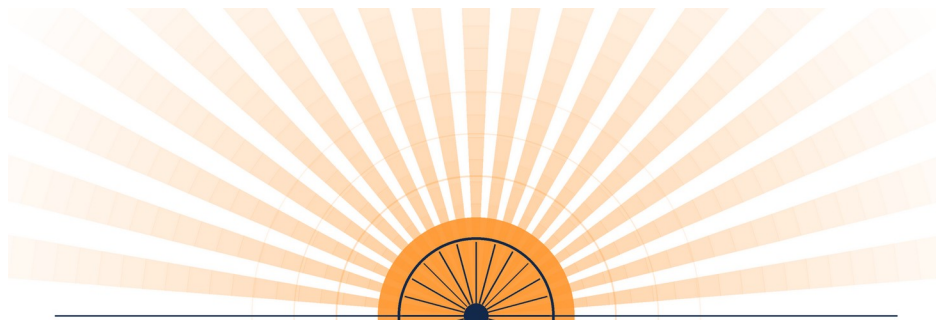




UPSC DARPAN

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

"To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace."

— Tacitus, Agricola (98 CE), Chapter 30 (speech of Calgacus; tr. Church and Brodribb)

The Hindu & The Indian Express (Delhi Editions) — 30 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 · 30 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.

“Without such sanctity of life and liberty, the distinction between a lawless society and one governed by laws would cease to have any meaning.”

— **Justice H.R. Khanna (dissenting)** · *ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla* (1976) 2 SCC 521, Supreme Court of India, dissenting opinion, 28 April 1976

Use in: Liberty and preventive detention (today's Supreme Court ruling quashing the NSA detention of a Sambhal accused, holding that a confession made in police custody cannot justify it, with ₹10 lakh in costs on Uttar Pradesh). Khanna wrote this alone during the Emergency, when the majority held that no detenu could seek habeas corpus; nine judges in *Puttaswamy* (2017) later said the majority was wrong. Use it in GS2 answers on Article 21 and Article 22, the NSA and Advisory Boards, and in essays on liberty and security: preventive detention is an exception to the rule of law and must be read strictly. Argue for detention only on the detaining authority's own satisfaction formed on admissible material, Advisory Boards that hear the detenu in substance, and personal accountability for misuse.

“Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”

— **George Orwell** · *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Part One, Chapter 3 (the Party slogan)

Use in: Who decides what history is taught (today's release of NCERT's new Class 9 social science book, which drops the French and Russian revolutions and presents 1000–1700 CE as a period of “Resistance and Resilience”). Use it in GS2 answers on education policy, NCERT and the federal balance in curricula, and in essays on memory, identity and power: a textbook is always a selection, and a student cannot question a past she was never shown. Argue for curricula written by historians through open, published consultation with States and teachers, the teaching of sources and debates rather than single verdicts, and room for regional histories without dropping the ideas of liberty and equality that citizenship rests on.

“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

— **Aldo Leopold** · *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), essay “The Land Ethic”

Use in: Grasslands dismissed as “wasteland” (today's PNAS study finding that ancient grasslands, once destroyed, do not regain their character for at least a century, and the call for a National Grassland Restoration Programme and a National Grazing Policy). Use it in GS3 answers on biodiversity, land-use classification, afforestation targets and the Great Indian Bustard, and in essays on development and nature: an ecosystem is judged by whether it stays whole, not by whether it looks productive to a revenue clerk. Argue for removing open natural ecosystems from “wasteland” categories, not planting trees on grasslands, restoration of the kind that brought back the bustard in Solapur and the lesser florican in Kutch, and grazing rights for pastoralists.

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- 12.1 The absence of dissent is not the presence of consent.

Start here — today's top 5

The whole magazine is about a two-hour read. If you are short of time, read these five cards first.

1.1	SC quashes Sambhal NSA detention, ₹10 lakh costs on UP Why it matters: GS2 Articles 21–22: preventive-detention safeguards and police-custody confessions are a staple Mains theme, with NSA and Evidence Act Prelims facts.
2.1	₹1 lakh crore RDI Fund stalls as TDB stops applications Why it matters: GS3 resource mobilisation and indigenous technology: ANRF, TDB and the two-tier fund design are prime Prelims facts; delivery failure suits Mains.
4.1	Jaishankar: US–China in ‘competitive mode’, India must de-risk Why it matters: GS2 effect of great-power policies on India: strategic autonomy, the Quad and the UN ‘enemy state’ clauses are likely asks.
5.1	Centre seeks Supreme Court stay on Great Nicobar FRA hearings Why it matters: GS3 environment and GS2 tribal welfare: FRA consent, Niyamgiri and PVTGs recur in both papers; the SLP is listed for October 5.
7.1	Cybercrime up 17.9%; bribes and contacts decide recovery Why it matters: GS3 cyber security: NCRB data, IT Act Sections 66C/66D and I4C, plus the State-subject policing angle, suit a Mains question.

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

Both stories today are about the State using a procedure to reach a result the law does not allow. In Sambhal, a preventive-detention law kept in jail a man the courts had bailed; in the electoral rolls, a software change did what only a rule amendment could. In each case the correction came from outside the machinery that erred.

1.1 Supreme Court quashes Sambhal accused's NSA detention, rules police-custody confession cannot justify it

ISSUE THREAD Preventive detention and arrest safeguards (update 6) **LENS** Liberty and order · Rule of law and discretion

STORY SO FAR Courts are tightening checks on detention: a J&K PSA order was quashed, Goondas Act misuse was censured, and the Supreme Court held arrest without written grounds unconstitutional.

THE NEWS New Delhi. On September 29 the Supreme Court quashed the detention of Mulla Afroz under the National Security Act (NSA), 1980, and ordered Uttar Pradesh to pay him ₹10 lakh in costs within a month. Afroz was arrested on January 17, 2025, over the November 24, 2024 violence in which four people died during a court-ordered survey of Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid. While he was in judicial custody, the Sambhal District Magistrate detained him under Section 3(2) of the NSA on October 13, 2025; the Allahabad High Court upheld the order. Justices Dipankar Datta and Sheel Nagu held that "a confessional statement made before a police officer cannot, by itself" found such detention. Preventive detention means jailing a person to stop a future act, not to punish a past one; here, the court said, it was "not preventive but punitive", an attempt to frustrate his bail.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Court-ordered mosque survey sparks violence → Afroz arrested 54 days after the FIR, allegedly confesses in custody → as bail comes, the DM invokes the NSA → State confirms a year's detention, High Court upholds → Supreme Court quashes with costs

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	Article 22(3)-(7) is a separate code of safeguards for preventive detention — Clause (3) excludes preventive detainees from the ordinary arrest protections of clauses (1) and (2). Instead, detention beyond three months needs an Advisory Board of persons qualified to be High Court judges, the grounds must be communicated as soon as may be, and the detenu must get the earliest opportunity to make a representation. The National Security Act, 1980, puts detention in the executive's hands — Section 3(2) lets the Centre or a State detain a person to prevent acts prejudicial to the security of the State, public order or essential supplies, and Section 3(3) lets the State delegate this to a District Magistrate or Police Commissioner. Cases go to an Advisory Board, and the maximum detention is twelve months. The Supreme Court upheld the Act in <i>A.K. Roy v Union of India</i> (1982).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	Preventive detention is a standing GS2 test of liberty against security — It falls under the GS2 line "Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure", and this ruling adds a point on confessions and bail.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- A confession to a police officer cannot be proved against an accused (Section 25, Indian Evidence Act, 1872; carried into the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023). - Article 20(3) protects a person accused of an offence from being compelled to be a witness against himself. - Under the National Security Act, 1980, the maximum period of detention is twelve months.
ANALYSIS	Lens — Liberty and order: the court protected order by insisting on the right tool for it — Sambhal's public-order concern was real. But Afroz was already inside the criminal process, where the answer to an unwelcome bail is to appeal it; using the NSA instead

	let the executive overrule a court by another route. A thoughtful officer would keep preventive detention for a fresh, independent threat, never as a substitute for a trial. 2. Four checks cleared the order; only the Supreme Court read the material — The order passed the DM, the State's confirmation, two representations and the High Court, yet the CCTV used to identify him was never supplied to him. Internal safeguards tend to check form, not substance, when they defer to 'subjective satisfaction'. Since the Supreme Court cannot audit every order, the fix must lie in the State's own review. 3. Costs on the State teach a lesson, but the taxpayer pays — ₹10 lakh turns an abstract wrong into a price. In the Noida NSA case the Supreme Court stayed a salary penalty on the DM, showing the courts' reluctance to fix personal liability. Treasury costs spare honest officers but never touch the one who signed a weak order; departmental review of quashed detentions is a middle path.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Preventive detention cannot become a route around an order granting bail." In the light of this observation, critically examine the adequacy of safeguards against misuse of preventive detention in India. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh safeguards on paper against practice and reach a judgement. 2. Introduction — detention prevents, it does not punish — Define preventive detention; cite the Sambhal ruling and its ₹10 lakh costs. 3. Body — on paper the safeguards are strong — Value addition: A.K. Roy (1982); the Bench called detention a 'rarest of rare' exception to Article 21. 4. Body — in practice every layer defers to subjective satisfaction — Afroz's order survived four checks; draw the five checkpoints as a flowchart, marking the one that worked. 5. Body — remedies must bite on substance — Full disclosure of material, costs, officer review. 6. Conclusion — reasons, not labels — Require written reasons linking fresh material to a future threat.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a District Magistrate, the police ask you to detain under the NSA an accused just granted bail, relying mainly on his custodial confession. What do you do? Approach: I would refuse on that basis, because a confession to the police is inadmissible and the Supreme Court has now held it cannot found detention. I would ask whether fresh, independent material shows a real likelihood of future disorder, and whether all of it can be supplied to him. If bail was wrong, the prosecution should challenge it.

1.2 EC reverts online Form 6 as Form 10 data show agents beat the 10-a-day cap

ISSUE THREAD SIR of electoral rolls (update 9) **LENS** Independence and accountability · Liberty and order

STORY SO FAR The SIR re-verifies electors against the last intensive roll. Delhi deleted 47.6 lakh names; 93% of decided West Bengal appeals restored voters; States question ECINet software.

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Election Commission (EC) has reverted to the original online Form 6, the application for fresh voter registration, in States where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of rolls is not under way. A Saturday press release said the declaration added to Form 6 during the SIR, mapping an applicant or parents to the last intensive roll, would be used only during the SIR; on Tuesday the fields seeking parents' and grandparents' details were removed. Two Election Commissioners had flagged the problem in notes in May and August 2026. Separately, Delhi's Form 10 reports, a public list

of objections to names on the roll, show four people filed more than 10 objections a day during September 21–27, though EC guidelines cap a party's booth-level agent (BLA) at 10; the ECINET portal has no such limit. Delhi's deadline for claims and objections moves to October 30.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Bihar SIR attaches a declaration to Form 6 → an IT change blocks online Form 6 without it everywhere → two Commissioners object → EC confines it to SIR States → Form 10 data expose a second gap, no cap on bulk objections

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Representation of the People Act, 1950, is the law of electoral rolls — Section 21 provides for preparation and revision of rolls, including intensive revision, Section 22 for correction and Section 23 for inclusion of names, all through the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, made by the Centre, prescribe Form 6 for inclusion, Form 7 for objection or deletion and Form 8 for correction or shifting. 2. Articles 324 and 326 set the EC's power and the voter's right — Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of rolls and the conduct of elections in the Election Commission. Article 326 bases elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on adult suffrage for citizens aged 18 or above not disqualified by law.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Electoral rolls are where the RPA meets the right to vote — The GS2 syllabus asks for "Salient features of the Representation of People's Act", and the SIR has made deletion safeguards and the EC's powers a live Mains theme.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, Form 6 is for inclusion of a name, Form 7 for objection or deletion, and Form 8 for correction or shifting of residence. - Electoral rolls fall under the RPA, 1950; conduct of elections under the RPA, 1951. - Article 326 provides for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Independence and accountability: the EC corrected itself because its own members objected — The EC says Form 6 was never amended, yet online applicants outside SIR States could not submit it without the declaration. Since only the Centre can amend the Rules, a software condition on what a citizen must produce stands on weak legal ground. The reversal followed two Commissioners' written objections: a multi-member Commission checking itself. The officer's lesson: any new condition for registering must be notified as a rule, not coded into an app. 2. Software has quietly become the rule-maker for deletions — The 10-a-day cap exists in guidelines but not in ECINET, and an agent who logs in with Aadhaar looks like any citizen. In Karnataka's Babaleshwar, 1,363 of 1,373 Form 7 objections received on one day came from 10 people. In Delhi, 519 objections were disposed of against 92 inclusion forms in one week, though each objection needs notice, hearing and a speaking order. That shifts the burden onto the voter. 3. Demanding grandparents' details from a new voter fails the privacy test — Pankhuri Agarwal in The Hindu calls the SIR "a third kind of watching". Under the proportionality test of Puttaswamy (2017), collecting data must be necessary for a legitimate aim. Roll purity is such an aim, but an 18-year-old's grandparents' records are not necessary for it outside the SIR.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine how the design of online electoral-roll platforms can strengthen or weaken the right to vote in India. (10 marks, 150 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Probe both effects with evidence; say which prevails. 2. Introduction — rolls are now revised through ECINET — Note the EC's reversal of the online Form 6 declaration outside SIR States. 3. Body — design helps when it cuts paperwork and leaves a public audit trail — Form 10 lists make objections visible. 4. Body — design hurts when code skips legal limits — Value addition: 1,363 of 1,373 Babaleshwar objections came from 10 people. Draw the Form 7 flow (filing → notice → hearing → speaking order) marking where bulk filing strains it. 5. Conclusion — code the law into the platform — Hard-coded caps, notified rules and audits of bulk filers.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As an Electoral Registration Officer, you find one person has filed over 400 Form 7 objections in a day, mostly against one community. What do you do? Approach: I would treat each objection as a claim to be proved, not a deletion to be processed, and hear every affected voter before any order. Where the pattern suggests false declarations, I would report it to the District Election Officer for legal action and ask the Chief Electoral Officer to enforce the cap.

2. Economy

India's weakest factor of production is not land or labour but risk capital for new technology, and the State has promised to supply it. Today's story shows that a promise of ₹1 lakh crore is worth only what the delivery pipe can carry. The RDI Fund has stalled not for want of an allocation but for want of a release, fund managers and a tax ruling.

2.1 ₹1 Lakh Crore RDI Fund Stalls as TDB Stops Applications, Awaiting DST's Money

ISSUE THREAD RDI Fund and private R&D (new thread) **LENS** Market and State · Independence and accountability

STORY SO FAR In November 2025 the Centre created a ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund to give private deep-tech firms long-term, low-cost loans over six years.

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Technology Development Board (TDB), a statutory body under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), posted a notice on September 29 that funding invitations will close after this month "due to administrative reasons", The Indian Express reports. Sources say the TDB, the only agency now selecting beneficiaries for the ₹1 lakh crore RDI Fund, has not received money for fresh offers, though the DST, the fund's custodian, has been allocated ₹23,000 crore. The TDB's ₹2,000 crore ran out in April, when 22 firms were offered soft loans of ₹2,192 crore; 13 more selected in August have no letters of intent. Selection is meant to run through "Second Level Fund Managers" (SLFMs), intermediaries that pick and finance firms, but the 30-40 private SLFMs expected have not been appointed. The syllabus link is GS3 on mobilisation of resources and indigenisation of technology.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Private firms shun risky, slow research → the RDI Fund is created in November 2025 → only TDB lends, exhausting ₹2,000 crore in April → private SLFMs are not appointed and BIRAC awaits a tax ruling → with no fresh DST release, the only pipe closes

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	The RDI scheme lends through two tiers, with ANRF at the top — A special-purpose fund within the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) is the first tier; it passes money to Second Level Fund Managers, which lend to or invest in firms in sunrise sectors such as quantum, space and AI. ANRF was set up under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023, which repealed the Science and Engineering Research Board Act, 2008. TDB is a statutory lender to industry; BIRAC is a company — The Technology Development Board was constituted under the Technology Development Board Act, 1995, to give loans and equity support to firms commercialising indigenous technology. The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) is a not-for-profit company under the Department of Biotechnology, so dividends from loans converted into equity raise tax questions for it that a statutory board does not face.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	Private R&D is where India's innovation gap sits — GS3 lists "Indigenization of technology and developing new technology". India spends well under 1% of GDP on research, with business funding only about two-fifths, so innovation answers now need the RDI Fund.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The Anusandhan National Research Foundation was established by the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023; the Prime Minister is the ex-officio president of its governing board. - The Technology Development Board is a statutory body under the Department of Science and Technology, set up under the Technology Development Board Act, 1995. - Soft loans under the RDI Fund cover up to 50% of project cost; the firm raises the rest from non-government sources.
ANALYSIS	Private firms under-invest in research for three reasons the market cannot fix alone

	— Research is risky: most projects fail, which banks cannot price. It is slow: deep-tech revenue can take longer than venture funds wait. And its gains leak: rivals and the wider economy benefit without paying, so the inventor captures only part of the value. This market failure from risk, gestation and spillovers is why patient public capital is justified. 2. Lens — Market and State: the State chose the right instrument but built it without a delivery pipe — Letting private fund managers pick firms is sound, since officials judge start-ups poorly. But the design depended on private SLFMs, a tax ruling and timely DST releases, and none arrived. When the State relies on the market to allocate, it must still do its own part fast. A thoughtful officer would write release schedules and SLFM deadlines into the scheme, so one late file cannot stop the fund. 3. The conflict-of-interest row makes speed and integrity look like enemies; they are not — The Indian Express reported on August 10 that 15 of the first 22 recipients had investment ties to seven selection-committee members, who said they recused themselves. The answer is not slower selection but published recusals, scores and reasons.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“India’s problem in research funding is less the size of the corpus than the machinery of delivery.” Critically examine with reference to the Research, Development and Innovation Fund. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh design against delivery and judge which matters more. 2. Introduction — ₹1 lakh crore promised, ₹2,192 crore out in a year — TDB closes applications for want of DST funds. 3. Risk, gestation and spillovers justify patient public capital — Explain the market failure in plain terms. 4. The corpus is adequate; the pipe is blocked — Delayed SLFMs, BIRAC’s tax query, unreleased money; value addition — 35 selected from 300-plus applicants. 5. Integrity must travel with speed — Disclose recusals and scores. Diagram: DST → ANRF fund → SLFMs → firms, blockages marked. 6. Conclusion — tie release to milestones, not files — Time-bound SLFMs, a tax ruling, public reporting.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Secretary, DST, the only fund manager has stopped taking applications. What do you do this month? Approach: I would release a tranche to TDB at once so the 13 second-round firms get letters of intent. I would fix a date for notifying the private SLFMs recommended in May, and take BIRAC’s tax query to the Finance Ministry for a quick ruling. A monthly public dashboard would expose delays early.

3. Agriculture & Food

In an El Niño year the Centre has set a foodgrain target below last year's harvest while insisting there is no crisis. Both can be true at the national level and false in a single drought-hit taluka. The gap between an all-India number and a village well is where food policy is actually tested.

3.1 Centre Sets 2026-27 Foodgrain Target at 373.93 Million Tonnes, Below Last Year's Harvest

ISSUE THREAD Drought and the rabi season (update 4) **LENS** Short-term relief and long-term reform · Growth and equity

STORY SO FAR With a deficient monsoon and strengthening El Niño, the Centre advanced rabi planning with the States, while Maharashtra promised a drought declaration that NDRF rules delay until October 5.

THE NEWS New Delhi. Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Tuesday, September 29, after a two-day national conference on Rabi crops, that the country's rainfall deficit is around 12% but unlikely to hurt crop production, ruling out any "major crisis" nationally due to El Niño, The Hindu reports. El Niño is the periodic warming of the eastern Pacific that tends to weaken India's monsoon. The Centre has set a foodgrain target of 373.93 million tonnes (mt) for 2026-27, 2.63 mt below the actual 376.56 mt of 2025-26, including 177.72 mt for Rabi. He said the target rests on a scientific assessment of El Niño and that the Kharif harvest will beat last year's; last year's target was 362 mt. The Centre will also talk to States about explaining the benefits of free trade agreements to farmers. The syllabus link is GS3 on cropping patterns and food security.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

El Niño strengthens through the summer → monsoon ends about 12% short, far worse in Marathwada → Centre advances rabi planning with States → national conference fixes a 2026-27 target just below last year's record → villages turn to tankers even as the national number stays reassuring

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. El Niño, La Niña and the Indian Ocean Dipole move India's rain — El Niño, an unusual warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, shifts rising air away from India and usually weakens the monsoon; La Niña, the cooling phase, usually strengthens it. Together they form ENSO, the El Niño–Southern Oscillation. A positive Indian Ocean Dipole, with a warmer western Indian Ocean, can offset part of El Niño's drying effect. 2. The National Food Security Act, 2013 is the floor under the harvest — The Act entitles up to 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population to subsidised foodgrain: 5 kg per person per month for priority households and 35 kg per family for Antyodaya households. The Food Corporation of India procures and stores grain for this and a strategic reserve, so a shortfall is absorbed first by central stocks, not ration cards.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Monsoon failure is a recurring GS3 frame — GS3 lists "issues of buffer stocks and food security" and disaster management. An El Niño year joins them, and answers must connect climate signals to procurement, stocks and relief.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation, marked by above-normal sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. - Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, Antyodaya Anna Yojana households are entitled to 35 kg of foodgrain per family per month. - Drought is declared by State governments, following the Centre's Manual for Drought Management.
ANALYSIS	1. A lower target is honest planning, not an admission of crisis — Targets usually rise year on year, so setting one below last year's harvest signals that the Centre expects rabi, which depends on soil moisture and reservoirs, to be hit. A realistic number lets procurement, imports and stock releases be planned early, not in panic. The counter-view is that 373.93 mt is still well above last year's target of 362 mt, so the national

	food supply is not at risk. 2. Lens — Short-term relief and long-term reform: tankers are relief, piped water was the reform — In Marathwada, 74 of 76 talukas are drought-affected and 277 tankers serve 160 villages, only three of them government-owned, while farmers pay up to ₹1,500 a tanker, The Indian Express reports. Only about half of the Jal Jeevan Mission work in the region is complete. Tankers buy weeks; finished pipelines and recharged aquifers buy years. A sound officer spends on relief but measures drought readiness by the reform work. 3. National adequacy hides regional distress — India can meet its grain needs from central stocks even if Latur, with 48% less rain, loses its crop. But the farmer there loses income, not food, so the response must be insurance claims, input support and MGNREGA work. Aggregate targets answer the food question, not the livelihood question.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine how El Niño threatens India's food security and farm incomes differently, and the role of buffer stocks in managing the risk. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Probe both threats and what stocks can do. 2. Introduction — the monsoon is 12% short, yet the target stays near a record — About 20 words on El Niño and the 373.93 mt target. 3. Supply is cushioned because central stocks and NFSA absorb a shortfall — Value addition — the 2025-26 harvest of 376.56 mt beat its 362 mt target. 4. Incomes are not cushioned, as Marathwada shows — Tanker dependence and half-finished Jal Jeevan work. Diagram: El Niño → weak monsoon → two arrows, food supply (stocks) and income (insurance, MGNREGA). 5. Conclusion — stocks guard the plate; insurance and water guard the farmer — About 15 words.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Collector of a drought-hit Marathwada district, how would you manage tanker supply fairly? Approach: I would allot tankers by source failure and population and publish the list, so supply does not follow influence. GPS on private tankers and trip logs signed by the sarpanch would stop billing for trips not made. I would requisition idle wells for public use and fast-track pending Jal Jeevan works, and ensure farmers file crop insurance claims in time.

4. International Relations

Two great-power moves shape India's room today: a US-China relationship that competes but talks, and an American exit from Iraq in the middle of a war with Iran. In both, India is a bystander with large stakes. The right response is not to pick a side but to widen the number of sides India can call on.

4.1 Jaishankar Says US and China Are in “Competitive Mode”, Urges De-Risking and Diversification

ISSUE THREAD Xi-Trump summit and India (update 5) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · National interest and global commons

STORY SO FAR Xi Jinping's Washington visit extended the US-China trade truce to January 10, 2027; commentators warned a managed rivalry could leave India a rule-taker.

THE NEWS New York. In his first remarks on last week's Trump-Xi meeting, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told the Asia Society Policy Institute on Monday, September 28, that the US and China have “points of convergence” but are “overall... in a competitive mode”, The Indian Express reports. With “limits to what the two of them can agree upon”, other countries ask: “How do we de-risk? How do we diversify? Which are the new partners?” De-risking means reducing dependence on any one supplier or partner without cutting ties. New today is the official line that India and the US have “more or less an understanding on the trade agreement”, after early hopes met a “much more complex” reality. If India's concern over terrorism from Pakistan is “not fully appreciated” by a partner, he warned, it affects the relationship. The syllabus link is GS2 on the effect of other countries' policies on India.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Trump's tariffs unsettle US partners → Xi visits Washington and the trade truce is extended → both recall being allies of 1945 → Jaishankar reads competition with limited convergence → India speaks of de-risking and a near-agreed US trade understanding

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Strategic autonomy is about keeping choices, not staying equidistant — Strategic autonomy means India judges its interests case by case and avoids alliances that would commit it to another power's wars. In practice it works as multi-alignment: India joins overlapping groups such as the Quad, BRICS and the SCO, each for a different purpose. The Quad of India, the US, Japan and Australia began in 2007, was revived in 2017 and has held leaders' summits since 2021. 2. The UN Charter still names the defeated powers of 1945 as “enemy states” — Articles 53, 77 and 107 of the UN Charter refer to Second World War enemies of the signatories, chiefly Japan and Germany. Though obsolete, they remain because amending the Charter under Article 108 needs a two-thirds General Assembly vote and ratification by two-thirds of members, including all five permanent members.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Great-power rivalry and India's choices is a standing GS2 theme — GS2 asks about “effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests”. A G2-style understanding is such an effect; answers must weigh hedging against alignment.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprises India, the United States, Japan and Australia; it was revived in 2017 after a first meeting in 2007. - Articles 53, 77 and 107 of the UN Charter contain the “enemy state” clauses relating to the Second World War. - The People's Republic of China was proclaimed in 1949; the Republic of China, now in Taiwan, was the wartime ally of the United States.
ANALYSIS	1. “Competitive mode” is good news for India, within limits — If the US and China were true partners, Asia would have to accept whatever order they agreed. Because they remain rivals, both need other countries, which gives India bargaining room. That

	room shrinks whenever the two agree over India's head, and India must plan for both at once. 2. Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: de-risking is autonomy made practical — India cannot lean on China while the border dispute is live, nor fully on a US that downplays India's concern over Pakistan-backed terrorism. De-risking spreads supply chains, markets and defence ties so no single capital can coerce India. The sensible judgement is to close the near-agreed US trade deal alongside deals with Europe, the Gulf and East Asia, not instead of them. 3. History is being used as a weapon, and India is absent from the story — C. Raja Mohan argues in The Indian Express that by calling the US and China victorious allies of 1945, Beijing presses Japan and weakens the "San Francisco System" of US alliances built on the 1951 peace settlement with Japan. China also opposes deleting the Charter's "enemy state" clauses. He notes that 2.3 million Indians served under arms, yet a divided freedom movement left India without a shared account of the war, weakening its claim to the top table.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The rest of us are coming to terms with a very different America." In this context, evaluate de-risking and diversification as India's response to US-China rivalry. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Evaluate — Judge how far de-risking protects India. 2. Introduction — Jaishankar reads the Trump-Xi meeting as competition with limited convergence — Define de-risking in one line. 3. De-risking works because rivalry keeps both powers in need of partners — Near-agreed US trade understanding; the Quad; spread supply chains. 4. It has limits when the two converge over India's head — Trade truces; the terrorism concern unmet. Value addition — Raja Mohan on the 'San Francisco System'. 5. India must also claim its history and institutions — 2.3 million Indians served in the Second World War. Diagram: India at the centre, arrows to the US, EU, Gulf, Japan, ASEAN. 6. Conclusion — diversify partners, close the US deal, keep choices open — Autonomy is the number of options retained.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. An interview board asks: if the US and China reach a broad understanding, is India's strategic autonomy finished? Approach: No. Autonomy was never about being courted by both; it is about keeping choices. A US-China understanding would narrow India's leverage, so India should deepen ties with Europe, Japan, the Gulf and ASEAN and build domestic capability. The two will still compete in Asia and need India there.

4.2 US Troops Leave Iraq's Last Bases After Two Decades as Iran-Aligned Groups Claim Victory

ISSUE THREAD West Asia war: Iran, Saudi, Houthis (update 6) **LENS** National interest and global commons · Short-term relief and long-term reform

STORY SO FAR The war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February has widened to Saudi Arabia and Yemen; the US has blockaded Iran, and Trump told the UNGA he must choose between a deal and "annihilation".

THE NEWS Baghdad. US forces are set to leave their last bases in Iraq by Wednesday, September 30, The Indian Express reports, citing Reuters. About 4,500 Americans died in more than two decades of war there. The withdrawal was agreed in 2024 under President Joe Biden and is being carried out by President Donald Trump's administration even as it wages war

on Iran. Iraqi analyst Jasim al-Bahadili said Iran gains because the coalition acted as a “counterweight” to its influence, and Iraqi experts warn Islamic State could stage a comeback. A commander of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella of Iran-backed armed groups, called it “a historic victory”. Separately, Mr. Trump denied reports that he offered Iran sanctions relief, while President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran is ready for talks but not “bullying or coercion”. Iran’s rial fell past 2.5 million to the dollar. The syllabus link is GS2 on West Asia and India’s interests.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The US invades Iraq in 2003 and stays through insurgency → it returns in 2014 to fight Islamic State → Baghdad and Washington agree in 2024 on a drawdown → the US goes to war with Iran in February while the drawdown proceeds → the last bases close, leaving Iran-aligned groups stronger

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The US presence in Iraq rested on invasion, then on invitation — The US-led coalition invaded Iraq in 2003 and toppled Saddam Hussein. The 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement set the long-term relationship, and US combat troops left in 2011. They returned in 2014 at Baghdad’s request under Operation Inherent Resolve, the coalition campaign against Islamic State. 2. The Strait of Hormuz is the world’s chief oil chokepoint — The Strait of Hormuz links the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, with Iran on its northern shore and Oman’s Musandam peninsula to the south. The Hindu notes that about a fifth of the world’s oil and gas moved through it before the war. Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, among India’s leading crude suppliers, depend heavily on it.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. West Asian instability reaches India through oil and diaspora — GS2 covers the “effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests” and the diaspora; this exit joins energy security and the safety of Indian workers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman. • Operation Inherent Resolve is the US-led coalition campaign against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, begun in 2014. • The US–Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement of 2008 governs the long-term political, economic and security relationship between the two countries.
ANALYSIS	1. The exit hands Iran a strategic gain even as Iran loses the war’s economic battle — With US troops gone, Iran-backed groups gain freedom inside Iraq, and Iran gains depth on its western border. Yet The Indian Express editorial notes that Gulf crude shipments are back to just under 80% of prewar flows, Saudi Arabia has repaired its East-West pipeline, and Iran cannot export past the US counterblockade. Iran is winning ground and losing money, which explains why Tehran is now keener to talk. 2. Lens — National interest and global commons: Hormuz is a shared lifeline, not Iran’s bargaining chip — Iran’s seven-point proposal, reported by The Hindu, offers to reopen the Strait of Hormuz in seven days in return for the US lifting its naval blockade, granting sanctions waivers and releasing frozen funds; Mr. Trump says he rejected it. Each side treats a global shipping lane as leverage. India’s interest lies in treating Hormuz as a commons whose free passage all should guarantee, and in pressing that case with Gulf partners and at the UN. 3. A power vacuum can revive Islamic State — Islamic State grew in 2014 in the space left by a weak Iraqi state and sectarian militias, and a region distracted by war offers similar space now. For India, a revived Islamic State means risk to workers in the region and a propaganda boost for online radicalisation at home.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Discuss the implications of the US withdrawal from Iraq for India’s energy security. (10 marks, 150 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Discuss — Set out the main implications in a balanced way, with one clear line of argument. 2. Introduction — US forces leave Iraq's last bases on September 30 amid the Iran war — About 20 words. 3. Iran-aligned groups gain, raising risk around a key supplier — Iraq is among India's leading crude suppliers. 4. Hormuz, not Iraq, is the real exposure — Value addition — flows at just under 80% of prewar in September; Iran's seven-point Hormuz offer. Diagram: map of the Gulf with Hormuz, Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline to the Red Sea and India's sea route. 5. Conclusion — diversify suppliers, build strategic reserves, back free passage — About 15 words.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Secretary, Petroleum, what would you prepare for if Iraq becomes unstable after the US exit? Approach: I would line up fallback cargoes from the Americas and West Africa, check that strategic petroleum reserves are full and that refiners can process alternative grades, and coordinate evacuation plans for Indian workers in Iraq with the External Affairs Ministry. The aim is that a shock raises our costs but does not stop our supply.

5. Environment & Ecology

All three stories are about the cost of treating fragile landscapes as empty space. The Centre wants the courts to stop asking whether the Nicobarese and Shompen consented to a mega-project; Uttarakhand is finally watching a glacial lake instead of only mapping it; and science now says a grassland ploughed up for a solar park or a plantation will not come back within a lifetime. In each case the cheapest safeguard is the one exercised before the damage, and the State keeps finding it inconvenient.

5.1 Centre asks Supreme Court to halt Calcutta HC hearings on Great Nicobar, disputing petitioner's standing

ISSUE THREAD Great Nicobar project and tribal rights (new thread) **LENS** Development and environment · Liberty and order

STORY SO FAR The Great Nicobar port-airport-township project, on forest land of the Shompen and Nicobarese, is challenged in the Calcutta High Court over Forest Rights Act consent.

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Union government has filed a special leave petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court seeking a stay on proceedings in the Calcutta High Court, where petitions allege that the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was violated in obtaining consent for the ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project, The Hindu reports. The Centre says the petitioner, retired IAS officer Meena Gupta, has no locus standi — the legal right to bring a case — and calls the petitions an “abuse of process”. On May 6 a Bench of then Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Partha Sarathi Sen rejected that objection, holding she had “sufficient interest”. The petitions challenge gram sabha consent resolutions, reduced buffer zones for Campbell Bay and Galathea Bay National Parks, and a certificate that all FRA rights were settled. The SLP, filed July 24, is tentatively listed for October 5.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Strategic port-airport plan for Great Nicobar → forest diversion needs FRA rights settled and gram sabha consent → a former Tribal Affairs Secretary challenges consent and buffer cuts → High Court upholds her standing → Centre seeks a Supreme Court stay

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Forest Rights Act makes rights come before diversion — The Forest Rights Act, 2006 vests individual and community rights over forest land, and makes the gram sabha the authority that initiates their determination; claims then pass to sub-divisional and district level committees. Section 4(5) bars eviction of any forest dweller until recognition and verification of rights is complete. 2. Niyamgiri settled that gram sabhas decide on cultural and religious rights — In Orissa Mining Corporation v MoEF (2013), the Supreme Court held that whether bauxite mining in Niyamgiri would affect the religious and cultural rights of the Dongria Kondh, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, was for the gram sabhas to decide. Separately, S.P. Gupta v Union of India (1981) relaxed locus standi, letting public-spirited persons litigate for those unable to reach courts.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Tribal-area projects join GS3 and GS2 — The GS3 syllabus lists “Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment”, and GS2 covers “mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections”. Great Nicobar tests both in one answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- FRA 2006, Section 4(5): no forest dweller may be evicted until recognition and verification of rights is complete. - The Shompen of Great Nicobar are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group; the Nicobarese are a Scheduled Tribe of the same island. - Article 136 lets the Supreme Court grant special leave to appeal from any court or tribunal except military tribunals.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Development and environment: consent is a strategic project's cheapest

	insurance — The Centre frames the case as growth against “claims of private individuals”, but the petition asks whether the law’s procedure was followed, not whether the port should exist. The Shompen, with almost no outside contact, are exactly whom the consent rule protects. A thoughtful officer would conclude that a transparent gram sabha process is faster than years of litigation, and that strategic value is a reason to do consent properly, not to skip it. 2. Attacking standing rather than the merits signals a weak record — Standing objections work against busybodies, but the petitioner was Secretary in both the Environment and Tribal Affairs Ministries and helped draft the FRA. By seeking to stop a final hearing it had agreed to hold on November 25 and 26, the Centre invites the inference that it prefers no scrutiny to an adverse verdict. The counter-view: serial litigation can stall national projects. 3. Niyamgiri’s return shows gram sabha verdicts are never quite final — Activists in Odisha now warn of a push to reopen Niyamgiri after Vedanta’s chairman said so, nearly 13 years after 12 Dongria Kondh gram sabhas said no. A refusal is re-asked again and again, while a consent once given is treated as permanent. That asymmetry is why the quality of the first consultation decides whether the FRA protects anyone.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Gram sabha consent is a mere procedural hurdle for projects of national importance.” Critically examine with reference to the Great Nicobar project. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh both sides and reach a judgement. 2. Introduction — a strategic project meets a statutory right — The ₹92,000-crore project and the Centre’s SLP. 3. Body — the strategic case is genuine and time-bound — Delay has costs; serial PILs can be misused. 4. Body — consent is substance, not paperwork, for isolated groups — Value addition: Orissa Mining Corporation (2013) and Section 4(5). 5. Body — procedural shortcuts cost more time than they save — Flowchart: claims → gram sabha → sub-divisional → district committee → diversion. 6. Conclusion — redo consent openly and let the court decide on merits — A recorded consultation makes the project durable.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Deputy Commissioner, Nicobar, you are asked to certify that all forest rights are settled. What do you do? Approach: I would certify only what the record supports. For the Shompen I would bring anthropologists and interpreters so consultation is real. If the record is incomplete, I would say so in writing with a timeline to finish. A false certificate exposes the project to reversal and me to liability.

5.2 Uttarakhand installs its first glacial-lake early-warning system as Gandak breaches Bihar embankment

ISSUE THREAD Himalayan floods and glacier risk (update 4) **LENS** Development and environment · Short-term relief and long-term reform

STORY SO FAR Nepal’s August floods damaged at least 13 hydropower projects; an expert argued the Rasuwa disaster was a rock-ice avalanche, not a glacial lake outburst, and needs seismic warning networks.

THE NEWS Dehradun. Uttarakhand began installing its first early-warning system for a glacial lake at Vasundhara Tal in Chamoli district on Tuesday, September 29, The Indian Express reports. A team from the Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee, and the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, supported by the SDRF, NDRF and ITBP, will work until October 15. Sensors will track water level, weather, snow depth and ground movement, on solar power. The National

Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has identified 13 high-risk glacial lakes in the State, five in Category A, the highest-risk; the National Remote Sensing Centre counted 344 glacial lakes in 2023. The step follows the August flood in Nepal, which the US Geological Survey traced to a glacial collapse and debris flow. Separately, a flash flood from Nepal's Gandak catchment breached embankments at three sites in West Champaran and Kushinagar, setting a record flood level of 91.25 metres at Bagaha.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Warming swells moraine-dammed lakes → NDMA flags 13 high-risk lakes → Nepal's August disaster shows how fast a collapse kills → Uttarakhand wires Vasundhara Tal → the unsolved step is sensor-to-siren

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. A glacial lake outburst flood is a dam failure with no engineer — As a glacier retreats, meltwater collects behind loose rock and debris (moraine) it left behind. An avalanche, landslide, earthquake or extreme rain can overtop or breach this natural dam, releasing a wall of water and debris downstream within minutes; this is a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF). The NDMA issued national guidelines on the management of GLOFs, stressing mapping, monitoring and early warning. 2. The Disaster Management Act, 2005 sets a three-tier structure — The Act creates the NDMA chaired by the Prime Minister, State authorities chaired by Chief Ministers, and district authorities chaired by the Collector or District Magistrate, and constitutes the NDRF as a specialist response force. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, which India has adopted, sets a global target to increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early-warning systems.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Early warning is where disaster questions are heading — GS3 lists “Disaster and disaster management” and GS1 “Important Geophysical phenomena”. Questions increasingly ask not what a GLOF is but why warnings fail to reach people, which this card answers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The National Disaster Management Authority is chaired by the Prime Minister under the Disaster Management Act, 2005; a District Disaster Management Authority is chaired by the Collector or District Magistrate. - Target G of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 concerns multi-hazard early-warning systems and disaster-risk information. - The Gandak rises in Nepal, where it is known as the Narayani, and joins the Ganga near Patna; the Valmikinagar barrage on it was built under an India–Nepal agreement.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Short-term relief and long-term reform: one sensor is a pilot, not a system — Relief is visible and quick; monitoring a remote lake for years is invisible, so it is usually skipped. Uttarakhand has surveyed six lakes and wired one, against five in NDMA's top category. A thoughtful officer would treat Vasundhara Tal as a template to be costed and replicated across all Category A lakes within a fixed period, funded from mitigation rather than relief budgets. 2. The weak link is the last mile, not the sensor — A GLOF can reach a valley village in under an hour, so data is useful only if it triggers a siren, a phone alert and a practised evacuation. That needs clear thresholds, someone empowered to sound the alarm at night, and villagers who trust it. Sensors without drills are a smoke detector with no battery. 3. Floods now arrive from upstream countries, so warning must be shared — The Gandak surge came from short, heavy rain in Nepal and hit Bihar within hours, much as the Nepal glacial collapse did. Gauge readings at Devghat in Nepal already exist; what is thin is real-time exchange across the border. The new flood level at Bagaha shows design standards must be revised upward.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Explain why early-warning systems for glacial lake outburst floods often fail to protect Himalayan communities. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Explain — Give the causes of failure clearly, with one example. 2. Introduction — a GLOF leaves minutes, not hours — Define GLOF in one line; cite 13 high-risk lakes in Uttarakhand. 3. Body — coverage is thin: one lake wired out of five in the top category — Value addition: NDMA's 13-lake list and NRSC's count of 344 lakes. 4. Body — the chain from sensor to siren breaks at the last mile — Draw a flowchart: sensor → control room → threshold → siren and SMS → evacuation drill. 5. Conclusion — scale sensors and drill villages together — Fund under mitigation and share data with Nepal.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As DM of Chamoli, how would you make the Vasundhara Tal warning actually save lives? Approach: With USDMA and the scientists I would fix water-level thresholds that trigger an alert without further approval, sent automatically to sirens and phones downstream. The pradhan and a volunteer in each village would be trained to lead evacuation to marked high ground, with drills before winter and after snowmelt. The test is whether a village moves in fifteen minutes, not whether the sensor works.

5.3 Destroyed old grasslands take over a century to recover, PNAS study finds; ecologist seeks restoration programme

ISSUE THREAD Grasslands and the 'wasteland' tag (new thread) **LENS** Development and environment · Short-term relief and long-term reform

STORY SO FAR India's grasslands, home to the Great Indian Bustard and pastoralists, are routinely classed as "wasteland"; on 23 September a grassland atlas was proposed under the rhino plan.

THE NEWS A new global study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) finds that grasslands which grew for millennia almost never regenerate the same way once destroyed, at least for a century, The Hindu reports. Researchers, including one at IISER Pune, compared 742 plant species from Indian, Australian and Brazilian savannas and the US prairies. "Secondary" grasslands that regrow have taller, less resource-conserving plants, fewer species and non-native weedy annuals, because soil nutrients and pH have changed. Grasslands store about one-third of Earth's land carbon yet are often called "wastelands". Ornithologist Asad Rahmani says restoration still works partly: in Solapur it brought back the bustard, in Kutch the lesser florican, and in Assam's Orang grasslands the pygmy hog. He seeks a National Grassland Restoration Programme and a National Grazing Policy, noting India holds 15% of the world's livestock on 4% of its surface area.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Land records treat open grassland as unproductive → the 'wasteland' tag steers solar parks, mines and plantations onto it → bustards and herders lose habitat → PNAS shows old grassland does not return for a century → calls for a restoration programme

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. 'Wasteland' is an administrative label —** The Wastelands Atlas of India, prepared by the Department of Land Resources with the National Remote Sensing Centre, maps categories that include degraded pastures and scrub. Open grassland and savanna thus often appear as land to be 'developed'. India pledged under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 towards land degradation neutrality.
- 2. Grassland birds are in the courts —** The Great Indian Bustard is listed as Critically

	Endangered by the IUCN and in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. In <i>M.K. Ranjitsinh v Union of India</i> the Supreme Court first ordered overhead power lines in bustard habitat in Rajasthan and Gujarat to go underground (2021), then in 2024 modified that order and recognised a right against the adverse effects of climate change under Articles 14 and 21.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Ecosystem questions are moving beyond forests — GS3 covers “Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation”, and GS1 “distribution of key natural resources”. The United Nations has declared 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, making grasslands an obvious theme this year.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Great Indian Bustard is Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and listed in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. ● Under the UNCCD, India has committed to restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. ● The Wastelands Atlas of India is prepared by the Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development, with the National Remote Sensing Centre. ● The pygmy hog, a grassland species, has been reintroduced in Orang National Park in Assam.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Development and environment: a grassland is not empty land waiting for a project — Solar parks and plantations go to grasslands because the land is flat, cheap and officially ‘waste’. The PNAS finding changes the arithmetic: the loss is permanent on any policy timescale. A thoughtful officer would place renewable energy on genuinely degraded land, rooftops and canal tops first, and require a grassland impact screen before allotting open land. 2. Tree-planting can harm a grassland as much as a mine — Afforestation targets reward planting trees, and grasslands are the easiest place to plant them. But trees shade out grasses and shelter predators of ground-nesting birds, and counting carbon only in trees ignores grassland soils. The counter-view: some grasslands are degraded forest, so classification must be site-specific. 3. Restoration is partial, so protection must come first — Rahmani’s examples show wildlife can return to restored grassland, but the study shows the original plant community does not. The long-term choice is to protect remaining old grasslands through a clear legal category and a grazing policy that treats pastoralists as managers rather than encroachers.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	To what extent does classifying grasslands as “wastelands” undermine India’s conservation and climate goals? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — To what extent — Show where the label does damage, where it does not, and give a measured verdict. 2. Introduction — a third of land carbon, officially waste — Cite the PNAS study: destroyed old grasslands do not recover for a century. 3. Body — the label steers solar, mining and plantations onto grasslands — Value addition: <i>M.K. Ranjitsinh</i> (2021, 2024) on bustard habitat and power lines. 4. Body — it conflicts with UNCCD and climate goals — Lost soil carbon versus the 26 million hectare pledge. 5. Body — the label is partly right where land is genuinely degraded — Draw a map of the Thar, Kutch, Deccan and Terai grasslands with bustard and florican ranges.

	6. Conclusion — a legal grassland category and a National Grazing Policy — Protect old grasslands first, restore second.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Collector, you must find 'wasteland' for a solar park, but most listed land is grassland used by herders. What do you do? Approach: I would check each parcel against bird records and grazing use recorded with the gram panchayat. Genuinely barren parcels go first; grassland with birds or community grazing is flagged to government with alternatives. Herders' rights are recorded before any allotment. Otherwise the park ends up in court.

6. Society

Both stories are about who gets to shape a community's common story and its common choices. A textbook decides which past a fourteen-year-old inherits; an "unopposed" panchayat decides whether a village ever hears a dissenting voice. In both, the form looks settled and harmonious, and the real question is whose voice was left out of the process.

6.1 NCERT's new Class 9 book replaces European revolutions with medieval Indian 'resistance'

ISSUE THREAD History in school textbooks (new thread) **LENS** Tradition and social justice · Independence and accountability

STORY SO FAR Under NEP 2020 and the school curriculum framework of 2023, NCERT is rewriting its textbooks class by class; Part 1 of the new Class 9 social science book came out in June.

THE NEWS New Delhi. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) on Tuesday, September 29, released Understanding Society: India and Beyond – Part Two, the new Class 9 social science textbook. It drops the old chapters on the French and Russian revolutions and presents 1000–1700 CE as a period of "Resistance and Resilience" against invasions it says were driven by "territorial expansion and religious motives". It covers Mewar, the Ahom victory at Saraighat, Vijayanagara, Maratha Swarajya, the Jat uprising of 1669 and the execution of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur, saying Mughal brutality against the Gurus has "few comparisons in history". Kachwaha–Mughal cooperation gets a brief mention. The Indian Express notes that composite culture, central to Indian historiography for over 50 years, recedes. NCERT chief Dinesh Saklani's foreword promises "critical inquiry". The link is GS2 education policy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

NEP 2020 calls for a new curriculum → NCF-SE 2023 sets the framework → NCERT rewrites books class by class → Class 9 Part 2 swaps European revolutions for medieval Indian resistance → debate on which past students inherit, and who decides

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. NCERT is an advisory society, not a statutory regulator — NCERT was set up by the Government of India in 1961 as a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. It advises the Centre and States on school education and publishes model textbooks used widely in CBSE schools. States have their own SCERTs and may adopt, adapt or write their own books. 2. Education is a shared subject with a constitutional goal — The 42nd Amendment, 1976, moved education to the Concurrent List (Entry 25, List III): the Centre frames policy such as NEP 2020 and the curriculum framework NCF-SE 2023, while States run most schools. Article 51A(h) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Curriculum content is now a governance question, not just a pedagogy one — GS2 covers "Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources". Textbook revision tests federalism and autonomy together.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- NCERT was established in 1961 as a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860; it is not a statutory body. - Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976. - The Battle of Saraighat (1671) was won by the Ahom commander Lachit Borphukan against a Mughal fleet on the Brahmaputra.
ANALYSIS	1. Both sides of the debate are making a real argument about balance — Supporters say the old syllabus gave Europe more pages than India's regions, leaving the Ahoms barely known. Critics reply that the French and Russian revolutions taught the liberty and equality our Constitution draws on, and that reading seven centuries mainly as

	“resistance” leaves little room for exchange and synthesis. The disagreement is what limited pages should train a citizen to see. 2. Lens — Independence and accountability: who decides what is taught matters as much as what is taught — NCERT has no statutory insulation, so its choices read as the government's. On September 27 the Higher Education Department, citing the PMO, asked central universities for “comments” and enrolment details on courses using Ambedkar, Phule and Sharmila Rege, after an anonymous post called them “poison”. A thoughtful officer would conclude that legitimacy comes from process: named expert committees, published reasons for each change and open review. 3. The test of the book is method, not only topics — Article 51A(h) asks for a spirit of inquiry. The book separates belief from evidence when it says Shivaji is “traditionally believed” to have received a sword from goddess Tulja Bhavani. The real test is whether students compare sources and learn to weigh evidence, or only receive a verdict.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“A history textbook teaches citizenship as much as the past.” In the light of NCERT’s revised Class 9 textbook, critically examine how school curricula should be decided. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh both sides, then judge the process. 2. Introduction — textbooks shape how young citizens see the nation — The September 29 release: revolutions out, medieval resistance in. 3. Body — the case for revision rests on a real Eurocentric gap — Regional histories like the Ahoms were thin. 4. Body — the case against rests on lost ideas and a single frame — Liberty and equality recede; draw NEP 2020 → NCF-SE → NCERT → SCERTs showing where review sits. 5. Body — legitimacy depends on open process and States’ role — Value addition: Article 51A(h) and the 42nd Amendment. 6. Conclusion — a book that teaches students to weigh evidence serves every view — Open review, multiple sources, State freedom.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Director of a State SCERT, you must decide whether your State adopts the new NCERT Class 9 book. What do you do? Approach: Education is concurrent, so the State may adopt, adapt or write its own book. I would place it before an expert committee of historians and teachers and record reasons for every choice. Where content is contested, I would add supplementary readings with sources and multiple views rather than accept or reject wholesale. Publishing the report protects the decision and the teachers.

6.2 Some Maharashtra villages have not voted in panchayat polls for 60–70 years

ISSUE THREAD Panchayati Raj and local democracy (new thread) **LENS** Independence and accountability · Growth and equity

STORY SO FAR The 73rd Amendment, 1992, mandated regular panchayat elections and reservation for women, SCs and STs; many villages still fill seats “unopposed”.

THE NEWS Pune. In parts of rural Maharashtra, gram panchayat members have been chosen “unopposed” for as long as 70 years, bypassing the ballot. In Angar, Solapur district, no panchayat election has been held in 60 years; when it became a nagar panchayat last year, Prajakta Patil, daughter-in-law of former MLA Rajan Patil, was elected its first president unopposed, amid opponents’ allegations of threats, which the family denies. Perid in Kolhapur, population about 3,000, has not had a contested poll since 1956. Model villages Ralegan Siddhi and Hiware Bazar also favour unanimity, though opposition panels contested in 2021. Analyst Ashok Chousalkar says that in most villages “the dominant political family”

decides. Former sarpanch Alka Kamble says reserved seats for Dalit and OBC women go to candidates “who will not raise their voices”. “Unopposed” means declared elected because no rival filed or all withdrew. The link is GS2 local government.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Elites fear contests split families and waste money → seats are settled before nomination day → one candidate per seat, so no poll → the practice hardens into “tradition” → reserved seats go to compliant nominees

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Part IX makes panchayat elections a constitutional duty — The 73rd Amendment, 1992, added Part IX (Articles 243 to 243-O) and the Eleventh Schedule. Article 243A recognises the gram sabha of all voters in the village; Article 243D reserves seats for SCs and STs in proportion to population and not less than one-third of seats, and of chairpersons’ posts, for women. Article 243E fixes a five-year term, with elections before expiry or within six months of dissolution. 2. Two State bodies keep panchayats alive: one for elections, one for money — Article 243K vests superintendence of panchayat elections in a State Election Commission appointed by the Governor, removable only like a High Court judge. Article 243I requires the Governor to set up a State Finance Commission every five years to review panchayat finances.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. The question has moved from holding elections to making them real — GS2 asks about “Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein”. Proxy representation and elite capture are now the core challenges beyond the formal mandate.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 243K: superintendence, direction and control of panchayat elections vests in the State Election Commission, not the Election Commission of India. - Article 243D reserves not less than one-third of panchayat seats and chairpersons’ posts for women, including within SC and ST reserved seats. - Article 243A provides for the gram sabha, all persons on the village panchayat’s electoral roll.
ANALYSIS	1. Consensus in deliberation is not the same as consensus in choosing rulers — A gram sabha that argues until it agrees on a watershed is healthy, as Hiware Bazar shows. Choosing who holds power is different: the secret ballot lets a person who cannot object in public object in private. A seat settled before nomination day removes that one hidden moment. The counter-view, that contests breed feuds and cost money, argues for cleaner contests, not none. 2. Lens — Growth and equity: the village’s harmony is paid for by its weakest members — Reservation under Article 243D guarantees that a Dalit or OBC woman holds the seat, not that she speaks. If the dominant family picks a compliant nominee, the seat is filled and its purpose defeated. A thoughtful officer would judge unanimity by who proposed the name, not by the absence of a rival. 3. The State Election Commission can protect the choice to contest, not force a contest — An unopposed return is lawful, so the Commission cannot order a poll where no one files. It can make coercion costly: record withdrawals, enquire into threats, and publicise that anyone may file. NITI Aayog’s September 28 “Viksit Panchayat” workshop on Gram Panchayat Development Plans, per a PIB release, assumes a real gram sabha; without contested voice, the plan is the dominant family’s.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Unopposed gram panchayat elections are often presented as a sign of village harmony. Examine this claim with reference to the representation of women and marginalised groups. (10 marks, 150 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Test the claim on one dimension, representation. 2. Introduction — Maharashtra villages with no poll for 60–70 years — Angar and Perid, in 20 words. 3. Body — consensus can reduce feuds and cost, as model villages show — Ralegan Siddhi and Hiware Bazar decide in the gram sabha. 4. Body — pre-settled seats hand reserved posts to compliant nominees — Value addition: Article 243D; draw a flow: dominant family → nominee → no poll → silent reserved member. 5. Conclusion — protect the right to contest — Harmony is genuine only where dissent was free to appear.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As District Collector, a Dalit woman tells you she was pressured to withdraw her nomination so the village could stay “unopposed”. What do you do? Approach: The election is under the State Election Commission, so I would forward her recorded statement to it and the Returning Officer at once. I would have the police register any intimidation and protect her, since fear is the mechanism of coerced unanimity. I would also have withdrawals recorded in future. The aim is not to force a contest but to ensure no one is stopped from offering one.

7. Internal Security

Cyber fraud is now India's fastest-growing crime, and today's data show it preys on the connected, not the ignorant. The harder finding is about the State: once a victim is defrauded, recovery depends on a bribe or a contact more than on procedure. Cyber fraud is a test of policing as much as of technology.

7.1 Cybercrime rises 17.9% in NCRB's 2024 data as survey shows bribes and contacts drive recovery

ISSUE THREAD Cyber fraud and 'digital arrest' (new thread) **LENS** Innovation and safeguards · Independence and accountability

STORY SO FAR As UPI and smartphones spread, phone and online fraud, including fake 'digital arrests', has become the commonest way citizens meet crime.

THE NEWS New Delhi. Cybercrime cases in India rose 17.9%, from 86,420 in 2023 to 1,01,928 in 2024, even as overall registered crime fell 6%, per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data cited in The Hindu. The Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) 2026, a survey of 8,306 citizens in 16 States by Lokniti-CSDS and Common Cause, shows the hidden scale: 13% were victims in the last two to three years, over half of them of financial fraud. College graduates (59%) reported financial fraud more than those without formal education (40%). Of victims who complained, 27% had to pay the police, including 51% of poor victims against 12% of affluent ones. An IIT Madras study of 33 victims found techies, bankers and cybersecurity-certified professionals among them, some caught in 'digital arrest', where fraudsters posing as officials hold a victim in fake custody over video until money is paid.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Cheap data and UPI bring crores online → a larger footprint gives fraudsters targets → impostors exploit trust in banks and police → victims reach stations built for local crime → bribes and contacts decide recovery

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The IT Act and the BNS together cover online fraud — Section 66C of the Information Technology Act, 2000, punishes identity theft (fraudulent use of another's password or electronic signature), and Section 66D punishes cheating by personation using a computer resource. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced the IPC, covers cheating and extortion, and its organised-crime provision includes cyber-crime among the offences a syndicate may commit. 2. Policing is a State subject, but cyber fraud crosses every border — "Public order" and "Police" are Entries 1 and 2 of the State List, so investigation belongs to State police. The Home Ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) coordinates across States and runs the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and the 1930 helpline. The NCRB, set up in 1986 under the Home Ministry, compiles the annual Crime in India data.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Cyber security is an explicit GS3 syllabus line — GS3 lists "Challenges to internal security through communication networks ... basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention"; questions on organised cyber fraud and State police capacity fit this card's data.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Section 66D of the Information Technology Act, 2000, punishes cheating by personation using a computer resource; Section 66C punishes identity theft. "Police" and "Public order" are subjects in the State List of the Seventh Schedule. - The NCRB functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs; 1930 is the national cyber-fraud helpline.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Innovation and safeguards: awareness campaigns cannot carry a risk the payment system creates — The survey's authors call fraud "a tax on connectivity". The IIT Madras study adds that fear and stress, not ignorance, cause a "brain freeze" even

	in certified experts. So 'be careful online' misplaces the safeguard. A thoughtful officer would put friction where the risk sits, through bank-side detection of unusual first-time transfers and delays on large ones at a small cost in speed. 2. Redressal is regressive: the poor pay most to get their own money back — Victims who paid the police recovered everything far more often (41% against 12%), and a working personal contact roughly tripled the odds of full recovery. Women, rural and poor victims use these routes most because they have no other lever, so the system works best for those it serves least. The fix is to make FIR registration and bank-police coordination enforceable duties. 3. The NCRB count is the visible tip, and federal policing hides the rest — About one lakh registered cases sits oddly beside 13% reporting victimhood, and 39% of victims never complained. Stolen money moves across States in minutes while each State force investigates alone. Centralising policing would override the State List; the better route is shared data, joint teams and I4C coordination that reaches the police station.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Fraud has become less a tax on carelessness than a tax on connectivity." Analyse this with reference to cyber fraud in India and the gaps in redressal for its victims. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Analyse — Split the statement, test each part against evidence. 2. Introduction — cyber fraud is rising against the national crime trend — NCRB: cybercrime up 17.9% to 1,01,928 in 2024 while overall crime fell 6%. 3. Body — exposure grows with connectivity, not ignorance — Graduates report more fraud; professionals fall to 'digital arrest'. 4. Body — redressal rewards bribes and contacts, hitting the poor hardest — Value addition: SPIR 2026, 51% of poor complainants paid police against 12% of affluent. Draw a flowchart: fraud → 1930 call → FIR → bank freeze → recovery, marking where bribes enter. 5. Body — State-wise policing fragments a borderless crime — I4C coordinates but cannot command State police. 6. Conclusion — procedure, not influence, should recover money — Enforceable FIR and freeze timelines, bank-side detection, joint inter-State teams.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Superintendent of Police, a retired officer reports losing his savings in a 'digital arrest' scam an hour ago. What do you do? Approach: Time decides recovery, so I would first ensure the fraud is reported on the 1930 helpline so banks can freeze the money trail, and register an FIR at once. I would give the case to the cyber cell under a named officer who keeps him informed, so that he never needs a bribe or a contact. Station-wise recovery data would show whether my police deliver.

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 — A Confession Made to the Police, and the District Magistrate Asked to Detain on It

SCENARIO The Supreme Court has quashed a National Security Act (NSA) detention ordered by a District Magistrate after communal violence, finding the link between material and satisfaction “conspicuously absent”, calling it “more punitive than preventive”, holding that a confession before a police officer cannot by itself found such detention, and imposing ₹10 lakh costs on the State (The Hindu, 30 September). Now imagine you are the District Magistrate of a district where a clash has left several people dead. The Superintendent of Police brings you a draft NSA order against a man already in custody. Its only substantial material is his confession to the police. A senior officer at State headquarters phones to say “public order” demands your signature today, and the Government will defend it in court.

- Q1.** Is subjective satisfaction under the NSA a licence to act on the police file, or a duty to test it? Discuss the ethical and legal limits of the DM's discretion.
- Q2.** How would you respond to the pressure from above, and what will you record in the file?
- Q3.** If the order is later quashed with costs, who should bear responsibility, the DM, the police or the State?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. Satisfaction must be the DM's own, formed on objective material** — The NSA lets the DM detain without trial only when satisfied that a person must be stopped from acting prejudicially to public order or the security of the State. That satisfaction is subjective, but courts test whether relevant material, with a live link to the danger, supports it. A custodial confession is inadmissible against the accused as evidence, and using it to detain is a punishment without trial. Ask what is independent, recent and specific.
- 2. Pressure from above is a reason to write the file more carefully, not a substitute for it** — The statute gives the power to the DM, not to headquarters. Ask the police in writing for corroboration, and decline to sign if none comes, recording reasons. An officer who signs an order he cannot justify has abdicated the discretion on which Article 22's safeguards depend.
- 3. Accountability is personal, and the cost of error falls on a citizen first** — Every day of wrongful detention is a liberty lost that no costs award restores. The police may share blame for a thin file, but the signing DM cannot outsource the judgement. Ask whether a less drastic tool, such as ordinary prosecution, would do.
- 4. Conclusion — firmness without illegality** — Order stronger policing of the real threat through ordinary law, and reserve the NSA for cases with fresh, verifiable material.

Case 2 — A Thousand Deletion Objections in a Day, and the Electoral Registration Officer Who Must Decide Each One

SCENARIO The Hindu reported on 30 September that in Karnataka's ongoing special intensive revision of electoral rolls, more than 4,000 Form 7 applications seeking deletion of names, largely of Muslim voters, had been filed across several constituencies, according to the Form 10 statutory report. In one constituency, 1,363 of 1,373 applications received on a single day came from just ten people. The reason cited was “Absent/Permanently Shifted”. In some, the details of the voters were already printed and only the objector's name handwritten. Officials said each objection would be scrutinised before any action. Now imagine you are the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) of a constituency with such a pattern. Your booth-level officers are stretched, one party demands prompt deletions, another demands that all be rejected outright, and the district election officer wants the backlog cleared by Friday.

- Q1.** Should the ERO treat the filing pattern as evidence against the objections, or judge each name on its own facts? Discuss.
- Q2.** How would you balance speed against the risk of deleting a genuine elector, and what would you do about the objectors?

Q3. What safeguards make an ERO's decision defensible before a court?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. The pattern is a warning sign, not a verdict** — Ten filers, near-identical forms and one stated reason suggest abuse, but a deletion is decided on the evidence about the elector, not about the objector. Rejecting all objections would spare some wrongly targeted electors but could also keep real dead or shifted names on the roll. Fairness to the elector and the purity of the roll are both duties.
- 2. Verify on the ground and hear the elector before any deletion** — Send a field verification, give notice to each named elector, and allow a hearing. Pass a short speaking order for every name, deleted or retained. Delay is the price of avoiding a wrongful deletion, and the vote is a right that cannot be restored after polling day.
- 3. Refuse both political pressures and protect the objection process** — Meet all party agents together and record what was said, so that neither side can claim a private favour. Refer the suspicious filings to the Chief Electoral Officer for inquiry, since a false declaration is an offence, and seek more staff instead of shortcuts.
- 4. Conclusion — a slower roll is better than a wrong one** — The ERO's legitimacy comes from process. An open, reasoned and reviewable procedure protects both the elector and the Commission's credibility.

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
J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 — the Speaker controls what the Assembly takes up, and “sub judice” is a convention	The Act made Jammu and Kashmir a Union Territory with a legislature, and its Speaker decides the admissibility of resolutions under the House’s rules. The J&K Law Secretary’s letter, routed through the Chief Secretary, urged him to disallow the statehood resolution as sub judice (Indian Express, 30 September); the sub judice rule is a parliamentary convention that restrains debate on matters pending in court, and it does not bar the House from expressing an opinion.
Article 35A — inserted in 1954 by a Presidential Order under Article 370	Article 35A was added to the Constitution in 1954 by a Presidential Order issued under Article 370(1), empowering the J&K legislature to define “permanent residents”; in 2019 Article 367 was modified so that the “Constituent Assembly” of the State read as its “Legislative Assembly”, which made Article 370’s abrogation possible.
CAQM Act, 2021 — the statutory air-quality body for Delhi-NCR and its revised GRAP	The Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas is a statutory body created by the CAQM Act, 2021, which replaced the earlier EPCA. Its Graded Response Action Plan has four stages by severity of pollution; on 29 September a revised GRAP added Sonipat to the districts where BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars are barred in Stage 3 and withdrew the exemption for non-BS-VI trucks carrying essential goods (PIB; The Hindu).
Coal stock norms at power plants — the “required stock” is set by the Central Electricity Authority	The Central Electricity Authority, a statutory body under the Electricity Act, 2003, prescribes normative coal stocks for each thermal plant, which vary with its distance from the mine; the Indian Express (30 September) compares actual stocks with this “required stock”, and hydropower falling short in an El Niño year raises reliance on coal.
UNICORN — the India-Japan naval radar technology-transfer pact	UNICORN stands for Unified Complex Radio Antenna, a naval radar system on which India and Japan signed a technology-transfer agreement during Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s July visit; on 29 September Japan asked India to speed up its internal processing (The Hindu). Both are members of the Quad, which India and Japan revived in 2017 with the United States and Australia.
FCRA — the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and the 2026 Amendment Bill	The FCRA, 2010 regulates the receipt of foreign funds by individuals and NGOs, and registration is mandatory for NGOs to receive them. The Amendment Bill, 2026, introduced in Lok Sabha on 25 March and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee on 12 August, would create a “Designated Authority” in which assets vest on cancellation of registration and cut the maximum imprisonment from five years to one (per PRS).
Further investigation — the 2012 Dharmasthala case gets a fresh SIT	Police may carry out further investigation even after a report is filed in court, under Section 193(9) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, which corresponds to Section 173(8) of the CrPC. On 21 September the Supreme Court ordered a special investigation team, with three months, to reinvestigate the 2012 rape and murder of a student, after a CBI court acquitted the only suspect in 2023 (Indian Express).
Section 232 of the US Trade Expansion Act, 1962 — tariffs on national-security grounds	Section 232 lets the US President restrict imports found by the Commerce Department to threaten national security; it is the basis of the US tariffs on steel, aluminium and copper, which the Indian Express reports were doubled from 25% to 50% earlier this year. Two other instruments in the report are the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and Section 122 of the Trade Act, 1974.
Central Secretariat Library — founded 1891, run by the Ministry of Culture	The Central Secretariat Library was founded in 1891 as the Imperial Secretariat Library, moved to Delhi with the capital after 1911, and is administered by the Ministry of Culture. It is the second-largest central government library after the National Library in Kolkata, and now needs a new home as Shastri Bhawan is pulled down under the Central Vista plan (Indian Express).

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Tata Sons — a merger needs approvals under Sections 230-232 of the Companies Act, 2013	A merger or amalgamation under Sections 230-232 needs board, member and creditor approval and the sanction of the National Company Law Tribunal, and the RBI's clearance where applicable. The Tata Trusts' proposal aims to take Tata Sons out of the RBI's NBFC/Core Investment Company framework, which RBI's assessment, not the two parties, would decide (The Hindu).
UK and the EU — Brexit's timeline	The United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in the June 2016 referendum, triggered Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union in March 2017 and left on 31 January 2020. Prime Minister Andy Burnham told the Labour conference in Liverpool that "Brexit has done more harm than good", and the UK holds the G20 presidency in 2027 (The Hindu).
AFSPA, 1958 — "disturbed area" under Section 3 and the protection of Section 6	The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 applies once an area is notified as "disturbed" under Section 3, which both the Centre and a State can do; prosecution of personnel for acts under it needs prior sanction of the Central government. It was extended for six months from 1 October 2026 in parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh (The Hindu).
ZIPNET — the police platform for missing persons and unidentified bodies	ZIPNET is an integrated online platform used by police forces to circulate information on missing persons and unidentified bodies. A court noted "clear negligence" in Gurugram, where the details of a body recovered on 10 September were uploaded only on 16 September, after it had been cremated (Indian Express).
UAPA, 1967 — Section 15 defines a "terrorist act"	Section 15 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 defines a terrorist act by intent to threaten the unity, integrity, security or sovereignty of India or strike terror in people, and the means used. A special court granting bail in the Antilia case held that the accused's act "prima facie falls short" of that definition (Indian Express).
PM-AASHA — the umbrella scheme for farmers' price support	The Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanraksh Han Abhiyan (PM-AASHA), launched in 2018, has four components: the Price Support Scheme (PSS), the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS), the Pilot of Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme (PPSS) and the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF). NAFED, which implements them, held its 69th annual general meeting (Indian Express).
Labour codes — four codes, in force from 21 November 2025	The four labour codes are the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. They came into effect on 21 November 2025 and the Central Rules were notified on 8 May 2026 (PIB release of 29 September).
Index of Services Production — MoSPI's new monthly indicator, on a trial basis	The Index of Services Production (ISP) is published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on a trial basis, and covers 19 service sub-sectors, as reported by The Hindu. Those 19 sub-sectors account for roughly 60 per cent of India's services sector.

Source note: All items are drawn from *The Hindu* & *The Indian Express* (Delhi Editions) — 30 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. Answer Writing, GS1, Map, Ethics & CSAT

The daily part the newspapers do not give you: one fully written model answer, one GS1 static topic, map practice, one GS4 theory term and CSAT practice.

11.1 Model answer of the day — Card 1.2 (10 marks, 150 words)

Examine how the design of online electoral-roll platforms can strengthen or weaken the right to vote in India. (10 marks, 150 words)

Introduction — Article 326 guarantees adult suffrage, but a vote begins with a name on the roll. With revisions now run on the EC's ECINET portal, software increasingly decides who is added or struck off.

- 1. Good design widens access and audit** — Online Form 6 spares first-time voters a visit to the ERO; public Form 10 lists let anyone check objections.
- 2. Poor design silently rewrites the law** — An IT change made the SIR declaration, with grandparents' details, mandatory for online Form 6 everywhere, though only the Centre can amend the 1960 Rules. It also fails Puttaswamy's necessity test.
- 3. Missing limits enable mass deletions** — ECINET ignores the 10-a-day objection cap; in Babaleshwar, 10 people filed 1,363 of 1,373 Form 7 objections in one day, shifting the burden of hearings onto voters.

Conclusion — The EC's reversal shows self-correction works. Way forward: hard-code legal caps, notify new conditions as rules and audit the platform independently. Code must follow the law.

Draw this: Flowchart of Form 7: ECINET filing → Form 10 public list → notice → hearing → ERO speaking order; mark with a cross where the missing daily cap lets bulk objections in.

(153 words)

11.2 GS1 corner — History: The Ahom kingdom and the Battle of Saraighat (1671)

Today's peg: 6.1

- 1. The Ahoms built a durable state in the Brahmaputra valley** — Sukaphaa, a Tai prince from across the Patkai hills, founded it in 1228; it lasted nearly six centuries. Its paik system obliged adult men to serve the state in labour or arms.
- 2. Saraighat was a river battle won by terrain** — In 1671 a Mughal force under Raja Ram Singh of Amber, a Kachwaha, tried to retake Guwahati. The Ahom commander Lachit Borphukan fought on a narrow stretch of the Brahmaputra, where Mughal numbers counted for little and Ahom boats could manoeuvre, and won.
- 3. Assam passed to the British only in 1826** — Burmese invasions followed court feuds; after the First Anglo-Burmese War, the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) ceded Assam to the East India Company.

Prelims facts

- Lachit Borphukan's victory is marked on 24 November as Lachit Divas.
- The Moidams of Charaideo, Ahom royal mound-burials, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2024.
- The Buranjis were written first in the Tai-Ahom language and later in Assamese.

11.3 Places in news — mark them on your atlas

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
Great Nicobar Island	Southernmost of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; the Six Degree Channel separates it from Sumatra (Indonesia).	Centre seeks SC stay on Calcutta HC hearings over FRA consent for the project (5.1).	Indira Point, India's southernmost point, lies here; Campbell Bay and Galathea National Parks are on the island.
Vasundhara Tal,	Chamoli district, Garhwal Himalaya,	Site of Uttarakhand's first	Chamoli also holds the Nanda

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
Chamoli	Uttarakhand, bordering Tibet (China); drains to the Alaknanda.	glacial-lake early-warning system (5.2).	Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks, jointly a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Bagaha, West Champaran	North-west Bihar on the Gandak, next to the Nepal border and Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar district.	A Nepal-fed Gandak flash flood set a record level of 91.25 m here (5.2).	West Champaran holds the Valmiki Tiger Reserve and the Valmikinagar barrage on the Gandak.
Orang National Park	North bank of the Brahmaputra in Assam's Darrang and Sonitpur districts, west of Kaziranga, which lies on the south bank.	Restored grassland here brought back the pygmy hog (5.3).	Orang is also a tiger reserve, known as 'mini Kaziranga' for its one-horned rhinos.

11.4 Ethics term of the day (GS4 Section A): Moral courage

Meaning — Doing or saying what one believes is right when it costs one personally, such as displeasing superiors or colleagues. In public service it is often quiet: recording dissent on file or refusing an unlawful instruction.

In today's news — Two Election Commissioners recorded written objections in May and August to a Form 6 condition applied outside SIR States, and the Commission reversed it (1.2). Contrast 1.1, where four layers of review passed a weak NSA order.

Use in an answer — Case studies on pressure from superiors or peers: use it to justify a recorded, reasoned dissent over silent compliance.

11.5 CSAT practice (Paper II)

The passage below is original, written on the theme of one of today's editorials. Choose your answers first; the key is at the end.

A library keeps answers; a university exists to test them. Its real product is not the degree but a habit of mind: the willingness to ask how a claim is known, and to change one's view when the evidence changes.

This habit is fragile. It rarely disappears through dramatic bans. It fades when students learn, through many small signals, that some questions are unwelcome. A teacher who avoids a topic because it might invite a complaint, a researcher who softens a finding because it might embarrass a sponsor, a student who stays silent because disagreement looks like disrespect: none of them is punished, yet each has already surrendered a little of the freedom the institution was built to protect. Self-censorship is efficient precisely because it needs no censor.

Ceremony has a place in academic life. Convocations, oaths and traditions give a community a sense of continuity. The difficulty arises when the form of reverence begins to govern the content of thought, and when deference to position is mistaken for respect for knowledge. A scientist may honour a teacher and still prove the teacher wrong; that is how disciplines advance.

Those who run universities therefore carry a special burden. Their appointments, rules and public conduct teach more loudly than any syllabus. If leaders reward loyalty over rigour, students will conclude that success depends on pleasing rather than reasoning. A society that wants citizens capable of independent judgement cannot leave that goal to a clause in its Constitution. It must build institutions where doubt is safe, argument is ordinary and being corrected is no humiliation.

Q1. Which one of the following best reflects the central idea of the passage?

- (a) Universities should abolish ceremonies because they suppress free thought.
- (b) Academic freedom depends less on formal rules than on a culture in which questioning is safe.
- (c) Self-censorship in universities is caused mainly by government bans.
- (d) Libraries are better than universities at preserving knowledge.

Q2. The claim that leaders' conduct 'teaches more loudly than any syllabus' assumes that

- (a) students learn what is rewarded from how the institution actually behaves.

- (b) university syllabuses are poorly designed.
- (c) university leaders are appointed only for loyalty.
- (d) students do not read the Constitution.

Q3. Which one of the following can be inferred from the passage?

- (a) Respecting a teacher requires accepting the teacher's conclusions.
- (b) A constitutional provision is enough to secure independent thinking.
- (c) A researcher who has never been punished may still have lost some academic freedom.
- (d) University traditions always weaken scientific inquiry.

Reasoning and quantitative aptitude

Q4. An RDI soft loan covers at most 50% of a project's cost; the firm must raise the rest privately. A project costs ₹84 crore and the firm has raised ₹30 crore. How much more must it raise privately to claim the full loan?

- (a) ₹6 crore
- (b) ₹12 crore
- (c) ₹42 crore
- (d) ₹54 crore

Q5. Statements: All listed glacial lakes are monitored lakes. Some monitored lakes have sirens. Conclusions: I. Some listed glacial lakes have sirens. II. Some monitored lakes are listed glacial lakes.

- (a) Only I follows
- (b) Neither I nor II follows
- (c) Both I and II follow
- (d) Only II follows

Answer key and explanations

Q1: (b) The passage shows questioning fading through small signals and asks leaders to make doubt safe. A is tempting but wrong: ceremony 'has a place'. C contradicts 'rarely disappears through dramatic bans'; D is a side contrast.

Q2: (a) The claim holds only if students learn from real conduct, not just course content. C is tempting but the passage says 'if leaders reward loyalty', a condition, not a fact; B and D are unstated.

Q3: (c) The second paragraph says those who self-censor are not punished yet have surrendered freedom. A contradicts 'honour a teacher and still prove the teacher wrong'; B contradicts the last paragraph; D overstates it, since ceremony 'has a place'.

Q4: (b) Maximum loan = 50% of 84 = ₹42 crore, so the firm's share = 84 - 42 = ₹42 crore. Still needed = 42 - 30 = ₹12 crore. Check: 30 + 12 + 42 = 84. ₹54 crore is the trap of subtracting 30 from the whole cost.

Q5: (d) 'All listed lakes are monitored' converts to 'some monitored lakes are listed lakes', so II follows. The monitored lakes with sirens may all lie outside the listed group, so I does not follow.

12. 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

The absence of dissent is not the presence of consent.

Themes: Democracy and consent · Liberty and the State · Memory, knowledge and nature

Perid, a village of about 3,000 people in Kolhapur district, has not held a contested panchayat election since 1956. A visitor could read this as democracy at its best: a village so united that it no longer needs a ballot. A former sarpanch of the region, Alka Kamble, gave a less comfortable reading. In such villages, she said, the seats reserved for Dalit and backward-class women go to candidates “who will not raise their voices”. The two readings describe the same silence. When no one objects, we cannot yet tell whether people have agreed, or whether they were not asked, did not know, or did not dare.

This essay argues that silence is evidence of nothing until we know what produced it. Consent has three conditions: refusal must be possible, the person must know enough to refuse, and refusing must not cost more than complying. Where any one of these is missing, the absence of dissent is a record of power, not of agreement. A State that reads silence as assent governs on a signature it has forged. A mature State does something harder: it builds the conditions under which silence could honestly mean yes.

The oldest version of the error is political. In Tacitus’s *Agricola*, the Caledonian chief Calgacus says of Rome: “they make a solitude and call it peace.” Soviet elections, with one approved candidate on each ballot, reported majorities above 99 per cent and called them consent. Indian law has a quieter version. Under Section 53(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, if the number of candidates equals the number of seats, the returning officer declares them elected without a poll. In April 2024 this happened in Surat: the nomination of the main rival candidate was rejected, the others withdrew, and a Lok Sabha member was declared elected before a single vote was cast. The Supreme Court gave voters a NOTA button in *PUCL v. Union of India* (2013), but where no poll is held there is no button to press. In Angar, in Solapur district, no panchayat election was held for sixty years, and its first nagar panchayat president was elected unopposed amid allegations of threats, which her family denies. A contest is the mechanism that turns silence into choice. Without it we do not know what the silence means.

The most complete silence is that of the detained. Preventive detention, permitted by Article 22, holds a person not for what he has done but for what the executive fears he may do, and he cannot object before the order is made. During the Emergency, the Supreme Court held in *ADM Jabalpur* (1976) that while the right to move the courts under Article 21 was suspended, no detenu could seek habeas corpus. Justice H.R. Khanna dissented alone: without the sanctity of life and liberty, he wrote, “the distinction between a lawless society and one governed by laws would cease to have any meaning.” Outside, the streets were quiet, and Vinoba Bhave called the period an “Anushasan Parva”, a festival of discipline. It took until *Puttaswamy* (2017) for nine judges to say that *ADM Jabalpur* was wrong. This week the Supreme Court quashed a detention under the National Security Act in Sambhal that rested on a confession made in police custody, and ordered Uttar Pradesh to pay ₹10 lakh. A confession extracted in custody is the purest case of silence dressed up as consent: the words are there, but the freedom that would give them meaning is not.

A people can also be silenced across time. In his *Minute on Education* of 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay declared that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” Indian learning was silent to him only because he could not read it. George Orwell saw the danger that follows: “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.” Every textbook is a selection. NCERT’s new Class 9 book drops the chapters on the French and Russian revolutions and presents 1000–1700 CE as a period of “Resistance and

Resilience". Supporters say the old syllabus gave Europe more pages than the Ahoms; critics say composite culture has receded. The point here is not which selection is right, but that a fourteen-year-old cannot dissent from a past she was never shown. In Japan, the historian Ienaga Saburo fought lawsuits against the State's screening of his textbook from 1965 to 1997. A curriculum earns consent only when historians, States and teachers can contest it in the open.

The land itself cannot object, and so it is most easily misread. India's administrative records have long classed open grasslands as "wastelands", though grasslands store about a third of the Earth's land carbon. A new study in PNAS finds that ancient grasslands, once destroyed, do not recover their old character for at least a century. The pastoralists who grazed them were never asked. When consent is actually sought, the answer can surprise. In 2013 the Supreme Court let the gram sabhas of the Dongria Kondh decide whether bauxite should be mined in the Niyamgiri hills, and all twelve said no. That is why the dispute now before the courts over gram sabha consent for the Great Nicobar project matters: a signature on a resolution is not consent unless those who signed knew what they gave up and were free to refuse.

The counter-position deserves a fair hearing. The old legal maxim says *qui tacet consentire videtur*, he who is silent is taken to agree. John Locke argued in his *Second Treatise* (1689) that anyone who enjoys the protection of a government gives it tacit consent. No State can consult every citizen on everything, and an unopposed candidate may simply be popular. Model villages such as Ralegan Siddhi and Hiware Bazar value unanimity because it spares them factional feuds. All this is true, but it proves less than it seems. Locke's tacit consent assumed that a person was free to leave. Albert Hirschman, in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970), showed that silence can be loyalty, but only where exit and voice are real options; where both are closed, silence is neither. Unanimity is valuable when it is chosen, and the proof that it was chosen is that a contest remained possible. In 2021 opposition panels did contest in Ralegan Siddhi and Hiware Bazar. That is the sign of a healthy consensus: it could have been broken.

The remedy is to make dissent cheap and visible. Scrutinise mass withdrawals in uncontested elections as closely as a disputed count. Make advisory boards in detention cases hear the detenu in substance, not in form. Revise textbooks in open consultation. Count grasslands as ecosystems, and treat the Forest Rights Act's gram sabha consent as a question actually asked, not a form to be filled. The test for Perid is not whether it votes, but whether it could, and whether the woman in the reserved seat could speak without paying for it. Rome called a solitude peace. A democracy must refuse that confusion. It should treat silence as a question still to be answered, and give people the freedom to answer it.

Built from today's cards: Some Maharashtra villages have not voted in panchayat polls for 60–70 years · Supreme Court quashes Sambhal accused's NSA detention, rules police-custody confession cannot justify it · NCERT's new Class 9 book replaces European revolutions with medieval Indian 'resistance' · Destroyed old grasslands take over a century to recover, PNAS study finds; ecologist seeks restoration programme · Centre asks Supreme Court to halt Calcutta HC hearings on Great Nicobar, disputing petitioner's standing