhyani also said some retailers are earning higher margins, from 3.85% to over 14% on some Samsung models, on stock bought at older prices. Retailers have an interest in highlighting falling sales, and the claim that only one or two of the 10 or 15 daily visitors buy a phone is a single south Delhi shop's experience. The forecast of a fall of about 40% in global sub-\$200 shipments comes from Counterpoint, not from Indian data. The trend is real, but its size for India is not yet measured, and the "rumour" of a GST cut on phones mentioned in the report should not be treated as policy. 5. University chip projects need a path to fabrication, not just grants — The team's next step, a 65-nanometre ASIC proof of concept, requires access to a fabrication facility and costly mask sets. India's design-linked incentives and academic chip-design programmes are meant to provide exactly this, but projects often stall between a successful FPGA demonstration and first silicon. Pooled multi-project wafer runs, in which many designs share one fabrication run, lower the cost for academic groups. If the new Indian fabs under construction offer such shared runs at older nodes, university designs like this one could reach silicon in months rather than years.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India has built a strong base of chip-design engineers but owns little semiconductor intellectual property. Discuss how academic research, the Design Linked Incentive scheme and domestic demand can together move India from chip assembly to chip design. Illustrate with recent developments. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Cite the IIT Delhi programmable micro-GPU demonstrated on a Spartan-7 FPGA, described by its developers as the first working indigenously designed micro-GPU from an Indian university, against the fact that all GPUs used in India are imported. 2. Body — the gap — Explain the value chain of design, fabrication and packaging; note that India's strength lies in design services for foreign firms and new packaging plants, while design ownership and memory manufacturing are missing. Use the AI-driven memory-chip crunch and phone price hikes of ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 as evidence of dependence. 3. Body — the instruments — Describe the Semicon India Programme of ₹76,000 crore, the DLI scheme, the Chips to Startup programme, RISC-V based SHAKTI and VEGA, and the IndiaAI Mission's compute support. Explain why the FPGA-to-ASIC step needs shared fabrication access and industry partners. 4. Body — demand as the missing link — Argue that domestic niches such as e-rickshaw dashboards, smart meters and education devices can provide early volumes for Indian designs, and that public procurement preferences can help, with the caveat that protection must not lock in inferior products. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that design sovereignty will come from many small owned designs reaching silicon, backed by toolchains and buyers, rather than from a single flagship chip.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q &	Q1. You are a Secretary in MeitY. A university team asks for help to take its FPGA-based GPU to silicon. What do you offer?

APPROACH

Approach: I would connect the team to the Design Linked Incentive scheme and the Chips to Startup programme for design tools and funding for a fabrication run. I would push for a multi-project wafer shuttle at an accessible node so that the cost is shared with other academic designs. I would also help the team find an industry partner in a target market, such as electric vehicles or e-readers, because a chip without a buyer rarely survives. Clear IP ownership rules between the institute and the students should be settled early.

Q2. As a District Collector running a scheme that distributes tablets to students, how do you respond to rising device prices?

Approach: I would first check whether the procurement contract has price-variation clauses and whether the supplier is honouring quoted prices for committed orders. I would not reduce the device specification below what the learning software needs, since a cheaper but unusable device wastes public money. Where budgets are tight, I would prioritise students without any device at home and consider shared devices in school labs. I would report the cost trend to the State so that the next tender is realistic.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India spend public money on GPUs for AI or on building its own chips?

Approach: Both are needed but they serve different horizons. Imported GPUs give Indian researchers and start-ups compute today, which the IndiaAI Mission already subsidises, and waiting for domestic chips would leave them behind. Building chip design capability is a decade-long investment in bargaining power and security of supply. A sensible balance is to buy compute now while steadily funding design, packaging and fabrication so that dependence falls over time.

8. Society

The most durable gender norms are not taught in lectures on equality; they are absorbed from pictures of who cooks, who fetches water and who plays the drums. Andhra Pradesh has decided to redraw those pictures for six- and seven-year-olds, splitting household chores equally between men and women in its new textbooks. It is a cheap, quiet reform aimed at the root of India's unpaid care burden, and its success will depend less on the books than on the homes and classrooms that receive them.

8.1 Andhra Pradesh's new Class 1-2 textbooks show men doing half of all household chores

THE NEWS Hyderabad, September 25. Andhra Pradesh's new textbooks for Classes 1 and 2 show household chores divided equally between men and women, as the State tries to eliminate gender stereotypes from a young age, The Indian Express reports. A gender stereotype is a fixed idea of what men and women should do, for example that cooking and fetching water are women's work. The new books show a father working alongside the mother in the kitchen, girls playing drums and violins in musical performances, and men and women standing together in a queue to collect water from a common public tap. Other images show a woman selling vegetables, a man weaving a flower garland alongside a woman at a shop, and a man and a woman working together in an agricultural field. "While past textbooks depicted household chores as being performed entirely by women, the new textbooks, introduced recently, changed this approach so that 50% of the household chores shown are performed by men and 50% by women," an official said. "The aim is to avoid gender stereotyping from the first grade itself," said the State's IT and Human Resources Development Minister N. Lokesh Naidu, speaking on Thursday at a chat organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India in Delhi. The new books also introduce children to the "good" and "bad" sides of Artificial Intelligence, so that they understand the technology and use it effectively. Primary schools now observe a "No Bag Day" on Saturdays for value-based and practical learning, including lessons on managing family and agricultural budgets, field exposure visits and an introduction to AI. The government is working on "gamifying" classrooms: after every 45-minute class, students would watch a 60- or 90-second video summarising the lesson and answer four to five questions using clicker technology. The data would feed into the State's Learning Management System (LMS) to identify individual learning gaps and provide targeted homework and learning material through the LEAP app, open to parents and teachers. On teacher availability, Mr. Lokesh said the share of schools with one teacher per class had risen from 3% in 2024 to 33%, and told The Indian Express on Friday that 16,000 teachers had been recruited in a recent drive, with recruitment to be held every year. The syllabus link is GS1 on the role of women and social empowerment, and GS2 on education as a social sector.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Children absorb who does what at home from pictures before they can read → earlier textbooks showed chores done entirely by women, reinforcing a norm → Time Use Surveys show Indian women carry most unpaid domestic and care work, which keeps many out of paid employment → NEP 2020 and the new curriculum frameworks call for gender-sensitive materials → Andhra Pradesh redraws Class 1-2 textbooks with a 50:50 split of chores between men and women

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Time Use Survey measures the unpaid work that GDP does not count** — The National Statistics Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation conducted India's first all-India Time Use Survey in 2019 and a second round in 2024. It records how persons aged six and above spend each minute of a day, separating paid work from unpaid domestic services and unpaid caregiving. Both rounds found that women spend several times more minutes a day than men on unpaid domestic services for household members, while men spend far more time in employment. Because unpaid domestic work within the household is not counted in GDP, this survey is the main official evidence of the burden women carry.
- 2. Unpaid care work is a leading explanation for India's low female labour force participation** — The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), conducted by the NSO since 2017-18, measures the labour force participation rate (LFPR), the share of people who are working or seeking work. Female LFPR in India has risen in recent PLFS rounds but remains far below the male rate, and much of the rise is in self-employment and

unpaid work in household enterprises. Surveys consistently find that a large share of women outside the labour force cite domestic duties as the reason. Economists describe the division of domestic chores as a “double burden”: when women take paid work, they usually keep most of the housework too.

3. **NEP 2020 and the new curriculum frameworks require gender-sensitive school materials** — The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 treats gender as a cross-cutting priority, proposes a Gender-Inclusion Fund to help States improve access for girls and transgender students, and recommends bagless days with practical and vocational activities. The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS), 2022 covers children aged three to eight, which includes Classes 1 and 2, and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE), 2023 covers the whole school stage. Both frameworks call for learning materials free of gender, caste and other stereotypes. States prepare their own textbooks through their State Councils of Educational Research and Training, since education is in the Concurrent List.
4. **The Constitution and the SDGs both name the norm being targeted** — Article 51A(e), a Fundamental Duty inserted by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, asks every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Article 15(3) permits special provisions for women and children, and Article 21A, with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, guarantees schooling from six to fourteen years; the RTE Act’s schedule sets pupil-teacher norms for schools. Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality includes Target 5.4, which asks countries to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through public services, infrastructure and social protection, and through the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. Andhra’s textbooks are a direct attempt at that last clause.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS1 regularly asks about women’s work and social norms** — UPSC has asked about the reasons for low female labour force participation, the feminisation of agriculture and the effects of patriarchy on women’s status. A question on unpaid care work or the role of education in changing gender norms is squarely within the syllabus heading “role of women and women’s organisation” and “social empowerment”. This story gives a concrete policy example to cite.
2. **Prelims tests surveys, frameworks and duties** — The Time Use Survey, the PLFS and the agencies that run them are standard Prelims material, as are the Fundamental Duties and the SDGs. The NCF-FS and NCF-SE, and which age groups they cover, are likely targets now that States are rolling out new textbooks under them.
3. **Essay and GS2 use school reform as a test of governance** — Essay topics on gender equality and on education as a lever of social change recur. The Andhra reforms also carry a governance thread: learning data, teacher recruitment and the one-teacher-per-class goal are what examiners mean by outcome-focused school administration.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The Time Use Survey in India is conducted by the National Statistics Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; the first all-India round was conducted in 2019.
- Article 51A(e) of the Constitution lays down a Fundamental Duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- The Fundamental Duties were inserted into the Constitution by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976, on the recommendation of the Swaran Singh Committee.
- The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (2022) covers children aged three to eight years, including Classes 1 and 2.
- Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.4 calls for recognising and valuing

	unpaid care and domestic work, including through the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. ● The Periodic Labour Force Survey, conducted by the National Statistics Office, measures the labour force participation rate, worker population ratio and unemployment rate. ● Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
ANALYSIS	1. Textbooks work on the norm before it hardens, which is why the early grades matter — By six or seven, children already hold clear ideas about which jobs belong to which sex, learned at home and reinforced by what they see in school. Images in a Class 1 book are looked at repeatedly, discussed aloud and often copied in drawing, so they shape expectations more than a lesson in a later grade. The earlier Andhra books, by the official's own account, showed chores done entirely by women, which means the school system was actively teaching the stereotype. Correcting that costs almost nothing, since textbooks are revised anyway. The limitation is that a picture competes with a child's daily experience at home, and home usually wins. 2. The 50:50 rule is a blunt tool, but a measurable one — Counting chores and splitting them equally can look mechanical, and a critic could say it presents an ideal that few Indian homes match. But a numerical rule is auditable: anyone can open the book and check it, which is not true of vague commitments to "gender sensitivity". It also forces illustrators and writers to think about every image rather than defaulting to habit. The better test will be whether the next classes' books continue the approach and whether teachers use the images to start conversations rather than simply pass over them. 3. The economic stake is women's time, and schools can only address one part of it — The Time Use Surveys show that women do most of India's unpaid domestic work, and this is a major reason many stay out of paid jobs. Changing boys' expectations about housework is a long-run way to share that burden, but its effect on labour markets will take a generation. In the meantime, the time women spend fetching water, cooking with inefficient fuels and caring for children and the elderly is better reduced by piped water, clean cooking fuel and creches. The textbook reform complements that infrastructure; it cannot substitute for it. 4. The real risk to the reform lies in the classroom, not in the book — A teacher who laughs at the picture of a father cooking, or who asks only girls to clean the classroom, undoes the lesson. Gender-sensitive textbooks have been produced in several States before, and evaluations of such efforts tend to find that teacher attitudes and school practices decide outcomes. Andhra's recruitment of 16,000 teachers is an opportunity to build gender sensitisation into induction training. Without it, the new books risk being treated as a change of illustrations rather than of ideas. 5. The data-driven classroom brings benefits and questions of its own — The plan to follow every 45-minute class with a short video and clicker questions, feeding an LMS that sets targeted homework through the LEAP app, could identify learning gaps early, which is the central weakness of Indian primary schooling. It also creates detailed data on young children, which raises questions of consent, storage and use that the reports do not address. Frequent short quizzes can crowd out play-based learning, which the foundational-stage framework emphasises. The rise from 3% to 33% of schools with one teacher per class shows real progress, but it also means two-thirds of schools still fall short of that goal, and technology cannot replace a teacher in those classrooms.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Gender roles are learnt long before they are questioned." In this context, examine the role of school curriculum and textbooks in addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work in India. What are the limits of such interventions? (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Open with Andhra Pradesh's new Class 1 and 2 textbooks, which show household chores split 50:50 between men and women, where earlier books showed them done entirely by women, and link to the Time Use Survey evidence that women carry most unpaid domestic work.
- 2. Body — why curriculum matters** — Explain gender socialisation and the hidden curriculum; cite NEP 2020, NCF-FS 2022 and NCF-SE 2023 on stereotype-free materials, Article 51A(e) and SDG Target 5.4's call for shared responsibility within the household. Use the Andhra examples of fathers in the kitchen, girls on drums and men at the water tap.
- 3. Body — the economic link** — Connect unpaid work to low female labour force participation measured by the PLFS and to the double burden on working women. Argue that changing boys' expectations is a long-run lever for sharing domestic work.
- 4. Body — limits** — Discuss the gap between textbook images and home practice, teacher attitudes and training, the slow generational effect, and the need for complementary infrastructure such as piped water, clean fuel and creches. Mention that measurement through repeated Time Use Surveys is needed to judge impact.
- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that textbooks are a necessary, low-cost first step that must be matched by teacher sensitisation, community engagement and public services that reduce the care burden itself.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As a District Education Officer, how would you make sure the new gender-neutral textbooks actually change classroom practice?

Approach: I would include gender sensitisation in the induction and refresher training of teachers, using the textbook images as teaching material. School monitoring visits would check simple practices, such as whether cleaning and leadership duties are rotated between boys and girls. I would involve School Management Committees and parents, since children compare the book with what they see at home. Feedback from teachers on how children react would go back to the State Council for the next revision.

Q2. Some parents complain that the textbooks promote values contrary to their traditions. How do you respond as a District Collector?

Approach: I would meet the parents respectfully and explain that the books show men and women sharing work, which reflects the Constitution's Fundamental Duty to respect the dignity of women and does not attack any religion or custom. Many families already share work in the fields and at the tap, and the images show that reality. I would not withdraw the books, since curriculum is set by the State through due process, but I would ensure teachers present the material sensitively. Dialogue through community leaders and women's self-help groups usually works better than confrontation.

Q3. An interview board asks: is a 50:50 depiction of chores in textbooks social engineering by the state?

Approach: Every textbook conveys values; the earlier books that showed only women doing chores were also a form of social engineering, just an unexamined one. The State's choice is not between neutrality and influence but between reinforcing an unequal norm and reflecting the constitutional commitment to equality. The 50:50 split is transparent and open to public debate, which makes it more legitimate than a hidden bias. The state should still avoid coercion at home and let the lesson persuade rather than prescribe.

9. Internal Security

The Northeast dominates today because two parallel tracks are running at once: the Centre is extending emergency military powers for another six months while offering the Nagas a political seat at the negotiating table. That is not a contradiction but the standard Indian formula of force plus talks, and its weakness is visible in Kamjong, where armed groups from Myanmar's civil war cross an open border to kill villagers. The third story widens the lens from insurgency to deterrence: whether a nuclear doctrine written in 2003 still fits a world of two aligned nuclear neighbours and hypersonic weapons.

9.1 AFSPA Extended Six Months in Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal as Kamjong Killings Take Toll to Eight

THE NEWS New Delhi and Imphal. The Union Home Ministry on Friday, September 25, extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) in parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh for another six months from October 1, after a review of the law and order situation, the three papers report. AFSPA applies only in areas declared "disturbed"; there, The Hindu notes, the Army and Central Armed Police Forces may use even lethal force against anyone acting in contravention of law, arrest and search without warrant, and cannot be prosecuted without the Union government's sanction. In Manipur the disturbed-area declaration covers the whole State except the jurisdiction of 13 police stations in five valley districts. The ET lists them, across Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal, Bishnupur and Kakching. Withdrawn from all valley police stations between April 1, 2022 and April 1, 2023, the Act was reimposed on November 14, 2024 in six of 19 exempted police stations after the ethnic violence that began on May 3, 2023. AFSPA has applied in Manipur since 1981. In Nagaland the Act covers nine districts (including Dimapur and Mon) and 21 police stations in five other districts. In Arunachal it covers Tirap, Changlang and Longding and three police stations in a district bordering Assam. The extension came a day after four Tangkhul Naga civilians, including Vareishim Jajo, 67, and his son Phami Jajo, 43, were shot dead on Thursday at Pilong village in Kamjong district, near the Myanmar border. Police blame the suspected Myanmar-based Kuki National Army-Burma (KNA-B). The Working Committee of the Tangkhul Naga Long said, per The Hindu, that "a Kuki terror group armed heavily with sophisticated weapons crossed the river Namya from Phailen Kuki village of Myanmar", and alleged backing from Myanmar's People's Defence Force; it was the third such attack in Kamjong. The Express counts at least eight Naga and Kuki-Zo dead in about two weeks: two Kuki-Zo women at Leijangphai on September 15, a 17-year-old Naga boy on September 21, a 36-year-old Kuki-Zo man at Wakotphai on September 23, and now four. Houses in Naga villages of Kangpokpi were burnt on September 23-24; the Express says at least 24 houses in two villages, the ET about 41 in three. The Tangkhul Naga Long called a 24-hour shutdown, and a youth body questioned groups under the Suspension of Operations arrangement. The syllabus link is GS3: security in border areas.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Manipur's ethnic violence from May 3, 2023 reverses the 2022-23 withdrawal of AFSPA from the valley → reimposed in six valley police stations in November 2024 and President's Rule from February 2025 → Myanmar's civil war arms groups across a porous border → Naga-Kuki clashes kill at least eight in two weeks of September 2026 → Centre renews 'disturbed area' status for six months from October 1

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. AFSPA is triggered by a 'disturbed area' declaration under Section 3** — Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 lets the Governor of a State, the Administrator of a Union Territory or the Central Government declare an area "disturbed" if the use of the armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary; the Central Government's power to declare was added by an amendment in 1972. Section 4 lets a commissioned officer, warrant officer or non-commissioned officer, after due warning, fire upon or use force, even causing death, against persons acting in contravention of prohibitory orders, destroy arms dumps and fortified positions, arrest without warrant and enter and search premises. Section 5 requires arrested persons to be handed to the nearest police station with the least possible delay. Section 6 bars prosecution or legal proceedings against any person acting under the Act except with the previous sanction of the Central Government.
- 2. The Supreme Court upheld AFSPA but bound it with safeguards** — In Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India (1998), a Constitution Bench upheld the

	Act's validity but said a disturbed-area declaration must be for a limited period and reviewed periodically, with six months treated as the review interval, and required the Army to follow its list of 'Dos and Don'ts'. In <i>Extra Judicial Execution Victim Families Association (EEVFAM) v. Union of India</i> (2016), arising from alleged fake encounters in Manipur, the Court held that there is no absolute immunity and that excessive or retaliatory force is not permitted even in a disturbed area. Those rulings are why extensions come in six-month notifications like today's. 3. Official committees have recommended repeal, but governments have preferred partial withdrawal — The Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy Committee, set up after protests in Manipur in 2004, recommended in 2005 that AFSPA be repealed and that necessary powers be placed in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act with safeguards. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission, in its fifth report on public order, also supported repeal. The Centre has instead reduced the area covered, withdrawing the Act from large parts of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur since 2022, while retaining it in border and conflict districts. 4. The Free Movement Regime and the Myanmar war shape the border threat — India and Myanmar share a border of about 1,643 km across Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, guarded by the Assam Rifles. Under the Free Movement Regime, residents of border areas, often from the same tribes on both sides, could cross a short distance without visas; in 2024 the Centre announced it would end the regime and fence the whole border. Since the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, armed resistance groups such as the People's Defence Forces and ethnic armed organisations control much of the border region. In Manipur, several Kuki-Zo armed groups have been under a Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Centre and the State since 2008.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. AFSPA is a recurring Mains question on security versus rights — UPSC has asked whether AFSPA should be repealed and about the role of the armed forces in internal security. Today's notification gives a precise current map of where the Act applies, and the Kamjong killings show the security case for its continuation. 2. Border management and cross-border linkages feature in GS3 — The syllabus names security challenges in border areas and the linkages of organised crime and terrorism. Questions have asked about the India-Myanmar border, the Free Movement Regime and the impact of Myanmar's instability on the Northeast. 3. Prelims asks about the law's mechanics — Who can declare a disturbed area, what sanction is needed for prosecution, and which judgment upheld the Act are standard prelims material, along with which districts or States still have AFSPA.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Governor of a State, the Administrator of a Union Territory or the Central Government may declare an area to be a disturbed area. ● Section 6 of AFSPA, 1958 bars prosecution or legal proceedings against persons acting under the Act except with the previous sanction of the Central Government. ● In <i>Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India</i> (1998), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of AFSPA while requiring periodic review of disturbed-area declarations. ● In the <i>EEVFAM</i> case (2016), the Supreme Court held that there is no absolute immunity for armed forces personnel using excessive force in areas declared disturbed under AFSPA. ● The Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005) recommended repeal of AFSPA

	and incorporation of necessary provisions in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. ● Manipur, formerly a Union Territory, attained Statehood in 1972. ● The Assam Rifles is the force responsible for guarding the India-Myanmar border.
ANALYSIS	1. The map of AFSPA now follows the geography of the conflict, not a blanket rule — The Act covers all of Manipur except 13 valley police stations, nine Nagaland districts and three Arunachal districts bordering Myanmar. That is a sharper geography than a decade ago: the valley, where the State police dominate, is largely out; the hills and the border are in. The logic is that armed groups operate from the hills and across the Myanmar border, where police capacity is thin. The counter-view is that it creates two tiers of citizens in one State, with hill tribes living under a law the valley no longer does, which feeds the very ethnic resentments driving the violence. 2. Kamjong shows the threat is now cross-border, which strengthens the case for AFSPA in the hills — The killers allegedly crossed the river Namya from a village in Myanmar and returned, according to the Tangkhul body. When attackers use another country's territory as sanctuary, ordinary policing cannot pursue them, and the Army and Assam Rifles need powers to search and arrest quickly in border villages. This is the strongest argument the government has. But AFSPA's powers apply to Indian citizens inside India, not to the sanctuaries across the border, so the real remedy is border control and diplomacy with whoever controls the Myanmar side. 3. The Suspension of Operations arrangement is now a political liability — A Tangkhul youth body has questioned the activities of groups operating under the Suspension of Operations arrangement, and the killings are blamed on Kuki groups. SoO camps were meant to contain armed cadres while talks proceeded; if their members or allies are active in violence, the arrangement loses legitimacy with Nagas and Meiteis alike. The Kuki-Zo side, in turn, has lost women and a young man in the same fortnight. The government needs verifiable monitoring of SoO camps, or the arrangement will be seen as protection for one side. 4. Forty-five years of extensions suggest the Act has become a substitute for politics — AFSPA has applied in Manipur since 1981, and it has been renewed every six months, with brief withdrawals, for most of that time. A law meant for temporary aid to civil power has become a permanent feature of governance. The Supreme Court's six-monthly review requirement has become a formality rather than a real test. The honest view is that the Act can be withdrawn only when police capacity, border control and political settlements make it unnecessary — and that the renewals themselves are an index of how far that goal remains. 5. The papers' different house counts show the information fog of an ethnic conflict — The Express reports 24 houses burnt in two Naga villages of Kangpokpi, while the ET reports about 41 in three. In an ethnic conflict, numbers are themselves contested and used to mobilise communities. For administrators, accurate and quickly published figures reduce rumour; for readers, the lesson is to report ranges and sources rather than pick the larger number.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"AFSPA has outlived its original purpose, yet the security situation in the Northeast keeps justifying its extension." Critically examine this statement in the context of the recent extension of the Act in Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, and suggest a roadmap for its eventual withdrawal. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that on September 25 the Home Ministry extended AFSPA for six months from October 1 across Manipur (except 13 valley police stations), nine

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Nagaland districts plus 21 police stations, and three Arunachal districts plus three police stations, a day after four Nagas were killed at Pilong in Kamjong.

2. **Body — the case for continuation** — Cover the Manipur violence since May 3, 2023, the killing of at least eight Naga and Kuki-Zo people in two weeks, cross-border sanctuaries in Myanmar after the 2021 coup, and thin police capacity in hill districts.
3. **Body — the case against** — Explain Sections 4 and 6, the EEVFAM (2016) findings, the Jeevan Reddy Committee and Second ARC recommendations, and the damage to trust and to civil-military relations; note that the law has applied in Manipur since 1981.
4. **Body — a roadmap** — Propose district-wise withdrawal tied to measurable indicators, police modernisation, border fencing with humane arrangements for divided tribes, monitoring of SoO camps, and a genuine six-monthly review with published reasons.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that AFSPA should be treated as a bridge to normal policing and political settlement, and that the success of security policy is measured by the shrinking of the Act's map.

Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of Kamjong after the Pilong killings. What are your first steps?

Approach: I would ensure the bodies are handed over with dignity, compensation is paid promptly and the injured and displaced are cared for. I would coordinate with the Assam Rifles to secure border villages and patrol the Namya river crossings. I would meet Tangkhul Naga Long leaders to manage the shutdown and prevent retaliation against Kuki-Zo villages. And I would publish verified facts quickly to reduce rumour.

Q2. As Home Secretary of Manipur, how would you decide whether to recommend AFSPA's withdrawal from a district?

Approach: I would use clear indicators: incidents of violence over six months, the strength and reach of the State police, the presence of armed groups and the border situation. I would consult district officials and civil society, not only security agencies. Withdrawal would be phased, starting with areas where police can take over. The reasons for each decision should be recorded so that the six-monthly review is real, not routine.

Q3. An interview board asks: can a soldier act ethically under AFSPA?

Approach: The Act gives powers but does not remove the duty of restraint; the Supreme Court has said excessive force is not permitted even in disturbed areas. An ethical officer uses minimum force, gives warning, records actions and hands over arrested persons promptly. He also knows that one unjustified killing can turn a village against the state for a generation. Legal immunity is not moral immunity.

9.2 Centre Puts a Union Minister at the Naga Peace Table, Meeting an NSCN-IM Demand

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Centre has agreed to include “a Union Minister or a group of Union-level Ministers” in the Naga peace talks, meeting a long-standing demand of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), or NSCN-IM, for political representation in the negotiations, The Indian Express reports. The NSCN-IM, the largest Naga armed group, has been in ceasefire and talks since 1997. In a statement on Thursday, the NSCN-IM said it “particularly welcomes” the decision and expects it to “expedite the political process” and create momentum for “an honourable and enduring political settlement”. The move comes seven months after former Joint Intelligence Committee chief Ajit Lal was appointed Adviser (North East) in the Ministry of Home Affairs in February; for the first time, the NSCN-IM welcomed his appointment as “interlocutor”, calling it a “significant and encouraging development”. The tone contrasts with the years when former IPS officer R.N. Ravi was interlocutor: following disagreements over the 2015 Framework Agreement, the NSCN-IM accused Mr. Ravi of “mischief” and of trying to “segregate Naga society”, while he called the NSCN an “armed gang” running a “parallel government”. His successor, former Intelligence Bureau Additional Director A.K. Mishra, made little headway. The

Framework Agreement was signed on August 3, 2015 in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's presence. The NSCN-IM also thanked Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio's government for its "active facilitation". Security sources cite pressures on the NSCN-IM. Its rebel faction, the Eastern Flank, is based in Myanmar, is under no ceasefire and refuses talks. Ikato, son of NSCN co-founder Isak Chishi Swu, joined it in 2024 and became chairman in July; an officer said this lends legitimacy, as Ikato is a Naga from Nagaland while the NSCN-IM is led by Muivah, a Tangkhul from Manipur. Popular impatience in Nagaland over the delay is also "building popular pressure". But the hardline Eastern Flank could make it harder for the NSCN-IM to compromise on core demands, including a Naga flag and its own constitution, which Delhi has said will not be met. On Friday the NSCN-IM's External Publicity Wing issued a second statement saying the negotiations are based on "sovereignty" between the government and the NSCN, and that the "Nagalim national flag and Nagalim national constitution" are "non-negotiable". The syllabus link is GS3 (internal security in border areas) and GS2 (Article 371A).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Naga National Council claims independence in 1947 and insurgency follows → 16-Point Agreement (1960) creates Nagaland State with Article 371A, but the 1975 Shillong Accord splits the movement and NSCN is born → NSCN-IM enters ceasefire in 1997 and signs the Framework Agreement in 2015 → talks stall over flag, constitution and a bitter public feud with interlocutor R.N. Ravi → new interlocutor Ajit Lal and a Union Minister at the table, even as the Eastern Flank and public impatience squeeze the NSCN-IM

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Nagaland was created by a political agreement and protected by Article 371A** — The 16-Point Agreement of 1960 between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention led to the creation of Nagaland under the State of Nagaland Act, 1962, and the State was inaugurated on December 1, 1963. The Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act, 1962 inserted Article 371A. Under it, no Act of Parliament on the religious or social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedure, the administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, or the ownership and transfer of land and its resources applies to Nagaland unless the State Legislative Assembly so decides by resolution. This is one of the strongest special provisions in the Constitution.
- 2. The NSCN was born of a split and split again** — The Shillong Accord of 1975, under which a section of the Naga underground accepted the Constitution, was rejected by others, who formed the NSCN in 1980 under Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang. In 1988 the group split into the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). The NSCN-IM entered a ceasefire with the Government of India in 1997, and talks have continued since, mostly outside India at first and later in Delhi. Isak Chishi Swu died in 2016, leaving Muivah as the dominant leader.
- 3. The 2015 Framework Agreement and the 2017 Agreed Position created two parallel tracks** — The Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015 was signed by the NSCN-IM and the Government of India; its full text was not made public for years, and disputes arose over whether it accepted 'shared sovereignty'. In 2017, the Working Committee of seven Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs), representing other factions, signed an 'Agreed Position' with the government, accepting a solution within the Indian Union and a more gradual approach to integration of Naga areas. The two tracks have different constituencies: the NSCN-IM is strong among Manipur's Tangkhuls, and the NNPGs among Nagas of Nagaland.
- 4. 'Greater Nagalim', the flag and the constitution are the unresolved core** — The NSCN-IM seeks the integration of all Naga-inhabited areas, including districts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, into a single unit it calls Nagalim, along with a separate flag and constitution. Manipur, Assam and Arunachal oppose any change to their territory, and Manipur saw violent protests in 2001 when the ceasefire was extended to Naga areas outside Nagaland. The Centre has said a separate flag and constitution cannot be accepted. Any settlement therefore requires either symbolic accommodation or autonomous arrangements for Nagas outside Nagaland without redrawing State boundaries.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Insurgency in the Northeast is a standing GS3 topic — UPSC has asked about the causes of insurgency in the Northeast, the role of ethnic identity, and the effectiveness of peace accords. The Naga talks, now in their 29th year, are the longest-running negotiation and a strong case study. 2. Special provisions for States appear in GS2 and Prelims — Questions have asked which Articles give special provisions to which States. Article 371A for Nagaland, with its protection of customary law and land ownership, is directly relevant to any settlement. 3. Negotiation design is an ethics and governance theme — The contrast between Mr. Ravi's confrontational style and the current conciliatory tone is a case study in how the choice of interlocutor shapes outcomes, useful for GS4 and PubAd-style questions on conflict resolution.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 371A of the Constitution, inserted by the Thirteenth Amendment Act, 1962, contains special provisions for Nagaland, including protection of Naga customary law and ownership and transfer of land and its resources. - The State of Nagaland was created under the State of Nagaland Act, 1962 and was inaugurated on December 1, 1963. - The 16-Point Agreement of 1960 between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention preceded the creation of Nagaland. - The NSCN was formed in 1980 by Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang, and split into the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) in 1988. - The NSCN-IM has been in a ceasefire with the Government of India since 1997, and the Framework Agreement was signed on August 3, 2015. - The Naga National Political Groups signed an 'Agreed Position' with the Government of India in 2017.
ANALYSIS	1. A Union Minister at the table raises the stakes for both sides — The NSCN-IM has always wanted talks to be political rather than managed by intelligence officers, and it now has that. But a minister's presence also means that the government will be politically responsible for any concession, and ministers cannot concede what Parliament and neighbouring States will reject, such as territory or a separate constitution. The move therefore improves the atmosphere but narrows the room for ambiguity that officials once used. A settlement must now be something a minister can defend in Parliament. 2. The NSCN-IM is negotiating from weakness, and that cuts both ways — Its founder's son now chairs a Myanmar-based rival that refuses talks and calls the leadership corrupt, and people in Nagaland are tired of waiting. That pressure may push the NSCN-IM toward a deal. But a weakened group that concedes on the flag risks losing cadres to the Eastern Flank, which is outside any ceasefire and based in a lawless Myanmar border zone. Friday's second statement insisting that the flag and constitution are "non-negotiable" is best read as a message to its own ranks, not to Delhi. 3. Muivah's Tangkhul base ties the Naga talks to Manipur's violence — The Express notes the NSCN-IM is led by a Tangkhul from Manipur, and the Kamjong victims were Tangkhul Nagas killed allegedly by Kuki groups from Myanmar. Any Naga settlement that touches Naga areas of Manipur will be read by Meiteis and Kukis as a threat to Manipur's territory, at a moment when the State is already divided. The Centre's challenge is to settle the Naga question without inflaming the Meitei-Kuki-Naga triangle. That argues for non-territorial arrangements — cultural bodies or autonomous councils for Nagas outside Nagaland — rather than boundary changes.

	4. The choice of interlocutor has mattered as much as the substance — Under Mr. Ravi, public insults on both sides froze the process; under Mr. Lal, the NSCN-IM is calling developments “encouraging”. The substance — flag, constitution, integration — has not changed. This shows that trust is a precondition for bargaining in insurgency negotiations, and that a negotiator who treats the other side as criminals cannot get a deal even if his legal position is correct. The counter-view is that Mr. Ravi’s firmness forced the NSCN-IM to confront the limits of what India would accept, which may make a realistic deal possible now. 5. A final deal must merge the NSCN-IM and NNPG tracks — The government has separate understandings with the NSCN-IM (2015) and the NNPGs (2017). A settlement with one that the other rejects would repeat the Shillong Accord of 1975, which produced the NSCN. The Nagaland government’s facilitation, which the NSCN-IM thanked, is useful because the State government can speak for Nagas of Nagaland in a way neither armed group fully can. An inclusive final text, rather than a series of bilateral deals, is the only way to avoid another split.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The Naga peace process, running since 1997, shows both the strengths and the limits of India’s approach to resolving ethnic insurgencies through negotiation. Discuss with reference to the recent decision to include a Union Minister in the talks and the unresolved demands of the NSCN-IM. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Mention the ceasefire of 1997, the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015, and the Centre’s decision, reported on September 26, 2026, to include a Union Minister or group of Ministers in the talks after Ajit Lal’s appointment as interlocutor. 2. Body — strengths — Cover the longevity of the ceasefire, Article 371A as proof of constitutional flexibility, the role of the Nagaland government, the 2017 Agreed Position with the NNPGs and the current improvement in trust. 3. Body — limits — Explain the stalemate over the Nagalim flag and constitution and the territorial demand, the public feud under R.N. Ravi, the Myanmar-based Eastern Flank outside any ceasefire, and the link to Manipur’s ethnic violence. 4. Body — way forward — Suggest an inclusive settlement merging both tracks, non-territorial autonomy for Nagas outside Nagaland, symbolic accommodation on cultural identity, development packages, and consultation with neighbouring States. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that political engagement at ministerial level is necessary, but a durable settlement depends on inclusivity and on protecting the territorial integrity of neighbouring States.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the new interlocutor for the Naga talks. What would you do in your first three months? Approach: I would meet all stakeholders — the NSCN-IM, the NNPGs, the Nagaland government, civil society and churches — to understand positions and build trust. I would avoid public statements that could insult any party. I would identify issues on which agreement is possible, such as development and cultural autonomy, and separate them from the flag and constitution. And I would brief the Manipur, Assam and Arunachal governments regularly so that they are not surprised. Q2. As Chief Secretary of Nagaland, how would you support the peace process? Approach: I would ensure the State government facilitates talks without taking sides between Naga groups. I would push development in areas affected by insurgency to show the benefits of peace. I would curb extortion and illegal taxation by armed groups through police action, since these undermine public trust. And I would keep the public informed to manage expectations.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India accept a separate flag for the Nagas?

Approach: A separate flag with the same status as the national flag would signal shared sovereignty, which the Constitution does not permit. However, the Constitution already accommodates diversity through Article 371A, and cultural symbols for community use could be considered without implying sovereignty. The key is to distinguish identity from sovereignty. Any decision must also consider its effect on demands from other regions.

9.3 Review India's Nuclear Doctrine Without Revising It: Keep No First Use, Clarify Retaliation

THE NEWS New Delhi. In an op-ed in The Hindu titled 'Revisiting India's nuclear doctrine without revising it', Advitya Madan, a defence analyst who commanded 15 Punjab in Lebanon under the UN flag, argues that India should review its nuclear doctrine for clarity while keeping its core principles. A nuclear doctrine is a country's public statement of when and how it would use nuclear weapons, which shapes how adversaries calculate risk. The author traces the history. The 1998 Pokhran-II tests established India as a nuclear weapons state, while Kargil (1999) showed that nuclear deterrence did not rule out conventional war. The 1999 Draft Nuclear Doctrine and the Cabinet Committee on Security's decision of January 4, 2003 sought to reconcile deterrence with restraint. The 2003 decision operationalised a posture based on credible minimum deterrence, No First Use (NFU) and massive retaliation to a nuclear attack, supported by a survivable second-strike capability and firm civilian control, with a specific provision retaining the option of nuclear retaliation after a major biological or chemical attack on India or Indian forces. The doctrine has provided "continuity, predictability and strategic stability" for more than two decades, he writes, but its environment has changed in three ways. First, China and Pakistan have grown more strategically aligned: China has expanded and modernised its nuclear forces, strengthened military infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control and deepened defence cooperation with Pakistan, while Pakistan has diversified its capabilities, including tactical nuclear weapons intended to offset India's conventional advantage. Second, technology — artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, space-based surveillance, hypersonic weapons and ballistic missile defence — is shortening decision timelines, increasing the vulnerability of command-and-control networks and complicating assumptions about assured retaliation. Third, great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific has intensified. The author says "massive retaliation" deserves scrutiny, because Pakistan's tactical weapons were meant to complicate India's response below the level of strategic exchange. But he warns that ambiguity over NFU "could create uncertainty, encourage adversaries to recalibrate and complicate crisis management". The priority should be to strengthen operational capabilities, modernise delivery systems and improve command-and-control resilience rather than reopen declaratory policy, and a review should assess survivability, command and control, intelligence, early warning, cyber resilience and the nuclear triad. "Reviewing a doctrine is not the same as revising it," he concludes. The syllabus link is GS3 (security challenges and their management) and GS2 (India's relations with neighbours).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Pokhran-II in May 1998 makes India an overt nuclear weapons state → Kargil (1999) shows nuclear weapons do not prevent limited war, and the 1999 Draft Nuclear Doctrine follows → CCS decision of January 4, 2003 sets NFU, credible minimum deterrence and massive retaliation → Pakistan builds tactical nuclear weapons and China modernises its arsenal, while AI, hypersonics and missile defence compress decision time → calls for a public review that keeps NFU but clarifies scope and capabilities

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The 2003 doctrine rests on a few clear principles —** The Cabinet Committee on Security's review of January 4, 2003 stated that India would build and maintain a credible minimum deterrent; follow a posture of No First Use, using nuclear weapons only in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere; and that retaliation to a first strike would be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage. Nuclear retaliatory attacks can be authorised only by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority. India would not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states, but retained the option of nuclear retaliation in the event of a major attack with biological or chemical weapons.

	The doctrine also committed India to a moratorium on nuclear tests and to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. 2. The Nuclear Command Authority keeps the button in civilian hands — The Nuclear Command Authority, announced in 2003, has a Political Council chaired by the Prime Minister, which alone can authorise the use of nuclear weapons, and an Executive Council chaired by the National Security Adviser, which gives inputs and executes directives. The Strategic Forces Command, a tri-service command, manages the nuclear arsenal and delivery systems. This structure embodies the principle of civilian control that the op-ed says has been central to the doctrine's credibility. 3. India's path from Pokhran to the triad — India conducted a 'peaceful nuclear explosion' at Pokhran in May 1974 and five tests, known as Pokhran-II or Operation Shakti, on May 11 and 13, 1998. The Draft Nuclear Doctrine was released by the National Security Advisory Board in August 1999. The triad — the ability to deliver nuclear weapons from land, air and sea — was completed when the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine INS Arihant finished its first deterrence patrol in 2018. A sea-based second strike is the most survivable leg, which is why the author lists the triad among the capabilities a review must assess. 4. India stays outside the NPT and CTBT but has won civil nuclear access — India has not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968), which recognises only five nuclear weapon states that tested before 1967, nor the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (1996), which has not entered into force. In 2008 the Nuclear Suppliers Group granted India a waiver allowing civil nuclear trade, after the India-U.S. civil nuclear agreement. India's NFU and its voluntary testing moratorium are central to the argument that it is a responsible nuclear power, which underpinned that waiver. China has also declared NFU, while Pakistan has not.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Nuclear doctrine has been asked directly in Mains — UPSC has asked about India's nuclear doctrine and whether NFU remains relevant, as well as about India's position on the NPT and CTBT. The op-ed's 'review, not revision' argument gives a balanced structure for such answers. 2. Prelims tests the institutions and treaties — Questions have covered the NPT, CTBT, NSG and India's civil nuclear agreements. The composition of the Nuclear Command Authority and the elements of the 2003 doctrine are likely targets. 3. Emerging technology and deterrence is a GS3 theme — The syllabus covers security challenges and the role of technology. Hypersonic weapons, AI in command systems and cyber threats to nuclear command and control are the new dimensions examiners are adding.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● India's nuclear doctrine was operationalised by a decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security on January 4, 2003, following the Draft Nuclear Doctrine of 1999. ● Under India's nuclear doctrine, nuclear weapons will be used only in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere, with an exception for a major biological or chemical attack. ● The Political Council of India's Nuclear Command Authority is chaired by the Prime Minister and is the sole body that can authorise the use of nuclear weapons. ● The Executive Council of the Nuclear Command Authority is chaired by the National Security Adviser. ● The Pokhran-II nuclear tests were conducted on May 11 and 13, 1998.

	● India is not a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons or the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. ● The Nuclear Suppliers Group granted India a waiver for civil nuclear trade in 2008.
ANALYSIS	1. NFU is India's cheapest strategic asset, and abandoning it would cost more than it gains — A first-use option would require India to build a far larger arsenal, forward deployment and hair-trigger alert systems, all expensive and destabilising. NFU lets India keep a small, survivable force and claim the moral high ground that won it the NSG waiver. The author is right that ambiguity over NFU could encourage adversaries to recalibrate. The counter-view, voiced by some strategists, is that NFU lets Pakistan wage terror under a nuclear shield; but the answer to that is conventional capability, not nuclear first use. 2. The weak link is 'massive retaliation' against tactical nuclear use — If Pakistan used a small tactical nuclear weapon against Indian forces on its own soil, a promise of massive retaliation against cities may not be believed, because it would invite a devastating counter-strike. That credibility gap is exactly what Pakistan's tactical weapons exploit. The doctrine could instead promise retaliation that inflicts 'unacceptable damage', a phrase already in the 2003 text, allowing a flexible response without abandoning NFU. This is the kind of clarifying review the author has in mind. 3. Technology threatens the survivability that NFU depends on — An NFU posture works only if India can absorb a first strike and still retaliate. Hypersonic weapons, cyber attacks on command networks and space-based surveillance that can track mobile launchers all threaten that second strike. That is why the author's emphasis on capability — survivability, early warning, cyber resilience, the triad — is correct. A sea-based deterrent, with submarines hidden in the ocean, is the best guarantee, and the pace of India's submarine programme matters more to deterrence than any change in wording. 4. Two-front nuclear deterrence is a new problem the 2003 doctrine did not face — In 2003 China and Pakistan were treated as separate problems; today, the author notes, they are closely aligned. A crisis with Pakistan could now bring Chinese intelligence, satellites or diplomatic cover into play. 'Minimum' deterrence must therefore be sized against China's growing arsenal while being usable against Pakistan. That does not require a first-use option, but it does require periodic public reassessment of what 'minimum' means, which India has avoided since 2003. 5. A public review would itself be a signal, so its conduct matters — India has never published a formal update to the 2003 doctrine, and occasional ministerial remarks that NFU could change with circumstances have created exactly the ambiguity the author warns against. A formal review that reaffirms NFU would strengthen deterrence stability and India's diplomatic standing. The risk is that a review becomes a platform for pressure to abandon NFU. Conducting it through the National Security Council system, with a clear public reaffirmation at the end, would manage that risk.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Reviewing a doctrine is not the same as revising it." In the light of changes in India's strategic environment, examine whether India's nuclear doctrine of 2003, particularly No First Use and massive retaliation, requires revision. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State the core of the 2003 doctrine operationalised by the CCS decision of January 4, 2003: credible minimum deterrence, NFU, massive retaliation, civilian control and the biological/chemical exception. 2. Body — changes in the environment — Discuss the China-Pakistan alignment, China's modernisation and LAC infrastructure, Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons, and

technologies such as AI, cyber, hypersonics and missile defence that compress decision time and threaten command and control.

3. **Body — the case for revision** — Cover the credibility gap of massive retaliation against tactical use, the argument that NFU gives Pakistan a shield for sub-conventional war, and the need to size deterrence against two adversaries.
4. **Body — the case for review without revision** — Argue that NFU supports a small, survivable arsenal, strategic stability and India's standing as a responsible power, as reflected in the 2008 NSG waiver; recommend investment in the triad, early warning, cyber resilience and command-and-control.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that a formal public review reaffirming NFU while clarifying retaliation and strengthening capabilities best serves deterrence and strategic autonomy.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the National Security Council Secretariat asked to prepare a note on reviewing the doctrine. What would you include?

Approach: I would include an assessment of Chinese and Pakistani capabilities, including tactical weapons, and of emerging technologies that threaten command and control. I would evaluate the survivability of our triad, early-warning systems and cyber defences. I would present options for clarifying the language on retaliation while retaining NFU. And I would assess the diplomatic costs of any change, including on our civil nuclear partnerships.

Q2. As a senior officer of the Strategic Forces Command, what would be your priority?

Approach: My priority would be to ensure the survivability and readiness of our deterrent, especially the sea-based leg. I would strengthen command-and-control systems against cyber and electronic attacks and conduct regular exercises to test decision chains. I would ensure strict adherence to civilian authority under the Nuclear Command Authority. Credible deterrence depends on the adversary believing retaliation is certain.

Q3. An interview board asks: is nuclear deterrence ethical?

Approach: Nuclear weapons are morally troubling because their use would kill civilians on a massive scale. However, in a world where adversaries possess them, deterrence has helped prevent large-scale war. India's NFU and commitment to disarmament reflect an attempt to reconcile security with ethics. The ethical duty is to keep the arsenal minimal, secure and under civilian control, and to work toward a world without such weapons.

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 — Twenty-Four Girls, and the Department That Stood In for a Parent

SCENARIO On Friday the Odisha Legislative Assembly was told, in response to a query by Congress MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati, that 24 minor girls residing in hostels run under the State's Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste (ST & SC) Development Department have become pregnant over the past two academic years. The ST & SC Development Minister, Nityananda Gond, told the House that 15 girls were found pregnant in hostels under his department during the 2025-26 academic year, and nine during 2024-25. He said FIRs had been lodged against all the accused. No further detail was placed on record about which districts, which hostels, or what the department had done between the first case and the twenty-fourth. These are residential hostels meant for children of Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste families who would otherwise have to travel long distances to reach a school, so that a girl's access to education does not depend on how far her village is from the nearest town; the department's wardens and matrons stand, in law and in practice, in the place of a parent for as long as a child lives there. Now imagine you are the newly posted District Welfare Officer in charge of a cluster of five such hostels in your district, none of which has yet reported an incident but two of which have gone without a functioning warden for months, relying on ad hoc arrangements with teaching staff. A wave of transfers and a shortage of women staff mean that one hostel of ninety girls currently has no resident matron at night. The Collector has asked you, after the Assembly disclosure became local news, to certify by Monday that all hostels in your charge are safe.

- Q1.** Identify the stakeholders and the ethical obligations that arise when the State, and not a parent, is responsible for a child's safety. What kind of accountability is owed, and by whom?
- Q2.** As the District Welfare Officer, what would you certify to the Collector, and what would you refuse to certify until it is true? What would you do in the next 72 hours?
- Q3.** What systemic changes would reduce the chance that your district contributes to next year's number, without turning the hostel into a place of surveillance and fear for the girls who live there?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. The stakeholders, and the meaning of loco parentis** — The most affected stakeholders are the resident girls themselves, whose safety, dignity and continued education are all at stake at once, since a pregnancy in a residential hostel commonly ends a girl's schooling as well as harming her. Behind them stand their parents, many of whom chose a hostel precisely so their daughter could study, and who have delegated the everyday duty of care to the State on the understanding that it would be exercised with at least the vigilance of a home. The wardens and matrons are themselves stakeholders, often overworked and under-resourced, and the ST & SC Development Department is answerable both to the Assembly and, ultimately, to the Constitution's promise of protective discrimination for groups it is meant to uplift, not expose to harm. The doctrine of the State standing in loco parentis is not a metaphor here; when a department houses children away from their families, its officers acquire a parent's duty of care and a public servant's duty of accountability at the same time, and the second can never be a shield for failing the first.
- 2. Why 'FIRs against all the accused' is the least, not the most, that accountability requires** — The Minister's answer to the Assembly closes the loop on individual criminal accused, which is necessary, but it does not touch the separate and prior question of institutional failure: who was the warden, was the hostel staffed as sanctioned, was there a functioning grievance or complaint mechanism a girl could use before harm occurred, and did any supervisory officer visit in the months before each incident. A department that reports only prosecutions of accused persons, and not administrative inquiries into its own staff and infrastructure, is answering the political question and not the child-protection one. Comparing 15 cases in 2025-26 against nine in 2024-25 without district-wise or hostel-wise data leaves it impossible to tell whether the rise reflects better reporting, a real spike in vulnerability, or a specific set of hostels.
- 3. What the DWO should certify, and what should be refused** — The DWO should refuse to certify blanket safety until each of the five hostels is physically verified against a minimum checklist: a sanctioned, currently posted, resident matron; a functioning internal complaints mechanism reachable by the children themselves, not only by staff; secure separation of sleeping areas from any male staff quarters; and a working helpline number displayed and explained to every girl in the local language. The hostel with no resident matron at night is not a technicality; it is the single highest-risk gap and should

be flagged to the Collector as unsafe in writing, with an interim arrangement of a woman staff member deputed from a nearby school on a rotating basis until a matron is posted, rather than papered over with a certificate of convenience. Within 72 hours, the DWO should personally visit the two unstaffed hostels, meet a cross-section of the resident girls without staff present to hear their own account of safety, and record findings in a signed inspection note, because a note on file is what protects both the children and the officer later.

4. **Reporting is a duty, not a discretion** — The POCSO Act, 2012 makes reporting a known or suspected offence against a child mandatory for any person, including institutional staff, and failure to report is itself punishable; a warden who suspects or is told of abuse and does not report is not being discreet but committing an offence. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 requires every child care institution to be registered and monitored, and hostels housing children away from their families should be held, in spirit, to the same standard of a functioning Child Welfare Committee and grievance redress even where they are run by a welfare department rather than under the JJ Act's own registration. An officer who treats mandatory reporting as optional, out of a desire to avoid scandal for the department, converts a legal duty into a discretionary favour to the institution at the child's expense.
5. **The honest limits of what a checklist can do** — A counter-view deserves an honest answer: certificates, checklists and CCTV can produce the appearance of safety while a warden intimidates girls into silence, and an officer who treats a signed form as the end of the inquiry has not discharged the duty at all. Genuine safety depends on whether a girl who is afraid can actually reach someone who will believe her, which is a question of trust built over months, not a box ticked in 72 hours. The DWO should therefore treat the certificate to the Collector as a starting inventory of gaps, not a closing statement, and commit to a named, dated follow-up visit, because an inspection that is announced and repeatable is harder to game than a one-time audit.
6. **Fixing the design, not only this cluster of hostels** — The deeper fix is structural: a sanctioned staffing norm that guarantees at least one resident woman matron per shift in every girls' hostel, with a standing list of trained reserve staff the department can deploy within days of a vacancy, rather than leaving a ninety-girl hostel unstaffed at night for months. A confidential, child-accessible complaint channel, ideally one that does not route through the same warden being complained against, and periodic unannounced visits by a district-level child protection officer, would catch gaps before they become cases. Data should be published hostel-wise and district-wise, not only as a State-wide aggregate answered once a year in the Assembly, because sunlight on where cases cluster is what lets a Collector act before the next Assembly session rather than after it. None of this is possible without treating hostel wardens as a protected, valued cadre rather than a residual posting, since an institution's safety record tracks the seriousness with which the State treats the people it puts in charge of its children.

Case 2 — Fifteen Minutes on the Chief Minister's Handle

SCENARIO A minor girl was molested this week in Jamui, Bihar; the incident, and the outrage around it, spread rapidly on social media. Days later her photograph — that of the survivor herself, a minor — was released from the official X handle of the Bihar Chief Minister, Samrat Choudhary, when the girl and her parents had gone to meet him at his official residence in Patna. The Chief Minister's office realised the mistake after 15 minutes and deleted the post, but by then it had already been shared and downloaded, including by the Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal, so the damage was done. The police registered an FIR at the Secretariat police station against Sagar Prasad, an official posted at the Chief Minister's Office, in connection with the disclosure. Separately, and in the same set of controversies, the Chief Minister drew criticism for remarks about the case — asking, of the accused who had filmed a reel of the incident, 'If he had not made the reel of the incident, would he have been caught?' — remarks the Opposition read as making light of a survivor's ordeal even as his own office had just breached her identity. In the background sits a Bihar Cabinet decision of August 19 amending the Bihar Social Media and Other Online Media Rules, 2026, under which content creators become eligible to earn ₹10,000 for every one lakh views after 30 days of performance: the same State machinery that is building a formal incentive for viral reach around content has, through its own highest office, put a child survivor's face into circulation. Now imagine you are the officer who must, on Monday morning, brief a newly posted CMO staffer on what may and may not be released to the media or social handles, in light of this week's events, and you must also decide what to do about Sagar Prasad's continued access to the handle's login while the FIR is pending.

- Q1. Identify the ethical issues raised by an official disclosure of a minor survivor's photograph, and explain why intent (a mistake, quickly corrected) does not settle the question of accountability.
- Q2. As the officer briefing the new staffer, what specific rule would you lay down for anything involving a case of sexual assault, and how would you frame the tension between the CMO's need to show responsiveness and the survivor's right to privacy?

Q3. What would you recommend regarding Sagar Prasad's access and the wider protocol for the CMO's social media handle while the FIR is pending, and why?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. The stakeholders, and why speed made the harm, not just the mistake** — The stakeholders are the survivor and her family, who came to the Chief Minister's residence seeking support and instead had her identity published from his own office; the wider public of minor survivors and their families, who will now weigh whether approaching the State for help carries a risk of exposure; the CMO staff, who operate under time pressure to be seen responding; and the institution of the Chief Minister's Office itself, whose credibility on child protection is now in question. The ethical issue is not whether the disclosure was intentional — it plainly was not, and it was corrected within 15 minutes — but that on the internet 15 minutes is not a rounding error. A post is downloaded and re-shared long before anyone notices the mistake, which is precisely why the law treats disclosure of a child survivor's identity as an offence regardless of the discloser's motive; the standard is strict because the harm, once released, cannot be recalled by deleting the original.
- 2. The law that should have stopped this before it happened** — Section 23 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 makes it an offence for any person, including media, to disclose the identity of a child in respect of whom an offence has been committed, including through photographs, in any form of media, and permits disclosure only with the special court's permission and in the child's interest. Section 74 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 similarly bars disclosure, in any form of media, of the identity of a child in conflict with law or a child victim or witness, including through pictures. Both provisions exist because the law recognises that a child's face circulating online is a harm independent of, and often larger than, whatever justice eventually follows; an official who releases such a photograph, even by accident and even for fifteen minutes, has triggered exactly the harm these sections were written to prevent, and 'we did not mean to' is not a defence Parliament built into either section.
- 3. What the officer should tell the new staffer** — The rule to lay down is a simple, absolute one: no photograph, name, address, school, or other identifying detail of any complainant or accused minor in a case of sexual offence is ever released from the official handle, without exception, and without waiting to check whether the family is present in the room or has itself consented, because a family's presence at a meeting is not legal consent to publication and a grieving parent is in no position to weigh that consent in the moment. Every post concerning an ongoing case involving a minor should be drafted by, or cleared through, a designated officer trained in the POCSO and JJ Act's disclosure provisions, and no single junior staffer handling the handle in real time should have the unilateral power to post such material. The CMO's legitimate interest in being seen to respond can be served entirely by describing the meeting, the assurance given, and the steps taken, without a single identifying image.
- 4. Access, accountability, and not making an example of the wrong person** — While the FIR against Sagar Prasad is pending, the officer should recommend that his access to the handle be suspended as a standard administrative precaution, not as a punishment pre-judging guilt, since the same logic that suspends a driver's licence pending an inquiry into an accident applies here: the risk of repetition, not culpability, is what is being managed. At the same time, an honest brief must note that a single official rarely acts entirely alone in a CMO's communications workflow, and a fair inquiry should examine whether the systems — approval layers, training, a checklist before any post naming or picturing a case — were absent altogether, in which case the failure is institutional and Sagar Prasad is being asked to bear a systemic gap personally. Punishing one official while leaving the workflow unchanged guarantees a repeat with a different name attached to the next FIR.
- 5. The remark about the reel deserves its own honest scrutiny** — The Chief Minister's comment, made about a different aspect of the same set of incidents, was addressed to the accused's own conduct — asking whether it was the accused's filming that led to his being caught — and can be defended, on a narrow reading, as a point about video evidence assisting prosecution. But said in the same week that his own office breached a survivor's identity, and in a State simultaneously building a cash incentive for content that draws views, the remark lands as part of a wider culture in which visibility, rather than the survivor's interest, has become the currency by which incidents are discussed. A public figure's words about a live case of sexual assault carry a duty of care that goes beyond legal accuracy; they should be tested against the question of whether a survivor's family, reading them, would feel protected or instrumentalised.
- 6. The wider incentive structure the State itself is building** — The Bihar Social Media and Other Online Media Rules, 2026, as amended, pays registered content creators ₹10,000 for every one lakh views after 30 days, a scheme meant to formalise and professionalise a growing creator economy, and there is nothing wrong with States recognising that economy. But a scheme that rewards views without a corresponding, actively enforced carve-out for content involving minors, survivors and ongoing investigations risks making the exploitation of exactly this kind of case more, not less, lucrative for the

platforms and creators who first upload it, even as the government's own office is separately liable under POCSO and the JJ Act for the same act. An administration serious about child protection should require, as a condition of any such incentive scheme, a compliance undertaking against reposting identifiable material relating to minors, backed by the same disclosure provisions its own CMO must observe.

Case 3 — 'For the Satisfaction of the People, We Had to Go Beyond the Law'

SCENARIO In July, at the Bharati Vidyapeeth Police Station in Pune, two separate incidents took place that the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) later took up suo motu after videos surfaced on social media. In the first, four accused in an assault case were, according to an FIR, taken from the police station to a Slum Rehabilitation Authority colony on July 7, made to kneel and walk on the road, beaten on their legs with sticks and lathis, made to sit on their knees with their hands held out, and made to apologise to local residents; the FIR notes there was no corresponding general diary or vehicle log-book entry recording this visit. In the second, eight children in conflict with law, accused of another minor's murder, were taken into custody between July 20 and the early hours of July 22; the FIR alleges they were kept beyond the legally permissible period, and that three of the minors were made to sit on the bonnet of a police vehicle, tied with rope, beaten, and paraded on a public road, with a fourth minor inside the vehicle; four of the eight minors belong to the Scheduled Caste category, and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and the Juvenile Justice Act have both been invoked alongside the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Two FIRs were registered on a complaint by Deputy Superintendent of Police Sanket Gosavi, based on the MSHRC's findings, naming a total of 18 police officers and personnel, with Senior Inspector Mansingh Patil, who was in charge of the station at the time, named as an accused in both. The MSHRC called it 'a shocking story of extreme brutality of Pune Police by blatantly projecting to the public at large that constitutional provisions including fundamental right to life conferred by the Constitution of India has no value in functioning of the Pune Police Department.' Patil, transferred afterwards to the Special Branch, defended the parading of the minors to the press: 'I decided that something had to be done. For the satisfaction of the people, we had to go beyond the law.' Now imagine you are the newly posted Deputy Commissioner of Police for this zone, arriving after the FIRs, and you must decide how the department responds — to its own personnel, to the public that Patil says he was satisfying, and to the eighteen names now on record.

- Q1.** Identify the ethical issues and the stakeholders. What is wrong, specifically, with an officer's claim that going 'beyond the law' served 'the satisfaction of the people'?
- Q2.** As the new DCP, what would you say to your own force about this case, and what immediate administrative steps would you take regarding the officers named, the minors' treatment records, and public communication?
- Q3.** What changes to custodial procedure and oversight would make such a case less likely, without leaving officers feeling that public pressure will always be answered with departmental silence?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. The stakeholders, and the claim that needs to be named for what it is —** The stakeholders are the twelve accused across both cases, four of them adults and eight of them children, all of whom are entitled to due process and to be free of custodial violence regardless of what they are accused of; the SC/ST status of four of the minors, which the FIR itself flags, adding a further layer of aggravated vulnerability under the Atrocities Act; the residents of the SRA colony who were made unwilling participants in a public humiliation; the 18 named police personnel, who face the consequences of what their institution allowed to become normal; and the wider public whose 'satisfaction', in Patil's own words, was offered as the justification. The claim that going beyond the law served public satisfaction inverts the constitutional order: the police derive their authority to restrain, question and punish entirely from law, and 'satisfaction' obtained by abandoning that law is not policing achieving its purpose but policing consuming its own legitimacy to buy short-term applause.
- 2. Why the missing log-book entry matters as much as the beating —** The FIR's finding that there was no general diary entry or vehicle log-book record of the visit to the SRA colony is not a technical footnote; it shows that the parade was not an authorised operational step that simply went wrong, but something conducted off the books, which is precisely the condition in which custodial abuse escapes both supervisory correction and eventual accountability. An institution whose senior inspector can move four accused persons to a public colony for punishment without any contemporaneous record has a documentation failure at least as serious as the assault itself, because it is the paper trail, not good intentions, that lets a department later distinguish a lawful operation from an unlawful one.
- 3. The minors' custody raises a second, distinct violation —** Detaining the eight minors beyond the permissible period is a violation of the Juvenile Justice Act's own procedural safeguards independent of the parading, since the Act requires children in conflict with law to be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board without the delays ordinary criminal

procedure might tolerate for adults, precisely because prolonged, informal police custody is where such abuse tends to occur. Tying minors to a vehicle bonnet and parading them compounds a custody violation with a dignity violation, and the invocation of the SC/ST Act on top of the JJ Act signals that the investigating agency itself has recognised an additional, caste-linked dimension to the humiliation that an ordinary reading of 'parading of accused' might miss.

4. **What the DCP should say to the force, and do administratively** — The DCP's message to the force should be unambiguous: due process is not a constraint the department works around under public pressure but the thing that makes its authority legitimate in the first place, and any officer who believes 'public satisfaction' justifies bypassing law should understand that the MSHRC's finding could as easily have named him. Administratively, the DCP should ensure the 18 named personnel are dealt with through the ordinary departmental and criminal process without pre-judgment, but should immediately audit custody registers and general diaries at every station in the zone for the preceding six months, precisely because the absence of a log entry here suggests the practice may not be confined to one incident. The minors' medical and psychological needs, and their production before the Juvenile Justice Board with full compliance now, should be verified personally, and the department's public statement should acknowledge the MSHRC's findings rather than defend the officers, since a defensive statement at this stage would repeat the very error of prioritising the department's image over the law.
5. **The honest case for Patil's instinct, and its limit** — A fair-minded review should concede that Patil's underlying worry — that visible police inaction against accused minors breeds public cynicism and, eventually, vigilantism of the kind seen elsewhere this same week — reflects a real pressure officers face, and dismissing it as simple cruelty misses the institutional bind many station-house officers are in. But the answer to that pressure is transparent, lawful communication with the public about what the law permits and what has been done, not staged humiliation that borrows the optics of punishment without its legal legitimacy; the first builds long-term trust in the rule of law, the second borrows against it and eventually bankrupts it, as the MSHRC's own language about the 'fundamental right to life' having 'no value' in that department's functioning makes plain.
6. **Changing custodial culture without answering pressure with silence** — Structural changes should include mandatory, tamper-evident custody logging with periodic external audit by the MSHRC or an equivalent body, compulsory bodycam use during any movement of an accused outside the station, and a standing instruction that no accused, adult or minor, may be taken to a public location for any purpose other than a court-directed identification or recovery, with the purpose and authorisation recorded in advance. Equally important is that senior officers acknowledge, publicly and specifically, when the police have acted correctly and made an arrest stick through ordinary evidence-gathering, so that visible, lawful success becomes the department's answer to public frustration rather than a vacuum that individual officers fill with theatre. A department that only ever responds to abuse allegations with denial teaches its own personnel that the real risk is being caught, not doing wrong; a department that owns findings like the MSHRC's teaches the opposite lesson, at some short-term cost to its image and considerable long-term gain to its legitimacy.

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
Merchant Discount Rate on UPI — the subsidy question behind October 15	The Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) is the fee a merchant pays for accepting a digital payment; under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, as amended from January 2020, MDR has been zero on RuPay debit cards and UPI, a subsidy the Centre funds separately rather than through a merchant charge. A 0.4% MDR on person-to-merchant UPI payments above ₹2,000 goes live on October 15, and government sources say this will not be enough to cover the full cost of running the UPI platform, so the Finance Ministry will hold talks with the Indian Banks' Association before that date on how much of its existing incentive scheme — ₹2,000 crore has been budgeted this financial year for promoting RuPay debit cards and low-value BHIM-UPI transactions — should continue, and in what form. Officials say the Centre cannot unilaterally decide whether GST applies to the MDR collected by processors and banks from merchants, since that is a rate question only the GST Council can settle; the Council's October 7 meeting is expected to deal with process reforms and not this rate question.
Tenth Schedule and the Speaker's October 8 deadline for 20 rebel TMC MPs	The Tenth Schedule to the Constitution, inserted by the 52nd Amendment (1985), disqualifies a member who voluntarily gives up membership of the party that set him up, or votes against its whip without condonation; disqualification is decided by the Speaker or Chairman, a power the Supreme Court upheld as subject to judicial review in <i>Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu</i> (1992). In <i>Subhash Desai v. Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra</i> (2023), the Court held that the Speaker must decide such petitions within a reasonable time and cannot indefinitely sit on them. After the Supreme Court flagged a three-month delay in deciding Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee's petition seeking disqualification of 20 rebel MPs under Rule 6 of the Members of Lok Sabha (Disqualification on Ground of Defection) Rules, 1985, the Lok Sabha Speaker's office has now directed the 20 MPs to file their responses by October 8, after an earlier extension had already lapsed on September 22.
The Supreme Court's 'one last chance' on child sexual abuse material	In <i>Just Rights for Children Alliance & Anr v. S. Harish & Ors</i> (September 23, 2024), the Supreme Court held that even viewing or displaying child sexual exploitative and abuse material (CSEAM) without storing it amounts to 'possession' under Section 15 of the POCSO Act, 2012, and directed the Centre to take effective steps against its availability online. This week, on a plea alleging non-compliance, a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran noted that despite an August 14 direction, neither the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology nor the Ministry of Law and Justice had filed any counter or report on the steps taken to give meaningful effect to the 2024 judgment, and gave both ministries 'one last opportunity' to do so, calling the matter 'extremely serious'.
Directing generation in the public interest — Section 11 of the Electricity Act, 2003	Section 11 of the Electricity Act, 2003 empowers the appropriate government, in extraordinary circumstances such as a threat to security of the State, public order or a natural calamity, to direct that a generating company operate and maintain any generating station in accordance with its instructions, and to require the Appropriate Commission to offset the adverse financial impact this involves. Citing a supply crunch that has pushed monthly spot power prices to their highest since 2022, government sources say the Centre is considering directing thermal power plants to blend imported coal with domestic supplies for the first time since 2024; earlier coal-blending directives of this kind ran from December 2021 to March 2024. Most Indian coal-fired plants can already blend up to 15% imported coal, but the previous drive to boost domestic coal output and cut imports had, until now, kept blending largely voluntary.
Consumer commissions and the tiers that decide where a complaint goes	The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 replaced the 1986 Act and created a three-tier quasi-judicial structure — District, State and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions — with pecuniary jurisdiction fixed by the value of goods or services and compensation claimed, and a

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	right of appeal running upward through the tiers. A status report placed before the Supreme Court by an amicus curiae in a suo motu case on vacancies and infrastructure in consumer commissions has flagged a mounting backlog before Kerala's district and State commissions, inadequate video-conferencing facilities in several district commissions, and a lack of women members on the State commission bench, findings that go to the Act's promise of an accessible, speedy alternative to ordinary civil litigation for consumer grievances.
The Coffee Board's three-level sustainability certification	The Coffee Board of India, a statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has developed sustainability standards and is implementing a three-level certification: the first level is self-certification by growers verified by the Board itself, the second involves independent third-party verification, and the third benchmarks Indian standards against internationally recognised sustainability frameworks. India is the world's seventh-largest coffee producer and fifth-largest exporter, having exported coffee worth more than \$2 billion in 2025-26, with nearly 39% comprising value-added products; the Board hopes the new certification will let growers leverage India's traditional shade-grown cultivation as a market advantage.
Bangladesh's hilsa window and the Durga Puja gift-fish diplomacy	Hilsa, Bangladesh's national fish, has been subject to an export ban to India since 2012 to protect domestic supply and conserve breeding stock, but since 2019 Bangladesh has periodically permitted a short export window timed to the Durga Puja festival as a goodwill gesture, given the fish's cultural importance to Bengali festive cuisine on both sides of the border. Any decision each year to open or withhold this window has become a barometer of the state of India-Bangladesh relations, since the same conservation law that justifies the ban gives the Bangladesh government complete discretion over the size and timing of any exception.
227 Indians and the Russian army — what the MEA has confirmed	On September 1, 2026, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told the media that India had information about 227 of its nationals having been recruited into the Russian armed forces — most having gone to Russia on a student or work visa before being drawn into combat roles — of whom 139 had been discharged and 51 had died, with New Delhi in constant discussion with Moscow for the release and repatriation of those still there. Addressing the UN General Assembly on September 23, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy named India among 47 countries whose citizens, he said, Russia was using in its war against Ukraine, a claim India has treated as a case-by-case consular and diplomatic matter rather than a foreign-policy alignment question.
FDI equity inflows and the point behind the DPIIT's data	Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) equity inflow data are compiled and released by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and are tracked as a headline indicator of investor confidence and ease of doing business. For the first quarter of FY27, Japan was the top source country for FDI equity inflows and Tamil Nadu the top destination State, while inflows from the United States declined sharply — a reminder that India's FDI composition is watched as closely by policymakers for its diversification across source countries and States as for its aggregate size, since dependence on any single source economy carries its own strategic risk.
The Chief Economic Adviser's warning on 'sustained coercion' and the cost of hedging	Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran said this week that trade curbs — export licensing conditions, supply-chain choke-points and similar measures by major economies — amount to 'sustained coercion' aimed at making countries choose between competing geopolitical blocs, and that India's strategy of hedging between blocs, rather than choosing one, will itself carry a 'significant cost'. He argued that given India's location, size and geography, choosing a side is not a realistic option, so hedging's cost has to be factored into decision-making in both the public and private sectors — a framing that treats strategic autonomy in trade and foreign economic policy as a deliberate, costed choice rather than a default.
Iran's seven-day offer, and what is new about it	Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has suggested, at the UN General Assembly's sidelines, that Iran could reopen the Strait of Hormuz within seven days if the United States lifts its naval blockade, waives sanctions on Iranian oil sales, and observes a ceasefire that would extend to Lebanon; President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran does not want to continue fighting and that 'it is America that must choose' to end the war. This is a more specific, time-bound and conditional offer than Iran's position two days earlier, when President Trump had told the UN General

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	Assembly that Iran must choose between a deal and 'annihilation' while Hormuz remained disrupted; the seven-day figure and the explicit linkage to Lebanon are the new elements.
Sri Lanka raises the judicial retirement age despite protests	Sri Lanka's government has voted to raise the mandatory retirement age of all judges by two years, as part of judicial reforms that also seek to increase the number of courthouses, create new appellate courts outside Colombo, and recruit additional magistrates, staff and police officers to speed up trials; the extension will apply to 411 judges. The Bills were opposed in Parliament and by the country's influential bar association even as President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's government pressed ahead, framing the change as necessary to reduce case backlogs in a judiciary that, like India's, has long struggled with pendency.
Dharmashastra's Shudra category was never static — the sat-Shudra/asat-Shudra line	Classical Dharmashastra texts such as the Manusmriti address the Shudra varna sparingly, but medieval commentarial literature elaborated a distinction between the 'sat-Shudra' (respectable, admitted to temple worship though not to Vedic recitation) and the 'asat-Shudra' (treated as excluded from both), a line that determined which rites a Brahmin priest could perform for a family and which he could not. Devdutt Pattanaik's column notes that between roughly 1300 and 1600 CE, Sultanate and Mughal rule let many Shudras become landed peasants, merchants, guild artisans and even rulers, so that Brahmanical legal literature had to keep redrawing where the Shudra category's boundary lay — a reminder, against a static reading of caste, that Dharmashastra was a living, adapting body of law responding to real shifts in economic and political power, not a fixed code handed down unchanged from antiquity.
Madhya Pradesh revives a public bus network under PM e-Bus Sewa and PM E-DRIVE	Twenty-one years after winding up its state-run bus service, Madhya Pradesh has relaunched a state-backed public bus network, flagging off 351 buses under the newly launched Mukhyamantri Sugam Parivahan Sewa alongside the Centre's PM e-Bus Sewa scheme. PM e-Bus Sewa funds 10,000 electric buses at a total cost of about ₹57,000 crore, of which roughly ₹20,000 crore comes from the Centre, while PM E-DRIVE — approved in September 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,900 crore and now extended to March 31, 2028 for all segments except large electric three-wheelers — separately subsidises electric-vehicle demand, including for e-buses; the Union Road Transport and Highways Minister used the relaunch to press manufacturers on safety standards and push for a larger shift to electric public transport.
Delhi's SIR notices reach the night shelters	As part of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, camps have been organised at Delhi's night shelters — including Sarai Kale Khan — to make the electoral roll 'more inclusive', according to the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer's office. Of roughly 33.1 lakh electors on Delhi's draft roll who received notices to prove their eligibility to remain on the rolls, about 13.79 lakh could not be linked to the electoral roll of the last intensive revision, and about 19.33 lakh were flagged for logical discrepancies in their enumeration forms; the final electoral roll for Delhi is due to be published on November 4. Residents at the shelters, many without settled proof of address, have had to establish their eligibility through whatever Aadhaar, PAN or earlier voter identification documents they could produce to the visiting Booth Level Officers.
Punjab's Maavan Dheeyan Satkar Yojana and welfare-linked political outreach	The Maavan Dheeyan Satkar Yojana is a Punjab government cash-transfer scheme under which every eligible woman receives ₹1,000 a month and Dalit women receive ₹1,500 a month; announced as one of the AAP government's 2022 election guarantees, it was implemented only in July 2026, when three months of payments were transferred in advance. The Bhagwant Mann government says 97% of eligible women in Punjab are now covered by the scheme, which is being rolled out through a network of village-level 'Sakhis' who register beneficiaries — an example of a welfare entitlement scheme whose implementation timeline and outreach machinery double as a political mobilisation structure ahead of an Assembly election.
The ₹2.9 lakh crore overrun the MoSPI tracks every month	The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division (IPMD) monitors central infrastructure projects costing ₹150 crore or more, classifying those of ₹1,000 crore or more as 'mega' projects; its August report showed 1,731 ongoing projects, monitored across 17 central ministries and departments, had together recorded a cumulative cost overrun of ₹2.9 lakh crore over their original estimated cost of ₹30.7 lakh crore, with cumulative expenditure of ₹16.33 lakh crore representing about 48.59% of the

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	revised project cost. The report tracks aggregate overrun and expenditure but does not itself identify which individual projects are driving the overrun, which is monitored separately at the ministry level.
Census 2027's Population Enumeration phase adds 13 new questions	The Census of India 2027's Population Enumeration phase carries a schedule of 40 questions, 13 more than the 29-question schedule used in the 2011 Census, reflecting the addition of new fields of inquiry approved for this decadal count. Ladakh, a Union Territory without a legislature since 2019, has become the first State or Union Territory to begin this second phase of Census 2027, following the earlier House-listing phase; the Census is conducted under the Census Act, 1948, and its schedule and timing are notified by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.
Electoral rolls, Form 6, and who may amend the rules that govern them	Form 6, the form for fresh registration of a voter, is prescribed under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, which are themselves made under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and can be amended only by the Union government's Law Ministry, not by the Election Commission or any State authority acting alone. Section 16 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 gives statutory protection to the CEC and Election Commissioners in the discharge of their functions, while Section 32 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 makes a breach of official duty in connection with the preparation, revision or correction of electoral rolls a punishable offence — the two provisions together framing both the immunity that protects election officers doing their duty and the liability that attaches if they do not.
Why only nine States run their own lotteries	Government-organised lotteries fall under Entry 40 of the Union List, but the Lotteries (Regulation) Act, 1998 lets a State either run its own lottery, subject to conditions in Section 4, or prohibit lotteries from other States under Section 5, while Section 6 lets the Union prohibit lotteries altogether if it chooses. In <i>B.R. Enterprises v. State of U.P.</i> (1999), the Supreme Court read down Section 5 to hold that a State may bar other States' lotteries only if it does not run one of its own — a ruling that has shaped which States chose to exit the business, including Tamil Nadu in 2003 and Karnataka in 2007. A Lok Sabha reply of March 14, 2023 identified only nine States as currently running lotteries: Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim and West Bengal.
J&K's 2000 Autonomy Resolution and the demand it keeps returning to	The Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly passed an Autonomy Resolution on June 26, 2000 seeking a return to the State's pre-1953 constitutional position — the position as it stood before Sheikh Abdullah's dismissal as Prime Minister on August 9, 1953 — including restoration of titles such as Wazir-e-Azam (Prime Minister) and Sadr-e-Riyasat (President of the State). A further resolution on the State's special status was passed on November 6, 2024, and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has now moved a fresh resolution on restoration of Statehood 'in continuation of the 2000 autonomy resolution', a linkage that treats the demand for Statehood and the older demand for autonomy under Article 370 as points on the same continuing claim rather than as separate issues.
Compensatory afforestation must double the land it replaces	Under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and its rules, any diversion of forest land for a non-forest purpose requires compensatory afforestation on an equivalent area of non-forest land; where no such equivalent non-forest land is available, the compensatory afforestation must instead be raised on degraded forest land measuring twice the area of the forest land diverted, a deliberately higher ratio meant to offset both the loss of area and the lower ecological value of degraded land being restored. The rule is administered through the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund framework and is one of the standard conditions attached to forest clearances for infrastructure and industrial projects.
India's Model BIT, and why the UAE got a shorter wait	India's current Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) was approved by the Cabinet in December 2015 and adopted in January 2016, and requires a foreign investor to exhaust domestic remedies for five years before it may bring a treaty-based arbitration claim against India, a provision meant to keep ordinary regulatory and commercial disputes within India's own courts and tribunals in the first instance. The India-UAE BIT of 2024 departed from this template

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	by cutting the local-remedies period to three years, reflecting a negotiated exception rather than a change to the Model BIT text itself, which continues to apply as India's default starting position in other bilateral investment treaty negotiations.
T.N. Seshan and the rule that most EC decisions are unanimous by convention, not law	In <i>T.N. Seshan v. Union of India</i> (1995), the Supreme Court held that the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners have an equal say in the Commission's decisions, rejecting the idea that the CEC's opinion could override the others'; the Election Commission became a permanent three-member body only in 1993. Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 provides that the Commission's business is to be transacted unanimous 'as far as possible', and where the CEC and Election Commissioners differ, the matter is decided by majority — a legal fallback for disagreement that exists precisely because the Commission's public presentation of unanimity is a convention of collegiality, not a constitutional or statutory requirement that outvoted members must fall silent.
The wheat buffer norm, and why a 'free' export list is not the same as a subsidy	The Central Pool buffer stocking norm for wheat as on October 1 each year is set at 20.5 million metric tonnes, a minimum the Food Corporation of India must hold to guarantee supply for the public distribution system and price stabilisation through the lean season. Wheat exports, which had been in the 'prohibited' category, were moved to 'free' on August 24, 2026, a change in export policy classification under the Foreign Trade Policy that removes the licensing bar on exports but is a distinct decision from the buffer norm itself — a country can simultaneously free up exports and maintain a high mandatory buffer, since the two instruments manage different risks: one protects farm incomes and trade competitiveness, the other protects food-security stocks.

Source note: All items are drawn from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Economic Times* (Delhi Editions) — 26 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

What the State counts, it comes to govern.

Themes: Governance · Social justice · Data and the State

When H.H. Risley ran the Census of India in 1901, he tried to arrange the castes of each province in order of “social precedence as recognised by native public opinion”. The attempt set off a flood of petitions. Caste associations wrote to census officers asking to be recorded under more honourable names, to be placed higher in the table, to be counted as something other than what their neighbours called them. Historians still argue over how much the colonial census created and how much it only recorded; Nicholas Dirks, in *Castes of Mind* (2001), argued that colonial rule made caste the master category of Indian society, while others reply that caste was powerful long before any census. On one point they agree. Once the State wrote caste down, caste began to organise itself around what the State had written.

More than a century later, India is counting caste again. The questionnaire for the second phase of Census 2027 asks a caste question for the first time since Independence, using an “open column” in which people who are not Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes write their caste in their own words. Officials say it has not yet been decided how the answers will be sorted and tabulated. This essay argues that counting is never a neutral act of looking: what a State measures, it begins to fund, to regulate and to reshape, and people begin to shape themselves to fit. The real choice, therefore, is not between counting and not counting, but between a count that is governed openly and one that governs in the dark.

Start with the good that counting does. In 1990 Amartya Sen published an essay in *The New York Review of Books* titled “More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing”, estimating from population ratios how many women and girls should have been alive in Asia and North Africa and were not. A number turned a private practice into a public scandal. In India the Census kept recording the damage: the child sex ratio fell from 927 girls per thousand boys in 2001 to 918 in 2011. The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1994 and the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme of 2015 were both answers to what the count had shown. Even the Socio-Economic Caste Census of 2011, whose caste tables were never released, produced deprivation data still used to identify beneficiaries of housing and health insurance schemes.

Not counting also governs, only less honestly. The Mandal Commission estimated the share of Other Backward Classes in the population from the Census of 1931, the last to count every caste. For more than three decades, therefore, reservation and welfare have been allocated on caste lines without current caste numbers. In the absence of data, benefits tend to flow to the groups best able to claim them, not to those most in need. Silence about numbers did not abolish caste; it simply handed the question to whoever could organise the loudest.

Yet counting has a darker side, and it must be faced squarely. In 1933 the Belgian colonial administration in Rwanda issued identity cards recording each person as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. A category that had once allowed some movement was fixed on paper, and in 1994 those same cards were checked at roadblocks during the genocide. The lesson is general: a category written by the State can become a destiny. Economists know a gentler version as Goodhart’s law, after the economist Charles Goodhart: once a measure becomes a target, people change their behaviour to meet it and the measure stops telling the truth.

Today’s papers carry a small example of how a measure can replace the thing it measures. Karnataka says the Centre has withheld ₹2,186.20 crore in Finance Commission grants for panchayats because about ₹225 crore that the State says reached gram panchayats, and was spent on works, did not appear on the e-Gram Swaraj portal. “Citing such a minor

issue as a reason for withholding ₹2,186 crore is an injustice to Karnataka,” the State’s minister said. The Union government’s reply was not reported, and this essay does not judge the dispute. But the principle is visible either way. For the system that releases money, what is not on the portal does not exist.

The case against counting caste deserves its strongest form. France has long refused to collect statistics on ethnic origin, on the principle that the Republic sees only equal citizens, and in 2007 its Constitutional Council struck down a provision of an immigration law that would have opened the door to such data. India’s early leaders chose, after 1951, to count only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, hoping that other caste identities would fade if the State ignored them. The fear that a caste count will harden identities and set off competitive demands is not imaginary. Bihar published its caste survey in 2023, raised reservation to 65 per cent, and saw the Patna High Court strike the increase down in 2024 for breaching the fifty per cent ceiling set in *Indra Sawhney* (1992).

But the experience of the last seventy years is that refusing to look did not make caste disappear. It continued to decide who owned land, who married whom and who was hired, while the State pretended not to know. The honest conclusion is that the danger lies less in counting than in counting carelessly, secretly or for a result already chosen.

What would a well-governed count look like? First, the classification should be fixed before the data comes in, not after. Good statistical practice publishes the coding rules, synonyms and tabulation plan in advance, so that no one can later say the numbers were arranged to suit a result. The chain the officials describe, from the census divisions to the Registrar General, the Home Secretary and finally the Ministry or Cabinet, has no formal place for independent statisticians or social scientists; one should be created. Second, caste should be cross-tabulated with education, occupation and assets, so that policy can see deprivation within castes and not merely produce a new ranking of their sizes. And third, the confidentiality that Section 15 of the Census Act, 1948 promises to every household must be defended absolutely, because a count people fear will not be a true count.

The Karnataka dispute adds a fourth rule. Whoever is counted must be able to answer back. A data system that withholds money should first reconcile its records with those it serves, give reasons in writing, and allow a correction before the penalty falls. Otherwise the portal governs, and the panchayat that built the road is treated as if it had built nothing.

On 25 November 1949, B.R. Ambedkar warned the Constituent Assembly that the Republic would recognise “the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value” in politics, while its social and economic structure would continue to deny “the principle of one man one value”. A census is one of the few instruments a democracy has for checking how far that contradiction has narrowed. It will shape what it counts, as Risley’s tables did. The task is to make sure it shapes it in the open, by rules fixed in advance, for the sake of the person behind the number rather than the category above it.

Built from today's cards: Census 2027 records caste in an open column; the Centre is yet to decide how to tabulate it · Karnataka accuses the Centre of withholding ₹2,186.20 crore in 15th Finance Commission panchayat grants over portal gaps

ESSAY 2 · Essay · Section B · 6 min read***The work that holds the world together is the work no one sees.***

Themes: Labour and dignity · Gender · Globalisation

Suraj Yadav was twenty-two, from Deoria in Uttar Pradesh, and the first person from his village to work on a commercial ship. He joined the bulk carrier MV Cape Dao on 19 August. On 23 September the ship, flying the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, was attacked in the Gulf of Oman, and he was killed. Two days later, at the United Nations, India and Liberia launched a Group of Friends on the safety and security of shipping and seafarers. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reminded the meeting that nearly two million seafarers operate the world's merchant fleet and that shipping carries four-fifths of global trade. Few of the people who use the phones, fuel and fertiliser those ships carry could name a single ship or a single sailor.

In the same week, Andhra Pradesh introduced new textbooks for Classes 1 and 2 in which half of all the household chores shown are done by men: a father cooks beside the mother, men and women queue together at a public tap. The earlier books, officials said, had shown such work done entirely by women. A sailor's death in the Gulf of Oman and a picture in a Class 1 book seem far apart, but they share one idea. The labour that keeps everything else running is usually the least seen, and it is unseen not by accident but by design: of law, of accounting and of habit. This essay argues that making such work visible is necessary but not enough. It has to be counted, protected and shared.

Consider first why the sailor is invisible. Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, a ship on the high seas answers to the state whose flag it flies, and that state is responsible for its crew's conditions. Most of the world's tonnage is registered under open registries, or "flags of convenience", chosen for low fees and light oversight; Liberia runs the largest. So an Indian sailor on a Panamanian or Antiguan ship falls between two states: the one with the legal duty has little interest in him, and the one that cares has little legal standing. The world noticed this during the pandemic, when crew changes stopped and, at the peak in 2020, the International Maritime Organization estimated that some 400,000 seafarers were stranded, either stuck on board beyond their contracts or unable to join ships. In December 2020 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution urging states to designate seafarers as key workers. In March 2021, when the Ever Given blocked the Suez Canal for six days, the world discovered again how much depended on work it never thought about.

Now consider the home. India's first Time Use Survey, conducted by the National Statistics Office in 2019, found that women who did unpaid domestic work for their households spent about 299 minutes a day on it, against about 97 minutes for men who did such work. None of those hours enters the GDP, because the national accounts count household services produced for the family's own use as outside the production boundary. Marilyn Waring made the argument famous in *If Women Counted* (1988): an economy that measures the sale of a meal but not the cooking of one will underrate the people who cook. The journalist Katrine Marçal put the same point as a question, the title of her book *Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner?* Smith, who wrote about the butcher, the brewer and the baker, lived for most of his life with his mother, who kept his house.

Invisible work tends to become visible only when it stops. On 24 October 1975, about nine in ten women in Iceland refused to go to work, cook or look after children for a day. Offices, schools and factories struggled to function, and fathers took their children to work. Five years later Iceland elected Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as the world's first democratically elected woman president. It was a brilliant protest, but it is a costly way for a society to learn what it owes. A sailor should not have to die, nor a household have to stop, before the rest of us notice.

The counter-position has real force. First, invisibility is sometimes a sign of success. A water supply that works, a well-run port, a competent district office: no one sees them because nothing goes wrong, and a demand that every kind of labour be celebrated could produce only noise. Second, many families regard cooking and caring as acts of affection rather than

labour, and putting a price on them may seem to cheapen them; a 50:50 picture may look like an urban ideal imposed on households with very different lives. Third, visibility can be cheap. In the spring of 2020 people in Britain came out every Thursday to applaud health and care workers, and disputes over those workers' pay and conditions followed within a few years. Applause is not a wage.

These objections do not overturn the argument; they sharpen it. Visibility is only the first of three steps that the economist Diane Elson summarised as recognise, reduce and redistribute, the framework later reflected in Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.4 on unpaid care and domestic work. Recognition means counting: regular time-use surveys and a satellite account for household production would put women's unpaid work into official tables without pretending that love has a price. Reduction means infrastructure: piped water, clean cooking fuel and creches free more hours than any textbook can. Redistribution means changing who does the work, and this is where a Class 1 book matters, because children learn who does what from pictures long before they can read. The same picture will fail if the teacher laughs at the father at the stove, so teacher training matters as much as illustration.

For seafarers, the same steps apply. Recognition already exists on paper in the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, the "seafarers' bill of rights" on wages, rest, repatriation and medical care, which India has ratified. Protection has to follow: port states can inspect foreign ships for compliance, war-risk clauses and compensation should be written into every contract, and the Group of Friends will matter only if it presses flag states to accept the duties that come with the fees they collect. The Ports Ministry's "Seafarer-First" initiative for sailors in conflict zones is a start, but it must reach insurance and contracts, not only evacuation.

The honest conclusion is not that every worker needs a monument. It is that a society should know on whose labour it depends, before a crisis teaches it. A child in Deoria who opens a Class 1 book and sees a father cooking may grow up understanding what the world has long ignored: that ordinary life rests on work done quietly, by mothers at home and by young men like Suraj Yadav on ships far away. Seeing that work is the first duty. Sharing it, and protecting those who do it, is the rest.

Built from today's cards: India and Liberia launch a UN 'Group of Friends' to protect ships and seafarers · Andhra Pradesh's new Class 1-2 textbooks show men doing half of all household chores