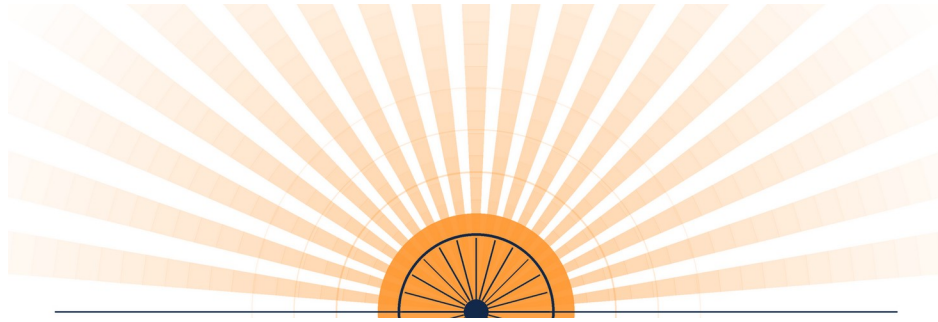




UPSC DARPAN

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

"One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world."

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture in Literature (1970), quoting a Russian proverb

The Hindu, The Indian Express & The Economic Times (Delhi Editions) — 6 October 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 · 6 October 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.

“Violence finds its only refuge in falsehood, falsehood its only support in violence.”

— **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** · Nobel Lecture in Literature (1970), text on nobelprize.org

Use in: Today's stories on the Form 6 “first time” declaration and the Cauvery sanctuary firing probe. Use it in GS4 answers on truthfulness, integrity and the ethics of compliance, and in essays on means and ends: coercion and cover-up feed each other, so an honest record is the first check on misuse of force. Pair it with Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 on false declarations and with the duty of public servants to report truthfully. Balance it: not every institutional failure is a lie, so separate honest error from concealment.

“Fake ‘encounters’ are nothing but cold blooded, brutal murder by persons who are supposed to uphold the law.”

— **Supreme Court of India (Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Misra JJ.)** · *Prakash Kadam v. Ramprasad Vishwanath Gupta* (13 May 2011), para 25

Use in: For GS2 and GS4 answers on custodial and extra-judicial killings, police and forest-force accountability, and Article 21. Today's Karnataka CID probe into the Cauvery sanctuary firing is a probe, not a finding, so use the line as the standard the State must meet, not as a verdict. Pair it with PUCL v. State of Maharashtra (2014), which laid down guidelines for investigating every police encounter death, and with the NHRC's guidelines on encounter deaths. Balance it with the real danger faced by personnel: the protection they need is clear rules and honest reporting.

“People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. ... Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.”

— **Jawaharlal Nehru** · Foreword to the second edition of Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, dated 9 October 1958 (the “Tribal Panchsheel”)

Use in: Today's Supreme Court refusal to stay the Great Nicobar case, where it called culture “a constitutionally protected fundamental right”. Use it in GS1 and GS2 answers on tribal development, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, PESA and the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and in essays on development and identity. The fifth principle of the same foreword, judging results “not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved”, is a fine closing line. Balance it: strategic and economic needs are real, so argue for consent and safeguards, not for a museum.

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Everything in today's edition, card by card · Reading time: about 1 h 46 min.

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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	Supreme Court issues notice on plea to suspend the CEC Why it matters: GS2 constitutional bodies: Article 324 and the 2023 Act's Section 16 for Prelims; collegial decision-making in the Commission for Mains.
2.1	India-US trade talks hit a "plateau"; EU FTA due in December Why it matters: GS2/GS3 trade: GATT Articles I and XXIV and Section 301 for Prelims; balancing US and EU negotiations for Mains.
3.3	Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye move to deploy forces under Mecca pact Why it matters: GS2 West Asia: Article 51 and collective defence for Prelims; a Gulf alliance including Pakistan for Mains.
4.1	Supreme Court refuses to stay Great Nicobar case Why it matters: GS3 EIA and GS2 tribal rights: Article 29(1), PVTGs and the Forest Rights Act for Prelims; strategy versus rights for Mains.
5.1	Centre weighs central licensing of all sterile drugs Why it matters: GS2 health governance: Concurrent List Entry 19, DTAB and DCC for Prelims; Centre-State drug regulation for Mains.

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 turn on a procedural rule that quietly settles a question of rights. The Supreme Court has begun asking whether the Election Commission decides as a body or as one man, and whether a former CEC should be beyond the courts. Bihar has decided that a woman's claim to a quota travels with her father's address, not her own life.

1.1 Supreme Court issues notice on plea to suspend CEC, disowns modified Form 6

ISSUE THREAD Election Commission's independence (update 6) **LENS** Independence and accountability · Liberty and order

STORY SO FAR Commissioners Sandhu and Joshi objected in writing 14 times in 10 months to decisions taken without them; the Supreme Court split on referring the 2023 appointment law, and the Opposition drafted a removal motion.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 5. A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana issued notice on two petitions seeking the suspension of CEC Gyanesh Kumar for "administrative unilateralism" in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). This is a notice, not a finding: the court refused interim suspension and sought responses from the CEC, Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, and two ECI officials. Three things are new. The CJI said "any modified Form 6 has not been approved by us", although an ECI press note of September 26 claimed the court had upheld the new declaration asking whether the applicant's or a parent's or grandparent's name was on an earlier roll. Decisions taken "neither by majority nor by unanimity" will have to be explained. And Justice Bagchi questioned Section 16 of the 2023 Act, which bars suits against anyone who "is or was" CEC.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Anoop Baranwal (2023) seeks a neutral selection panel → the 2023 Act drops the CJI and adds Section 16 → SIR and a new Form 6 declaration draw protests → Commissioners' objections surface → the court calls for the record

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	Article 324 vests elections in the Commission and protects the CEC's tenure — Article 324(1) gives the Election Commission superintendence, direction and control of electoral rolls and of elections to Parliament, State legislatures, and the offices of President and Vice-President. Under Article 324(5) the CEC can be removed only like a Supreme Court judge; other Election Commissioners only on the CEC's recommendation. The 2023 Act governs appointment and immunity — The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 followed Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023). A committee of the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister and the Leader of the Opposition picks from a search committee's panel. Section 16 bars courts from entertaining civil or criminal proceedings against a serving or former CEC or EC for official acts; a Lok Prahari challenge to it has been pending since notice on January 13, 2026.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	How constitutional bodies decide is now examinable — GS2 covers "powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies". The focus has moved from appointment to how a multi-member Commission decides.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 324(1) vests superintendence, direction and control of electoral rolls and elections in the Election Commission. - Under Article 324(5), an Election Commissioner other than the CEC can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation. - The selection committee under the 2023 Act is the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. - Form 6 is the application for inclusion in the electoral roll under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.
ANALYSIS	Lens — Independence and accountability: the court is testing collegiality, not

	independence — A three-member Commission exists so that no single officer controls the franchise; if the CEC decides alone, the other two become ornaments. Asking whether decisions had a majority enforces that internal check without second-guessing electoral policy. Recorded collegial decisions would also shield the CEC from charges of personal bias. 2. Lifelong immunity sits awkwardly with a judge-like office — Protection in office keeps an officer free of harassing suits; extending it for life, Justice Bagchi suggested, resembles the President's position more than a judge's. The counter-view is that Section 16 covers only official acts and echoes the Judges (Protection) Act, 1985; the real test is whether it shields wilful misconduct. 3. A form can disenfranchise more quietly than a deletion — Former CEC S.Y. Quraishi notes in The Indian Express that voters restored through Form 6 must declare they are applying "for the first time", a false statement punishable under Section 31 of the RP Act, 1950; he proposes a separate "Form 6X". In Bengal, tribunal judges say the EC portal cannot even serve notices; only 1.26 lakh of 38.31 lakh appeals are cleared. Rights are being lost in procedure.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Election Commission's independence from the executive means little without accountability within the Commission." Critically examine. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh a protected CEC against internal and judicial checks; conclude. 2. Introduction — Article 324 builds a multi-member body with a protected head — Two lines on Article 324(1) and (5). 3. Insulation from the executive was weakened in 2023 — Value addition: Anoop Baranwal (2023) and a committee without the CJI. 4. Unilateral decisions and lifelong immunity erode accountability within — Use the "neither by majority nor by unanimity" remark and Section 16; draw a flowchart: CEC → collegial vote → minutes → judicial review. 5. Yet a CEC hounded by litigation cannot run elections — Note the refusal to suspend pending authenticated records. 6. Conclusion — written rules of business, immunity limited to good-faith acts — One line.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a District Electoral Officer, you must accept restoration claims only on the new Form 6. What do you do? Approach: I would follow the Commission's instruction but seek written clarification on how long-time voters should treat the "first time" declaration. Meanwhile I would record each applicant's old EPIC and roll entry so that no one is pushed into a false statement. I would also report disposal figures accurately.

1.2 Bihar makes women married into the State prove caste from their parents' address

ISSUE THREAD Reservation, domicile and migration (new thread) **LENS** Tradition and social justice · Centre and States

STORY SO FAR Bihar notified a domicile policy in August 2025 that leaves only 15% of teacher posts open to outsiders, after a 2023 domicile clause was scrapped within months.

THE NEWS Patna, October 5. The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) has ruled that "married women, who wish to avail quota, will have to produce their caste, residence and non-creamy layer certificates, from [the] address of their parents', not of their husbands", The Indian Express reports. The September 22 notification came as the BPSC opened applications for 32,388 posts in the fourth Teachers Recruitment Examination (TRE-4). In effect, a woman from another

State who married into Bihar gets no reservation there. (A non-creamy-layer certificate shows that an OBC candidate's family is not among the better-off excluded from the quota.) Under the BPSC TRE Domicile Rules of August 2025, those who passed matriculation or intermediate in Bihar get a 40% quota and outsiders compete only for 15% open seats, with no women's quota and a 60% eligibility-test cut-off. About 50,000 out-of-state teachers, nearly a fifth of 2.68 lakh appointments, were hired in TRE-I to III.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Bihar hires lakhs of teachers through open recruitment from 2023 → about one-fifth come from other States → local resentment yields the August 2025 domicile rules → women married into Bihar use their husbands' address → the BPSC ties quota papers to the parents' home

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	Article 16 bars residence-based discrimination except by Parliament's law — Article 16(2) forbids discrimination in public employment on grounds including place of birth and residence. Article 16(3) lets only Parliament prescribe a residence requirement for posts under a State, and Article 35 keeps that power with Parliament. Article 16(4) allows reservation for backward classes not adequately represented. Reserved-category status follows the State of origin — In Marri Chandra Shekhar Rao (1990) and Action Committee on Issue of Caste Certificate (1994), the Supreme Court held that a Scheduled Caste or Tribe person who migrates cannot claim reservation in the new State, because these lists are drawn State by State. It is also settled that caste is determined by birth and cannot be changed by marriage (Sunita Singh v. State of U.P., 2018).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	Domicile quotas are a recurring federal and equity question — GS2 covers "Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections" and "issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure". More States now reserve jobs for locals, and each rule raises the same Article 16 question.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under Article 16(3), only Parliament can prescribe residence within a State as a condition for employment under that State. - Article 16(2) prohibits discrimination in public employment on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or residence. - Article 16(4) enables reservation in appointments for backward classes not adequately represented in State services. - The non-creamy-layer certificate is required for OBC reservation; it excludes the advanced section of backward classes.
ANALYSIS	Lens — Tradition and social justice: a patrilocal society meets a rule that ignores it — In most of India a woman moves to her husband's home, so her working life is built in his State. The rule ties her quota to where she was born, not where she lives. The State is right about caste, which is listed State by State and is not acquired by marriage. But residence is a different fact, and only women are sent back to their fathers' home to prove it. Schooling-based quotas are how States work around Article 16(3) — Bihar cannot reserve posts for residents, so its 40% quota is for those who studied in Bihar. Courts tend to accept educational links more readily than birth or residence. The effect is close to a residence quota all the same. The cost falls on Bihar's own schools — Bihar recruited from outside because it could not fill posts: TRE-I appointed about 1.20 lakh against 1.70 lakh vacancies. Shrinking the pool raises the risk of vacancies again. The counter-view is that local teachers know the language and stay longer.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine whether domicile-linked conditions in State recruitment are consistent with Article 16, with reference to women who migrate by marriage. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Test the rule against Article 16 and give a reasoned view. 2. Introduction — Bihar ties quota papers to the parents' address — One line on TRE-4. 3. Caste status by origin is settled law — Value addition: Marri Chandra Shekhar Rao (1990). 4. A residence condition needs Parliament's law under Article 16(3) — Draw: birth State → marriage → work State, marking quota eligibility at each step. 5. Conclusion — separate caste proof from residence proof — Let women prove residence through the marital home.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As BPSC Secretary, how would you answer a woman from Uttar Pradesh, ten years in Bihar, refused OBC benefit? Approach: I would explain that caste reservation does not transfer across States, which is settled law, so she competes in the open category. I would check that she is not also being denied benefits that rest on residence or schooling. And I would issue a clear FAQ before the exam, so candidates do not lose a year to a rule they discover after applying.

2. Economy

Today's three stories are about who sets the rules of the economic game. With the United States, tariffs have become a weapon rather than a bargaining chip, so India is turning to the EU deal. At home, the Centre has used a mining law to limit States' taxing power, and the courts must again draw the line. The new rural job Schedule shows the Centre deciding, from Delhi, what a village may build with guaranteed work.

2.1 India-US Trade Talks Hit a "Plateau" as Tariffs Are "Weaponised"; EU FTA in December

ISSUE THREAD India-US trade deal and tariffs (update 2) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · Market and State

STORY SO FAR An India-US trade framework agreed in February 2026 is unsigned. One Section 301 probe already brings a 10% tariff on Indian goods, a second is pending, and Washington calls a deal "not imminent".

THE NEWS New Delhi. Speaking at the Munich Leaders Meeting on Monday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the India-US talks have reached "a plateau beyond which giving or taking might be very difficult", after "a hard and very rigorously negotiated" process. The main sticking point is India's trade surplus with the US, about \$34.4 billion in goods in 2025-26 (ET), which Washington wants cut. India's goods deficit with China is \$112-113 billion. "Tariffs have become weaponised," she said, meaning they are used to force outcomes rather than as bargaining chips. A new US law allows tariffs of up to 100% on buyers of Russian oil, and a Section 301 "excess capacity" probe is still pending (IE). She said Russian oil was never a condition in the India-EU FTA, which is due to be signed in December and which she called the "mother of all deals".

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The US runs a trade deficit with India → it uses tariffs, a Section 301 probe and a Russian-oil tariff law instead of only negotiating → the talks stall at a "plateau" → India turns to the EU FTA, due for signing in December

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. WTO law makes non-discrimination the rule and FTAs the exception — Article I of the GATT sets the most-favoured-nation (MFN) rule: a tariff concession given to one WTO member must be given to all. Article XXIV allows free trade areas and customs unions only if they remove duties on "substantially all the trade" between partners. 2. Section 301 lets the US act on its own against "unfair" trade — Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974 lets the US Trade Representative investigate a foreign country's practices and impose tariffs if they are found unreasonable or discriminatory. Washington decides alone, outside WTO dispute settlement.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. The syllabus pairs trade with India's interests abroad — GS2 covers "effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests", and GS3 the "effects of liberalization on the economy". Stalled US talks beside a near-final EU deal illustrate protectionism and India's FTA strategy.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The most-favoured-nation principle is in Article I of the GATT; Article XXIV permits free trade areas and customs unions as an exception. - Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974 empowers the US Trade Representative to act unilaterally against foreign trade practices it considers unfair. - Under GATT Article XXIV, a free trade area must eliminate duties on "substantially all the trade" between its members.
ANALYSIS	1. A "plateau" tells Washington that more pressure will not buy more concessions — Talks plateau when each side has given what it easily can; after that, leverage decides. The US is using its leverage openly through the Russian-oil tariff law and the pending probe. Calling it a plateau is a negotiating message, not just a description. 2. Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: a trade surplus alone cannot justify

	punishment — If a surplus were enough to justify punitive tariffs, India could do the same to China, against whom its deficit is far larger, yet it chooses to negotiate. The sensible position is to keep talking to Washington while refusing to make trade balance the test of a fair deal. 3. The EU deal is an alternative, not a replacement for the US market — A deal covering two billion people and, in her words, a quarter of world trade gives exporters another outlet. But the EU does not yet replace the US as a buyer of Indian textiles, engineering goods and services, and it has its own carbon border tax (CBAM). Diversification spreads India's risk but does not remove the need for a US deal.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Tariffs have become weaponised." In this light, examine how India should balance its trade negotiations with the United States and the European Union. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Test the claim against evidence on both tracks and reach a reasoned conclusion. 2. Introduction — the US talks have stalled while tariffs are used to force outcomes — Quote the plateau and "weaponised" remarks, and note the EU FTA due in December. 3. Using tariffs to fix a trade balance breaks with WTO rules — Contrast GATT Article I with the Russian-oil tariff law and the Section 301 probe. Value addition: a \$34.4 billion goods surplus with the US against a \$112-113 billion deficit with China. 4. The EU deal strengthens India's hand but cannot replace the US market — Weigh "two billion people, a quarter of world trade" against CBAM. Diagram: a triangle of India, the US and the EU, with tariff pressure on one side and market access on the other. 5. Conclusion — diversify and keep negotiating — Sign the EU deal and keep US talks open without accepting trade balance as the test.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Commerce Secretary, how would you protect exporters while the US deal is stuck? Approach: US buyers have stopped placing bulk orders, so the risk is lost business, not just higher duties. I would track orders monthly with the export promotion councils, focus help on labour-intensive clusters most exposed to the US, and prepare them to use the EU FTA once signed. In the talks, I would hold clear red lines so pressure does not erode India's position.

2.2 Mining Tax Curbs Split Mineral States Along Lines of Dependence and Politics

ISSUE THREAD Mines Act amendment and States (update 4) **LENS** Centre and States • Short-term relief and long-term reform

STORY SO FAR Section 9D of the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 bars States from taxing mineral rights or mineral-bearing land except on the Centre's terms. Critics call it an intrusion into State List Entry 49; Odisha has not counted its cost.

THE NEWS New Delhi. A Hindu explainer by Safira Hussain (Lokniti-CSDS) and Sanjay Kumar maps State reactions to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026. Mineral receipts make up 85% of non-tax revenue in Jharkhand and 80% in Odisha, but only 11% in Telangana and 6% in Chhattisgarh. Karnataka, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala plan to challenge the law in the Supreme Court. Jharkhand warns that cancelling uncollected past dues will hurt its social-security schemes. Odisha's BJP government says the law causes no harm, and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have not objected. In ET, former CBIC chairman Najib Shah points to a similar fight over industrial alcohol ahead of Thursday's GST Council meeting. The Supreme Court gave States power over it on 23 October 2024 (ET misprints the split as "9-8"; it was 8:1), yet it is still taxed under GST at 18%.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

In 2024 the Supreme Court rules that royalty is not a tax and that States may tax mineral rights and land → States raise claims for past dues → the Centre amends the MMDR Act to bar such levies except on its terms and cancels uncollected dues → mineral-dependent and Opposition-ruled States head to court

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Mineral Area Development Authority v. SAIL (2024) upheld the States' power to tax mineral land — On 25 July 2024 a nine-judge bench ruled 8:1, with Justice B.V. Nagarathna dissenting, that royalty under the MMDR Act, 1957 is not a tax, overruling India Cement (1989). States may tax mineral rights under State List Entry 50, subject to Parliament's limits. Their power to tax land under Entry 49 cannot be curtailed through Union List Entry 54. 2. The Seventh Schedule divides mining between the Union and the States — State List Entry 23 covers mines and mineral development, subject to Union List Entry 54; the MMDR Act, 1957 is Parliament's law under it. A power to regulate a subject does not by itself include a power to tax it.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Fiscal federalism is a steady GS2 theme — GS2 covers "issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels".
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- In Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India (2024), a nine-judge bench held by 8:1 that royalty is not a tax. - State List Entry 23 (mines and mineral development) is subject to Union List Entry 54; State List Entries 49 and 50 cover taxes on lands and on mineral rights. - In State of U.P. v. Lalta Prasad Vaish (23 October 2024), a nine-judge bench held 8:1 that "intoxicating liquor" in State List Entry 8 includes industrial alcohol, overruling Synthetics & Chemicals (1990).
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Short-term relief and long-term reform: cancelling past dues eases costs now but weakens trust in Centre-State bargains — The Centre has a point: overlapping levies make Indian minerals costly and push industry to imports. But cancelling dues that States could lawfully raise after 2024 rewards firms that did not pay, while those that complied get no refund, which is the Article 14 objection PRS raises. A better course is to cap future levies by a jointly agreed formula and leave past dues alone. 2. Party alignment, not just dependence, decides which States fight — Odisha is nearly as mineral-dependent as Jharkhand yet sees no harm; Telangana loses little but is going to court. Dependence creates a stake; alignment decides whether it becomes a challenge. A party-split dispute is easier for the Centre to manage than a united front. 3. Industrial alcohol shows the same pattern: the court rules, but the money does not move — States won the power to tax industrial alcohol in 2024, yet it still pays 18% GST with input tax credit. Shah therefore asks the GST Council to recognise the States' power and the States to set excise near the effective GST burden. Courts settle who may tax; sharing still needs negotiation.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Does the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 dilute the States' taxing powers recognised by the Supreme Court in 2024? Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Comment — Give a reasoned opinion backed by evidence. 2. Introduction — the Act limits a power the court confirmed — Levies barred except on the Centre's terms; uncollected dues cancelled. 3. Yes on land: Entry 49 cannot be cut down through Entry 54 — Cite the 2024 verdict

	(8:1). Value addition: minerals are 85% of Jharkhand's and 80% of Odisha's non-tax revenue. 4. Partly no on mineral rights: Entry 50 is subject to Parliament's limits — Concede the cost argument. Diagram: Entry 23 → subject to Entry 54 → Entries 49 and 50, marked "regulate" and "tax". 5. Conclusion — agree future limits jointly and leave past dues alone — Propose a joint formula on the GST Council model.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Jharkhand's Finance Secretary, how would you respond to the cancellation of past mineral dues? Approach: I would first calculate the exact loss by mineral and year, since both a court case and a Finance Commission plea need precise numbers, and fund the social-security schemes first. I would back a Supreme Court challenge on the Entry 49 land-tax point, where the 2024 judgment is clearest, while staying open to a fair future-levy formula.

2.3 Centre Notifies 375 Permissible Works Under VB-G RAM G, Up from 266

ISSUE THREAD Rural job guarantee (VB-G RAM G) (new thread) **LENS** Short-term relief and long-term reform · Growth and equity

STORY SO FAR A 2025 law replaced MGNREGA, 2005 with the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) framework, raising the work guarantee from 100 to 125 days and moving to a 60:40 Centre–State cost share.

THE NEWS New Delhi. Per a PIB release of 6 October 2026, the Ministry of Rural Development has notified a Schedule of 375 permissible works under the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] Act, 2025, 41% more than the earlier 266. Permissible works are the only projects on which guaranteed work can be offered. They fall into four groups: water security (128, such as check dams, drip irrigation and ice-stupas); core rural infrastructure (111, such as solar street lights and libraries); livelihood infrastructure (98, such as cold storage and SHG work-sheds), now 26% of the list against 1.1% before; and a new disaster-preparedness group (38, such as flood shelters). Across groups, 181 works serve agriculture, 107 Antyodaya households, and 36 each women and youth. Works are chosen in Gram Sabha-approved Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans and tracked on the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

MGNREGA (2005) guarantees 100 days but mostly creates earthworks and water assets → a 2025 law replaces it with 125 days and a 60:40 cost share → the 2026 Schedule widens the list to 375 works, tilted towards livelihood and disaster assets → the test is whether villages choose these works and whether money follows

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The 2025 law changed the terms of the job guarantee, not just its name — Per PRS's summary of the Bill introduced on 16 December 2025, it replaces MGNREGA, 2005 and raises the guarantee to 125 days of wage work per rural household a year. Costs are shared 60:40 between the Centre and States (90:10 for north-eastern and Himalayan States) within a Centre-fixed allocation. Works pause for up to 60 days in peak farm seasons. 2. Article 41 is the constitutional root of a right to work — Article 41, a Directive Principle, asks the State, within its economic capacity, to secure the right to work, to education and to public assistance in unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement. A statute turns this unenforceable aim into a legal entitlement.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Rural employment links GS2 and GS3 — GS2 covers "welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population" and GS3 "inclusive growth and issues arising from it". The debate has moved from relief to the durability of assets.

PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 41, a Directive Principle, directs the State to make effective provision for securing the right to work within the limits of its economic capacity. - The VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 replaced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. - Per PRS, VB-G RAM G costs are shared 60:40 by Centre and States (90:10 for north-eastern and Himalayan States). - Under the VB-G RAM G Act, works are planned through Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans approved by the Gram Sabha.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Short-term relief and long-term reform: the list now aims to build an economy, not only to relieve distress — A job guarantee first pays wages in distress; its lasting value is what the work leaves behind. Moving livelihood works from 1.1% to 26% means a cold store or market yard can earn for years, unlike a pond that silts up. But such projects need skills, materials and upkeep and may crowd out unskilled labour. 2. A longer list helps only if the Gram Sabha really decides — More works mean more choice, which the plan places with the Gram Sabha. In practice, block staff often write the plans and technical works follow whoever has engineers. 3. Without new money, the new categories may stay on paper — The release is silent on funding. With States paying 40% and anything above the normative allocation falling on them, poorer States with heavy demand may fund only the cheapest earthworks. The equity test is whether the most distressed districts get the budget to use the full list.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	To what extent can widening the list of permissible works turn India's rural employment guarantee from a safety net into an engine of asset creation? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — To what extent — Give a qualified judgement on how far the claim holds. 2. Introduction — 375 works replace 266 under the 2025 Act — Cite the PIB release: four groups, with livelihood works up from 1.1% to 26%. 3. The Schedule tilts towards productive, climate-resilient assets — Use the 128 water and 38 disaster works. Diagram: wage → asset → farm or SHG income → less distress migration. 4. Funding and local capacity set the limit — Value addition: the 60:40 share and Centre-fixed normative allocation (per PRS), material costs crowding out labour, and plans written by block staff. 5. Conclusion — a menu of works is not an outcome — Fund States by need, tie every asset to a maintainer, and keep wages on demand as Article 41 intends.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a District Collector, how would you stop the new livelihood works from crowding out wage seekers? Approach: I would set a minimum share of unskilled-labour spending in each panchayat plan and check it monthly. Livelihood works such as cold stores would be approved only where an SHG or producer group commits to running them. I would hold special Gram Sabhas so works reflect local demand, and publish works and payments for social audit.

3. International Relations

All three stories are about the rules India must live by when others write them. With Switzerland, India is trading market access for capital and visas, and now faces a bill in investment protection and patents. At the WTO, 66 members are building an e-commerce rulebook around India's veto. In the Gulf, Pakistan has made itself a security provider to Saudi Arabia just as the United States steps back. In each case, saying no is cheap; shaping the outcome takes more work.

3.1 India and Switzerland Sign Mobility and Young-Professionals Pacts as TEPA Turns One

ISSUE THREAD Investment treaties and arbitration (update 3) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · Market and State

STORY SO FAR India is rewriting its investment treaties. The Finance Ministry has sent a revised model Bilateral Investment Treaty to the Cabinet, keeping taxation outside investor-State arbitration, after new BITs with the UAE and Israel.

THE NEWS New Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Swiss President Guy Parmelin on Monday, October 5. Mr. Parmelin is on a three-day visit marking one year of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the four-country European Free Trade Association (EFTA), in force since October 1, 2025. Five MoUs and Letters of Intent were signed, the External Affairs Ministry said. The Migration and Mobility Partnership MoU provides multiple-entry visas of up to five years, with stays of up to six months a visit, and renewable one-year student permits. The Young Professionals agreement lets 300 people a year from each country take temporary jobs, a number that "may" rise to 500. Mr. Parmelin wants an investment protection agreement "quickly" and results on intellectual property.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India ends older investment treaties and adopts a 2015 model → TEPA, signed in March 2024 after 16 years of talks, trades tariff cuts for an investment target → it takes effect in October 2025 → mobility pacts add a people layer → Switzerland asks for investment protection and patents

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	EFTA is a four-nation free-trade bloc outside the European Union — The European Free Trade Association was created in 1960 by the Stockholm Convention; its members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein join the EU single market through the European Economic Area; Switzerland does not. TEPA is India's first trade deal with an investment target written into it — TEPA was signed on 10 March 2024 and came into force on 1 October 2025; it is India's first FTA with a European bloc. EFTA states commit to aim for \$100 billion of investment and one million direct jobs in India over 15 years. If the target is missed, India may, after consultations, temporarily rebalance its tariff concessions.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	GS2 and GS3 both reward deals that tie trade to investment and mobility — GS2 covers "Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests", and GS3 covers "Investment models". TEPA fits both, and its template may be reused.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The European Free Trade Association has four members — Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland — none of which is in the European Union. - The temporary movement of people to supply services is Mode 4 under the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services. - Section 3(d) of the Patents Act, 1970 bars patents on new forms of known substances unless they show enhanced efficacy.
ANALYSIS	For India, the mobility pacts may prove worth more than the tariff cuts — Swiss duties on most Indian industrial goods were already low, so TEPA's market-access gain for exporters was always modest. India's real advantage is a young, skilled workforce, and Switzerland's labour market is ageing. The scale is small: an Indian Express op-ed

	notes that Germany's 2022 mobility pact offers up to 3,000 job-seeker visas a year. 2. Lens — Market and State: the \$100 billion is a promise governments made for firms they cannot command — Mr. Parmelin told The Economic Times that Swiss investment “is driven by the private sector” and his government only sets framework conditions. EFTA governments cannot order a drug-maker to build a plant in India. A sensible officer treats the target as a review benchmark, not a guarantee, and fixes what investors respond to: contract enforcement, approval timelines and tax certainty. 3. Investment protection and patents are the unfinished bargain — An investment protection agreement would let Swiss firms take India to international arbitration, which is why India wants it on its new model treaty; Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday that the template is close to Cabinet approval. Stronger patent rules for Swiss drug-makers could squeeze India's generic medicines. India can offer faster patent processing and better enforcement, but should not trade away Section 3(d) or compulsory licensing.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India-EFTA TEPA exchanged market access for an investment commitment. Examine whether this model, now extended to labour mobility, serves India's development interests. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Test each part of the model (tariffs, investment, mobility, IP) and reach a verdict. 2. Introduction — TEPA is the first FTA tied to investment and jobs — \$100 billion and one million jobs in 15 years; mobility pacts at its first anniversary. 3. Body — tariff cuts are certain, investment is only a target, and mobility is the real gain — Value addition: the rebalancing clause; compare 300–500 slots with Germany's 2022 MMPA. 4. Body — investment protection and IP demands test policy space — Section 3(d) and the new model BIT. Draw a flowchart: tariff cuts → investment → jobs, with mobility and IP as side branches. 5. Conclusion — measure the investment and sign a BIT on India's template — An annual public tracker and larger mobility quotas.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Commerce Secretary, how would you make sure the TEPA investment target is tracked, not just announced? Approach: I would first agree with EFTA on what counts: fresh equity from EFTA-based firms, kept separate from reinvested earnings and money routed through third countries. An annual joint scorecard by sector and State would make progress checkable. Most effort would go into clearing obstacles for interested firms; rebalancing is the last resort.

3.2 WTO Tells India Its Director-General Can Be Depositary for the 66-Member E-commerce Pact

ISSUE THREAD **WTO and plurilateral deals** (new thread) **LENS** National interest and global commons · Strategic autonomy and partnership

STORY SO FAR Groups of WTO members have negotiated deals among themselves on e-commerce and investment facilitation. India has blocked their entry into the WTO rulebook, saying they bypass consensus.

THE NEWS Geneva/New Delhi. The World Trade Organization has told India that its Director-General (DG) may act as depositary — the official who receives and records countries' acceptances of a treaty — for the Interim Arrangements for the Agreement on Electronic Commerce (ECA), The Economic Times reported. “The absence of an explicit limitation in the WTO Agreement, considered in light of customary international law” supports this, the DG wrote; had members wanted to

bar it, “they could have explicitly done so, but they did not.” India, in a communication circulated on July 8, had argued that a pact backed by only 66 members bypasses consensus. Per a Third World Network report, attempts to place the ECA in Annex 4, the list of plurilateral agreements, failed in February and December 2025, before the 66 announced interim arrangements at MC14 in March 2026.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The Doha Round stalls → at MC11 in 2017 groups of members launch Joint Statement Initiatives, including e-commerce → 66 members finalise the ECA, but bids to add it to Annex 4 fail twice in 2025 → they announce interim arrangements at MC14 → India challenges the Secretariat’s role and the DG claims depositary power

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Plurilateral agreements join the WTO rulebook only by consensus — Under the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO (1994), Annex 4 agreements bind only members that accept them (Article II:3), and Article X:9 lets the Ministerial Conference add one “exclusively by consensus”. Annex 4 today holds the Agreement on Government Procurement and the Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft. India is an observer, not a party, to the procurement agreement. 2. The e-commerce moratorium kept electronic transmissions duty-free until 2026 — In the 1998 Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce, members agreed not to levy customs duties on electronic transmissions and set up a multilateral Work Programme on e-commerce. Ministerial Conferences renewed it repeatedly, but MC14 in Yaoundé (March 2026) could not agree an extension, so the multilateral moratorium lapsed. India has argued it costs developing countries tariff revenue.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks about the structure and mandate of international institutions — The line “Important International institutions, agencies and fora — their structure, mandate” covers WTO reform, whose central fight is now consensus versus plurilateral deals.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article X:9 of the Marrakesh Agreement allows a plurilateral agreement to be added to Annex 4 only by consensus of the Ministerial Conference. - Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement contains the Agreement on Government Procurement and the Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft. - The WTO moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions dates from the 1998 Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce. - The Joint Statement Initiative on e-commerce was launched at the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in 2017; India did not join it.
ANALYSIS	1. The dispute is about who controls the WTO’s machinery, not about e-commerce — Consensus lets any member keep a plurilateral deal out of the WTO. If the DG and Secretariat serve that deal anyway, it gets most of the institution’s support without consensus. The DG’s reasoning, that what is not forbidden is allowed, reverses the usual rule that international bodies have only the powers members give them. The counter-view: a depositary’s job is merely clerical. 2. Lens — National interest and global commons: blocking the ECA protects policy space but leaves rule-writing to others — Rules on data flows, e-payments and duties on digital goods will be written with or without India, and the 66 include most large digital economies. Staying out keeps India free to set its own data and digital-tax policy, but Indian IT exporters will then work under rules they did not shape. A thoughtful negotiator contests the procedure while tabling India’s own development-oriented text. 3. Consensus protects India but also keeps the WTO stuck — The Appellate Body has not functioned since December 2019, so other members see plurilaterals as the only way forward. A middle path exists: the 1996 Information Technology Agreement, which

	India joined, was a critical-mass deal whose tariff cuts applied to all members on a most-favoured-nation basis. Open deals that benefit non-members threaten far less than closed clubs operating outside Annex 4.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Plurilateral agreements are the WTO's only way forward." Comment, with reference to India's objection to the e-commerce agreement. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Comment — Give a reasoned opinion with evidence on both sides. 2. Introduction — 66 members built an e-commerce pact India says bypasses consensus — Note the DG's claim to be its depositary. 3. Body — plurilaterals unblock rule-making when consensus fails — Value addition: the ITA (1996) and the procurement agreement. 4. Body — outside Annex 4 they hollow out Article X:9 — Draw two paths: Annex 4 by consensus versus interim arrangements with a DG depositary. 5. Conclusion — open, MFN-based plurilaterals that enter Annex 4 by consensus — India should shape the rules, not only block them.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As India's Ambassador to the WTO, would you keep opposing the e-commerce agreement or seek a seat inside it? Approach: I would keep the procedural objection on record, since accepting a depositary outside Annex 4 weakens every future use of consensus. In parallel, I would work with the IT ministry, the Reserve Bank and industry to list which provisions India could accept and which, such as unrestricted data flows, it cannot. That keeps India's options open.

3.3 Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye Move to Deploy Forces Under the Mecca Defence Pact

ISSUE THREAD Pakistan: frictions and contacts (update 5) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · National interest and global commons

STORY SO FAR A Pakistan Navy corvette collided with an Indian warship in the Arabian Sea, and Pakistan signed drone deals with a US firm. Yet India sent its SCO coordinator to Islamabad, its first such visit in nearly two years.

THE NEWS Riyadh. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye agreed on Monday, October 5, at an emergency meeting of the Mecca Defence Alliance, to implement their collective defence commitments immediately and ensure the "rapid deployment" of agreed forces and capabilities in Saudi Arabia, under "approved arrangements" and each country's laws, said a joint statement shared by Pakistan's Foreign Ministry (Reuters, in The Hindu). The three signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement in August; under it, an armed attack on one member is an attack on all, which is the principle of collective defence. The Saudi Defence Minister cited "heinous attacks against the Kingdom and the holy sites". The trigger is Yemen: last month Iran-backed Houthis seized areas around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and have fired missiles and drones at Saudi cities.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The US-Israel war on Iran reignites the Saudi-Houthi conflict → the US leaves Iraq and Syria and guards sea lanes, not allies → Gulf states seek new guarantors: the Saudi-Pakistan pact, then the Mecca agreement in August → the Houthis seize ground at Bab el-Mandeb → the alliance moves to deploy forces

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Collective defence rests on Article 51 of the UN Charter —** Article 51 recognises the "inherent right of individual or collective self-defence" against an armed attack until the Security Council acts. NATO's Article 5 (1949) is the best-known "attack on one is attack on all" clause, yet it leaves each member to take "such action as it deems

	necessary”, so wording decides how automatic a pledge is. 2. India and Saudi Arabia run their strategic partnership through a summit-level council — The 2010 Riyadh Declaration made the ties a strategic partnership. The Strategic Partnership Council, set up in 2019 and chaired by the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince, began with two ministerial committees (political-security; economy and investment) and was widened to four in April 2025, adding defence and tourism-culture. Saudi Arabia is a major crude supplier to India.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks how other countries' policies affect India and its diaspora — The line “Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora” fits a Gulf alliance that includes Pakistan.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 51 of the UN Charter recognises the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence against an armed attack until the Security Council acts. - The Bab el-Mandeb Strait links the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, between Yemen and Djibouti and Eritrea. - Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, headquartered in Jeddah; India is not.
ANALYSIS	1. Pakistan is selling security to the Gulf, and that raises its value to Riyadh — Pakistan cannot match India’s economic weight in the Gulf, so it offers troops willing to deploy. Read literally, the pact makes an attack on Pakistan an attack on Saudi Arabia. The counter-view is strong: Riyadh has every reason to stay out of a war with India, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday that India’s newest investment treaty is with Saudi Arabia. 2. Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: deepen Gulf ties without joining any camp — India works with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel and Iran at once, and that balance is its main asset in West Asia. Staying out of security entirely would leave Pakistan as the Gulf’s only South Asian security partner. The sensible course is more bilateral defence work with Riyadh, such as exercises and co-production, so the pact stays aimed at the Houthis, while India avoids taking sides in Yemen. 3. The pact is a symptom of America stepping back, and that exposes India’s sea lanes — In The Indian Express, former police chief Anju Gupta argues that damaged bases and depleted munitions have pushed Washington to guard sea lanes rather than protect allies. For India, oil and Europe-bound containers pass Bab el-Mandeb, and many Indians work in Saudi cities the Houthis have targeted.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement reflects Gulf states hedging against a retreating United States. Analyse its implications for India’s West Asia policy. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Analyse — Separate the pact’s causes from its effects on India and link them. 2. Introduction — a three-nation defence pact with Pakistan now operates on Saudi soil — The August agreement and Monday’s rapid-deployment decision. 3. Body — the cause is a security gap left by the US — Iraq exit and sea-lane focus (Anju Gupta); value addition: NATO’s Article 5. 4. Body — Pakistan’s value rises, but Saudi stakes in India cap it, while India’s exposure is energy, shipping and diaspora — Draw a map of Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea with arrows for oil and Indian workers. 5. Conclusion — engage every Gulf capital bilaterally, including on defence, and join no

	bloc — Keep evacuation plans ready.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Joint Secretary (Gulf) in the External Affairs Ministry, what would you put in place now for Indians in Saudi Arabia if the Yemen war spreads? Approach: I would have the Embassy update registration of Indian workers by city. Sea and air evacuation routes would be planned with the Navy, Air India and the Directorate General of Shipping, drawing on Operation Rahat in Yemen in 2015. The Indian Community Welfare Fund would be cleared in advance for emergency travel.

4. Environment & Ecology

Both stories turn on things India cannot easily replace: a tribe's way of life on an island rainforest, and a big cat lost in 1952. In Great Nicobar the Supreme Court has refused to let "strategic importance" close the hearing before it begins. At Kuno the cheetah count looks healthy, but the real measure is genetic breadth and wild survival, not births. In both, the honest test of success comes years after the headline.

4.1 Supreme Court refuses to stay Great Nicobar case: culture is "a constitutionally protected fundamental right"

ISSUE THREAD Great Nicobar project and tribal rights (update 2) **LENS** Development and environment · Tradition and social justice

STORY SO FAR The Great Nicobar port, airport and township project, on Shompen and Nicobarese land, is challenged in the Calcutta High Court over gram sabha consent, reduced park buffers and a forest-rights certificate; standing was upheld in May.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 5. A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, on Monday refused the Centre's plea, reported here on September 30, to stay Calcutta High Court proceedings on the Great Nicobar Island Project, and asked the High Court to decide on its fixed dates, November 25 and 26. Attorney-General R. Venkataramani called the project, worth ₹72,000–81,000 crore as variously reported, of "immense" strategic importance, said there was "no loss of habitation" for the Shompen, and argued the tribes were "integrated". Justice Bagchi asked for "some degree of filtration" between state security and commercial interests: "Preservation of culture is a constitutionally protected fundamental right." Petitioner Meena Gupta, a former Union Environment Secretary, alleges violation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006; her counsel said tribal councils have now been impleaded, that is, made parties.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Port, airport, power plant and township planned over 166.10 sq km, per a PIB backgrounder → clearance with conditions; NGT rejects a review in April 2023 → Calcutta HC petition on forest rights and consent → HC rejects the standing objection in May → Supreme Court refuses a stay

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Article 29(1) protects the culture of any section of citizens** — Article 29(1) gives any section of citizens with a distinct language, script or culture the right to conserve it; its text is not limited to religious or linguistic minorities, so a tribe's way of life falls within it. In the Niyamgiri case, Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment and Forests (2013), the Supreme Court left a mining decision to the affected gram sabhas.
- 2. The Shompen are a PVTG protected by a 1956 Regulation and the Forest Rights Act** — The Shompen, about 237 hunter-gatherers per the PIB, are one of India's 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956, made by the President under Article 240, notifies tribal reserves and restricts outsiders' entry. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 makes the gram sabha the authority that starts recognition of forest rights and bars eviction until recognition is complete.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. One project tests two syllabus lines** — GS3 lists "Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment"; GS2 lists laws and bodies "for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections". Great Nicobar is the live case for both.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Article 29(1): any section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture has the right to conserve it.
- The five PVTGs of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Onge, Sentinelese and Shompen.
- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956 was made under Article 240.

	Under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, the gram sabha initiates the process of determining forest rights.
ANALYSIS	The Bench has moved the case from “who may sue” to “what is at stake” — The Centre fought for months on maintainability, saying a non-local could not speak for absent tribes. Once tribal councils were impleaded that objection lost force, so November will turn on consent, forest rights and culture. Counter-view: courts usually defer on strategic projects, and delay raises cost. Lens — Development and environment: “strategic” cannot be a password that ends scrutiny — “Filtration” asks which parts serve defence and which are commercial. A 14.2 million TEU transshipment terminal and a township are mainly commercial. Up to 7.11 lakh trees may fall, per the PIB, while compensatory afforestation is in Haryana, which cannot replace island rainforest. A thoughtful officer would fast-track defence assets and give the commercial core full, time-bound scrutiny. “Integrated” describes the past; it cannot replace consent about the future — The Attorney-General implies the tribes’ culture needs no special shield. Justice Bagchi’s counter-example, the Great Andamanese, did merge with the mainstream and survive as a very small community. Under Article 29(1), keeping a distinct identity is the people’s choice, not a status the State certifies.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Preservation of culture is a constitutionally protected fundamental right.” In light of the Great Nicobar project, examine how India should reconcile strategic infrastructure with the rights of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	Directive — Examine — Weigh security need against tribal rights; reach a balance. Introduction — the SC refused a stay and called culture a fundamental right — Name the Shompen and the November hearing. Strategic need does not cover every component — Separate defence assets from the commercial port and township. Law already fixes the rules of consent — Article 29(1), the 1956 Regulation, the FRA; value addition: Niyamgiri (2013). Ecological loss cannot be offset in Haryana — Draw a flowchart: clearance → FRA certificate → gram sabha consent → court review. Conclusion — build with consent, not around it — Phase the commercial core; publish monitoring.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Chief Secretary of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, how do you prepare for the November hearing? Approach: I would check that each gram sabha resolution was taken in a language and setting the community understood, with records. For the Shompen I would document consultation through their tribal council and anthropologists. I would show the court a clear split between defence and commercial parts. An honest record defends better than a forceful one.

4.2 Five cubs at Kuno start a Botswana lineage; India’s cheetah count reaches 60

ISSUE THREAD Species recovery and captive breeding (update 2) **LENS** Development and environment · Innovation and safeguards

STORY SO FAR India’s species-recovery work runs on two tracks: captive-bred Great Indian Bustards, about 140 left in the wild, are being released in the Desert National Park, while Project Cheetah began with eight Namibian cheetahs in 2022.

THE NEWS Bhopal, October 5. KJP21, a 32-month-old female cheetah born in India, gave birth to five cubs at Kuno National Park on Monday. Their father came from Botswana, making them the first Botswana-lineage cheetahs born in India, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said. India now has 60 cheetahs, 41 born in the country. KJP21 is the third India-born female to breed, after Mukhi and KGP12, which had four cubs last month. Nine Botswana cheetahs, six females and three males, reached Kuno in February 2026, after eight from Namibia (2022) and 12 from South Africa (2023). Talks began in December 2024; Botswana agreed after studying India's Action Plan for Cheetah Reintroduction, and the transfer needed CITES export permits. A new lineage means descent from a distinct source population, which widens the gene pool.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Cheetah declared extinct in India (1952) → Namibian and South African founders (2022-23) → India-born generations from a narrow founder pool → nine Botswana cheetahs arrive (February 2026) → first Botswana-lineage cubs; count reaches 60

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Project Cheetah is an intercontinental reintroduction run by the NTCA — Project Cheetah began on 17 September 2022 with the release of eight Namibian cheetahs in Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh. It is implemented by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, a statutory body under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, with the Wildlife Institute of India. Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, also in Madhya Pradesh, is the second site. 2. The cheetah is Vulnerable globally and was lost to India in 1952 — The IUCN Red List classifies the cheetah as Vulnerable; the Asiatic subspecies, surviving only in Iran, is Critically Endangered. The cheetah is in CITES Appendix I, so any cross-border transfer needs export and import permits. India declared it extinct in 1952.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Reintroduction is a ready conservation case — GS3 lists "Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation". Project Cheetah lets one answer cover translocation, genetic diversity, habitat capacity and conservation diplomacy.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Kuno National Park, the first site of Project Cheetah, is in Madhya Pradesh. ● Project Cheetah is implemented by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, a statutory body under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. ● The cheetah is Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and listed in CITES Appendix I; the Asiatic cheetah is Critically Endangered. ● Cheetahs came to India from Namibia (2022), South Africa (2023) and Botswana (2026).
ANALYSIS	1. Sixty cheetahs is a count; genetic breadth is the real measure — The 41 India-born cheetahs descend from a few dozen founders, so relatives will increasingly breed with each other, and inbreeding lowers survival and fertility. That is why a Botswana bloodline matters more than five extra animals. Births are also the easier half of recovery; adult survival and wild breeding are the real test. 2. Lens — Innovation and safeguards: reintroduction is an experiment that must keep learning — No country had moved a large carnivore across continents to restore a lost species, so quarantine, collaring and release protocols are being tested in real time. The safeguards are the Action Plan, veterinary checks, CITES permits and the Botswana team's visit to Kuno and Gandhi Sagar. A careful officer would publish mortality data openly, because an experiment that hides failures cannot correct them. 3. Conservation diplomacy helps, but dependence is a risk — President Murmu's November 2025 visit to Botswana gave the transfer political push. Yet three source countries in four years show the project still needs imports to stay viable. Until India-born animals grow without fresh founders, this is a managed population, not a restored species.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Evaluate whether Project Cheetah is moving from translocation to a self-sustaining population, with reference to the first Botswana-lineage births at Kuno. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Evaluate — Judge progress against clear criteria and give a verdict. 2. Introduction — 60 cheetahs, 41 India-born, a new bloodline — One line on Project Cheetah since 2022. 3. Breeding and new bloodlines show progress — Three India-born females have bred; draw a timeline: Namibia 2022 → South Africa 2023 → Botswana 2026. 4. Self-sustaining means wild survival without imports — Value addition: IUCN Vulnerable status; inbreeding and habitat limits remain. 5. Conclusion — promising, not yet self-sustaining — Measure adult survival and spread to Gandhi Sagar.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Field Director of Kuno, villagers say a cheetah killed their goats. What do you do? Approach: I would pay compensation quickly, because delay turns tolerance into hostility. I would share collar alerts with village volunteers so herders can move livestock in time, and hire villagers as trackers so the cheetah brings income as well as loss. Local goodwill is the habitat no fence can replace.

5. Health & Life Sciences

Today's story is about the State knowing what it governs: who makes the injection that goes into a vein. The Constitution puts drug licensing mainly with the States while the risk crosses every border. The answer is not to choose between Centre and States but to give the Centre the standards and the States the means, and courts are now pushing both.

5.1 Centre weighs central licensing of all sterile drugs after courts limit CDSCO inspectors' powers

ISSUE THREAD Spurious drugs and regulator reform (update 5) **LENS** Centre and States · Innovation and safeguards

STORY SO FAR Police traced counterfeit cancer and antibiotic injections into more than 90 hospitals, and Delhi seized 481 fake rabies vaccine units. The CDSCO proposed centralising sterile-drug licensing; the NHRC sought national drug registration with QR track-and-trace.

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Centre is considering a legal opinion before bringing all sterile drug products under the Central Licence Approving Authority (CLAA) scheme, The Economic Times reports. Per ET, the Drugs Consultative Committee, which advises the Centre and States, discussed the proposal at a recent meeting and recommended a sub-committee to examine feasibility. The trigger, ET reports, is the Supreme Court's dismissal of the Centre's challenge to a Himachal Pradesh High Court ruling of June 22 that a CDSCO drugs inspector has no independent enforcement power under Chapter IV of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, which governs manufacture, sale and distribution; executive powers there "ordinarily vest in the State Government". The CLAA now covers only large-volume parenterals (big intravenous fluid bags), sera and vaccines, recombinant DNA, cell and gene therapy products and xenografts. States license small-volume injectables and eye drops, a framework the proposal calls fragmented.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 1940 Act leaves most manufacturing licences to States → the CLAA covers only a few high-risk categories → contaminated and spurious injectables expose uneven State inspection → courts confine CDSCO enforcement under Chapter IV → the Centre weighs central licensing of all sterile drugs

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 divides drug control between Centre and States — Drugs and poisons are Entry 19 of the Concurrent List. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India, approves new drugs and clinical trials and regulates imports; State licensing authorities license manufacture and sale. The Drugs Technical Advisory Board (Section 5) advises on technical matters and the Drugs Consultative Committee (Section 7) secures uniform administration. 2. Revised Schedule M sets modern manufacturing standards — Schedule M of the Drugs Rules, 1945 prescribes Good Manufacturing Practices. A revised Schedule M, notified in December 2023, moved Indian standards closer to WHO-GMP by requiring a pharmaceutical quality system and quality risk management, with a longer compliance window for smaller units.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Drug quality is a test of health governance — GS2 lists "Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health". Patient safety, a court ruling and Centre-State powers together make a ready governance case.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	"Drugs and poisons" is Entry 19 of the Concurrent List. - The Drugs Technical Advisory Board is constituted under Section 5, and the Drugs Consultative Committee under Section 7, of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. - Chapter IV of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 deals with the manufacture, sale and distribution of drugs and cosmetics.

	● Schedule M of the Drugs Rules, 1945 lays down Good Manufacturing Practices for pharmaceutical products.
ANALYSIS	1. The Centre has more responsibility than power, and a new rule may not close the gap — The High Court said the Act lets the Centre prosecute only under listed provisions such as Sections 26A, 26B and 33P. Central licensing would change who approves a licence, but inspection and prosecution would largely stay with States. That is why a legal opinion comes first: amending the Drugs Rules may not suffice, and the Act itself may need change. Centralising approval without enforcement adds paperwork, not safety. 2. Lens — Centre and States: one standard for high-risk drugs, shared enforcement — An injectable made in one State reaches hospitals everywhere, so weak inspection anywhere becomes a national risk; that argues for one standard. But the CDSCO lacks the inspectors to replace State regulators, who know their units. The sensible judgement is central licensing for sterile products, joint inspections and a shared database of failed samples, not a takeover. 3. Sterile products deserve risk-based regulation — A tablet meets the gut's defences; an injection or eye drop enters the body directly, so one microbial lapse can harm many patients. Risk-based regulation puts the strictest checks where harm is greatest. The counter-view is cost: small makers already facing revised Schedule M may exit, causing shortages of cheap injectables. A phased timeline with technical help answers that better than exemption.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Critically examine whether central licensing of all sterile drugs can fix India's drug-quality problem, given the States' role under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh the gains of central licensing against its legal and capacity limits; conclude. 2. Introduction — courts have confined CDSCO enforcement while sterile-drug failures persist — Cite the Himachal HC ruling and the DCC proposal, as ET reports. 3. Central licensing gives one standard for the riskiest products — Value addition: revised Schedule M (December 2023). 4. Licensing without enforcement power is not enough — Chapter IV powers rest with States; the Act may need amendment. 5. Cooperative regulation is the workable middle — Draw a flowchart: central licence → joint inspection → shared failed-sample database → State prosecution. 6. Conclusion — centralise standards, share enforcement — Fund State capacity alongside the reform.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a State Drugs Controller, eye drops from a unit in your State are reported contaminated elsewhere. What do you do? Approach: I would recall the batch and suspend production pending inspection, since Chapter IV powers lie with the State. I would inspect jointly with CDSCO so findings carry weight everywhere, alert other controllers, and prosecute if samples fail. Fast, open action protects patients and the regulator's credibility.

6. Science & Technology

This year's Medicine Nobel rewards a question nobody would have funded as a priority: why does a single-celled alga react to light so fast? Three decades later the answer is a switch that turns chosen brain cells on and off, and trials to restore sight. The lesson for India is about patient money for basic research, not one more gadget.

6.1 Medicine Nobel 2026 Rewards Optogenetics, the Light Switch for Chosen Neurons

ISSUE THREAD Frontier science and India (new thread) **LENS** Innovation and safeguards · Short-term relief and long-term reform

STORY SO FAR Nobel science prizes are announced each October. Darpan tracks them, and other basic-science breakthroughs, for what they teach about India's own research funding.

THE NEWS Stockholm, October 5. The Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet awarded the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine to American Karl Deisseroth (Stanford University) and Germans Peter Hegemann (Humboldt University, Berlin) and Georg Nagel (University of Würzburg) for "discoveries concerning light-gated ion channels and optogenetics" (ET). Optogenetics switches chosen nerve cells on or off with light, after giving them the gene for a light-sensitive protein. In the 1990s Hegemann found that light rapidly triggered an electric signal in the alga *Chlamydomonas*; in 2000 he approached Nagel, and they identified two light-gated channels, channelrhodopsin-1 and -2. The second opened within 0.2 milliseconds, letting positive ions into a cell (The Hindu). Deisseroth's team reported its first major result with rat neurons in 2005 and in 2007 moved live mice's whiskers with light through a fibre-optic cable. The prize, 12 million Swedish crowns, is shared.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Hegemann asks why an alga senses light so fast (1990s) → with Nagel he finds channelrhodopsins, at once light sensor and ion gate → Deisseroth puts the gene into neurons (2005) → light drives chosen circuits in live mice (2007) → brain-circuit maps, vision trials and the Nobel

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. An ion channel is a gated pore; channelrhodopsin is a gate that light opens — A neuron fires when ions such as sodium rush through protein pores in its membrane, called ion channels, which open only on a trigger such as a voltage change or a chemical. Channelrhodopsin opens under blue light. Because one gene codes it, the gene can be placed in a chosen type of neuron so that only those cells answer to light. 2. The ANRF Act, 2023 created India's apex research-funding body — The Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023 set up the ANRF to fund research in universities, colleges and laboratories, and repealed the Science and Engineering Research Board Act, 2008, merging SERB into it. Its Governing Board is chaired by the Prime Minister and its administrative department is the Department of Science and Technology.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 asks for science developments and their applications — The syllabus line is "Science and Technology — developments and their applications and effects in everyday life". Nobel prizes are a Prelims staple; Mains asks how India builds research capacity.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The Medicine Nobel is awarded by the Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet; Physics and Chemistry by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. - Channelrhodopsins are light-gated ion channels first found in the green alga <i>Chlamydomonas</i>; channelrhodopsin-2 opens under blue light and admits positive ions. - Francis Crick proposed the central dogma in 1958; Temin and Baltimore reported reverse transcriptase, which copies RNA into DNA, in retroviruses in 1970. - Har Gobind Khorana shared the 1968 Medicine Nobel for interpreting the

	genetic code.
ANALYSIS	1. The payoff came from a question about an alga, not a brief to cure brain disease — Hegemann wanted to know how a pond organism senses light; the brain tool came later. The same day The Hindu reports bacterial enzymes (DRT3b) that build DNA with no template, testing Crick's central dogma; CRISPR too came from studying how bacteria fight viruses. A funder demanding a named application up front would have missed all three. 2. Lens — Innovation and safeguards: a switch for brain cells needs rules before the clinic — Every human use is a gene therapy plus a device. The gain is real: trials aim to restore some sight in people blinded by retinitis pigmentosa. The risks are the long-term safety of the inserted gene, consent to permanent change, and misuse of a tool that can alter behaviour. A sensible regulator approves it disease by disease on trial evidence, neither banning nor rushing it. 3. India's gap is not talent but patient money — Indian labs already use optogenetics; TIFR's Vidita Vaidya told The Indian Express it "completely changed the scale" of discovery. The prize-winning path took two decades, while short grants reward quick outputs. The ANRF's test is whether it backs a few open-ended questions for a decade, accepting that most fail.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Optogenetics, born of curiosity about an alga, has won the 2026 Medicine Nobel. Examine what it teaches India about funding basic research. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Probe the lesson with evidence and judge funding design. 2. Introduction — from a pond alga to a light switch for neurons — Define optogenetics and note that it grew from an unplanned 1990s question. 3. Body — breakthroughs arrive by detour, so funding must tolerate uncertainty — Cite the alga path, DRT3b and CRISPR; draw a timeline: 1990s alga, 2005 neurons, 2007 mice, today's trials. 4. Body — India needs long, stable grants — Value addition: the ANRF Act, 2023 merged SERB into a PM-chaired foundation; argue for decade-long grants. 5. Body — the counter-view: missions matter too — Scarce money needs targeting; ring-fence a share for curiosity. 6. Conclusion — patience is the cheapest research subsidy — A ring-fenced ANRF window is how India grows its own optogenetics.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As head of a research funding body, a Minister asks why public money should go to scientists studying algae. What would you say? Approach: This year's Medicine Nobel began as exactly such an algae project, which no applied programme would have commissioned. I would propose a small, fixed portfolio of long-term open-ended grants, judged on scientific quality and reported publicly. Most money stays with mission-mode work, so the basic-science share is a deliberate bet, not a leak.

7. Society

India has never measured how its people get to work, and the first answer is humbling: on two wheels or on foot, rarely by public transport. The gender cut is the real finding. Where buses exist, women use them three times as much as men, which makes the bus a question of women's work, not only of traffic.

7.1 First National Household Travel Survey finds two-wheelers carry 43% of workers, buses carry women

ISSUE THREAD Urban mobility and how India commutes (new thread) **LENS** Growth and equity · Development and environment

STORY SO FAR Transport planning has relied on city-level studies. The Railways asked the National Statistics Office for a dedicated household travel survey, run in the NSS 80th round from July 2025.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 5. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released India's first National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), conducted from July 2025 to June 2026 among 20 lakh people in 14,274 villages and 10,377 urban blocks; trips under 1 km were not recorded. Per ET's report of the survey, 42.6% of workers commute mainly by two-wheeler, 28.3% walk, 10.7% cycle, 6.7% take a bus and 3% drive a car; metro, suburban rail, monorail and trams carry 5% of urban workers, but 20.7% in Maharashtra, 16.5% in West Bengal and 14.4% in Delhi. The Indian Express finds that only 9% use public transport to work, and that 21.7% of urban women travelling over 1 km take a bus, against 6.9% of urban men; the share is 46.8% in Kerala and 41.1% in Tamil Nadu. A worker spends ₹785 a month on commuting (urban ₹1,044, rural ₹612).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Cities outgrow their public transport → households buy two-wheelers → planners lack national trip data → the NSO runs a travel survey in the NSS 80th round → results show thin public transport and women reliant on buses

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. MoSPI and the National Statistics Office run India's official surveys — MoSPI was formed in 1999 by merging the Department of Statistics and the Department of Programme Implementation. In 2019 the Central Statistics Office and the National Sample Survey Office were merged into the National Statistics Office (NSO) within the ministry. National Sample Survey rounds are numbered; the NHTS was part of the 80th round, which also covers domestic tourism and health. 2. The National Urban Transport Policy, 2006 set the principle of moving people, not vehicles — The Union government's National Urban Transport Policy of 2006 asked cities to give priority to public transport and non-motorised modes such as walking and cycling, and to allocate road space by people carried rather than vehicles.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Urbanisation and women's mobility are core GS1 themes — GS1 lists "Urbanization, their problems and their remedies" and the "role of women". The NHTS supplies the first national numbers for both.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The National Statistics Office was formed in 2019 by merging the Central Statistics Office and the National Sample Survey Office, under MoSPI. - The first National Household Travel Survey was conducted as part of the 80th round of the National Sample Survey. - SDG target 11.2 calls for access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all by 2030. - The National Urban Transport Policy, 2006 prioritises public transport and non-motorised transport in cities.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Growth and equity: the bus is a women's employment policy — Urban women take the bus three times as often as men because they less often own or ride a two-wheeler and more often hold low-paid jobs near home. A fare or a missing route

	therefore decides whether a woman can take a job at all. The survey seems to support the free-bus schemes of several southern States, where women's bus use is highest. It is not proof, since high bus use there may partly result from those schemes; frequency and safety matter as much as fares. 2. India's commuting is short, cheap and private, which is a warning — Most workers reach work within half an hour because many live near it. As cities spread, trips will lengthen, and without better buses that means more motorcycles, congestion and road deaths. Metro use above 14% in Maharashtra, West Bengal and Delhi shows that where rail exists, people use it. 3. The data is the reform — City plans relied on local studies that could not be compared; a national survey lets funds go where bus dependence is high and service thin. Its limit is that trips under 1 km were not recorded, which hides much of the walking that poor and women commuters do.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	In the light of the first National Household Travel Survey, discuss the link between urban public transport and women's participation in work. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Discuss — Explain the link from several sides and reach a view. 2. Introduction — India's first national commuting data — Two lines on the NHTS and its scale. 3. Two-wheelers dominate and public transport is thin — Cite 42.6% two-wheeler and 9% public transport; value addition: NUTP 2006. 4. Women depend on buses, so bus access shapes their work — Use the 21.7% versus 6.9% contrast and the southern States' figures; draw a bar chart of women's bus share by State. 5. Fare-free schemes help, but frequency, safety and last-mile links decide outcomes — Note the risk of reading correlation as cause. 6. Conclusion — plan by people moved and fund buses as social infrastructure — One line.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Municipal Commissioner of a mid-sized city, how would you use the NHTS findings? Approach: I would compare our women's bus share and average commute time with the State's, and map where bus routes do not reach employment clusters. I would shift money from road-widening to frequent buses, safe stops and footpaths. Finally, I would ask the State for district-level survey data so that routes can be planned on evidence rather than complaints.

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 — Three Bodies Moved Before the Police Came: The Forest Officer Asked to Stand by His Staff

SCENARIO The Indian Express (6 October) reports that a Karnataka CID probe has questioned the forest department's account of the killing of three alleged poachers in Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary on 15 August. The department said the men were armed and fired first. The CID, opposing anticipatory bail to three forest staff, cites autopsies showing close-range shotgun wounds, a crime-scene video with no weapon near the dead, bodies removed, the scene not preserved and the police not told promptly, all against a 1991 order that protects forest staff who open fire only if conditions and reporting norms are followed. A survivor says the men were looking for lost cattle. Imagine you are the Deputy Conservator in charge of the division. Your staff face real danger from armed gangs, the Minister has publicly backed them, and your guards say they will stop night patrols if the department abandons them.

Q1. Identify the values in conflict and the stakeholders whose interests you must weigh.

Q2. What will you do about the inquiry, the accused staff and the morale of the rest?

Q3. What lasting changes would you propose so that such a case cannot recur?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. Loyalty to staff is not loyalty to a version of events** — The officer owes his guards legal help, fair process and the presumption of innocence. He does not owe them a cover story. The right to life of the three dead men and their families' right to the truth stand above the department's reputation.
- 2. Co-operate fully, record honestly** — Hand over all records, weapon issue registers and videos to the CID without delay, and report in writing every breach of the 1991 norms that the file shows. Arrange legal aid for the accused staff, and move them from field duty until the inquiry ends, as a neutral step and not a punishment.
- 3. Protect morale by protecting the rules** — Tell the guards plainly that the immunity they rely on depends on following the reporting norms, so honest reporting is their own shield. Keep night patrols going with police support in sensitive areas, and visit the bereaved families as a public servant, not as a party.
- 4. Conclusion — fix the system** — Propose body cameras, scene-preservation drills, immediate police intimation and an independent magisterial inquiry for every firing, plus regular dialogue with fringe villages on grazing and cattle. Enforcement that the forest's neighbours trust is safer for both guards and wildlife.

Case 2 — “I Am Applying for the First Time”: The Officer Told to Restore Voters Through a False Declaration

SCENARIO In The Indian Express (6 October), former Chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi points out that the Election Commission has ordered a drive to bring back eligible voters wrongly deleted during the Special Intensive Revision, but through Form 6, the “Application Form for New Voters”. Its declaration reads “I am applying for inclusion in Electoral Roll for the first time”, and the form warns that a false declaration is punishable under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. He argues that officials who push people to sign it may be abetting an offence. Imagine you are an Electoral Registration Officer. An elderly couple who have voted for thirty years have been dropped from the roll. Your Booth Level Officer says they will not sign Form 6 because it is untrue, and the target review is tomorrow.

Q1. What is the ethical problem in asking a citizen to sign a declaration both of you know to be false?

Q2. How will you restore the couple's vote without breaking the law or ignoring instructions?

Q3. What will you report upward, and to whom?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **A lawful end does not cure an untrue means** — Restoring a wrongly deleted voter is right, but the State cannot ask a citizen to sign a falsehood to get it. An officer who presses a false declaration teaches the citizen that the law is a formality, and exposes both to criminal risk.
2. **Use every honest route that already exists** — Accept Form 6 with a written note, signed by the applicant and countersigned by you, that the person is seeking restoration and was on the earlier roll, citing the old EPIC number and roll entry. Verify eligibility on the record and in person, and decide promptly.
3. **Dissent in writing, not in silence** — Write to the District Election Officer and the Chief Electoral Officer, pointing out the conflict between the restoration drive and the Form 6 declaration, and seek a written clarification or a separate restoration form. Record that the target will be met only by lawful means.
4. **Conclusion — the citizen's vote and honesty both matter** — Targets are tools, not ends. An officer who restores votes truthfully, and flags a faulty form, serves both the franchise and the integrity of the roll.

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
e-Sanjeevani — the national telemedicine service	e-Sanjeevani is the Union Health Ministry's telemedicine platform, developed by C-DAC, Mohali. It links Ayushman Arogya Mandir spokes to doctors at hubs, and also runs online OPDs for patients at home. Per a PIB release of 6 October, it crossed 50 crore teleconsultations on 15 September 2026, across all 36 States and UTs, and has been integrated with the ERSS-112 emergency number.
First international cargo from Upper Assam since 1947 — National Waterway 2	Per a PIB release of 5 October, a barge carrying methanol left Bogibeel terminal, Dibrugarh, for Bangladesh, travelling about 768 km on National Waterway 2 (the Brahmaputra, Sadiya to Dhubri) and then the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route. National waterways are declared under the National Waterways Act, 2016 and developed by the Inland Waterways Authority of India under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
CPCB flying squads against stubble burning — CAQM directions	On directions of the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas, the Central Pollution Control Board has deployed flying squads in 34 districts (18 in Punjab, 16 in Haryana) from 1 October to 30 November (The Hindu; PIB, 5 October). The CAQM is a statutory body under the CAQM Act, 2021; the CPCB was constituted under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.
Mineral Exchange Rules, 2026 — Indian Bureau of Mines	The Indian Bureau of Mines, under the Ministry of Mines, has invited applications from companies to set up a mineral exchange under the Mineral Exchange Rules, 2026, notified in June for administering mineral exchanges and market participants (ET). The rules are framed under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. The IBM is headquartered at Nagpur.
PESO and semiconductor gases	ET reports that gases critical to chip-making — helium, silane, phosphine, diborane and arsine — are not made in India, and that industry wants Indian rules aligned with the global SEMI standards. Safety of hazardous gases is regulated by the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), headquartered at Nagpur under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade; it administers laws such as the Explosives Act, 1884 and the Petroleum Act, 1934.
GST Council — 57th meeting scheduled for 8 October	The Indian Express reports that the GST Council's 57th meeting has been moved to Thursday, 8 October, and will focus on process reforms; it is the first since the rate overhaul announced in September 2025. The Council is a constitutional body under Article 279A (101st Amendment, 2016), chaired by the Union Finance Minister; decisions need three-fourths of the weighted votes, the Centre's vote counting for one-third and the States' together for two-thirds.
Carrying capacity — Kainchi Dham and Uttarakhand	Carrying capacity is the largest number of visitors a place can hold without degrading its environment, infrastructure and residents' lives. The Indian Express reports crowds at Kainchi Dham (Nainital district) after a film, and a State planning document that puts Uttarakhand's tourist inflow at about 300% of its resident population, against 185% in Himachal Pradesh. The National Green Tribunal has on record a carrying-capacity study of Kedarnath, Hemkund Sahib, Gangotri and Yamunotri.
Great Indian Bustard — the 'Godawan' and the power-line order	A Hindu editorial ('Bird islands') recalls that Salim Ali wanted the Great Indian Bustard as the national bird, but the Indian Board for Wildlife chose the peacock. In 2021 the Supreme Court ordered power lines in the bird's priority habitat to be laid underground, but after objections from the power and renewable-energy sector it withdrew that blanket order in 2024 and, in December 2025, confined the strict rules to smaller 'revised priority areas'. The bird is called

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	Godawan in Rajasthan; two males were released this week in Desert National Park.
Three new Supreme Court judges — Article 124	The Centre has appointed the Chief Justices of the Gujarat, Delhi and Telangana High Courts (Justices Sunita Agarwal, Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Aparesh Kumar Singh) as Supreme Court judges, taking working strength to 37 against a sanctioned 38 (The Hindu; PIB). Judges are appointed by the President under Article 124(2); Parliament fixes their number by law under Article 124(1), through the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956.
Census Rules, 1990 — freezing administrative boundaries	Rule 8(iv) of the Census Rules, 1990 requires State governments to freeze the boundaries of districts, tehsils and towns from the date the Census Commissioner intimates. The Hindu reports that the Supreme Court will hear on 9 October whether States can redraw municipal wards during Census 2027. The Census is conducted under the Census Act, 1948, by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India under the Home Ministry.
Legislative privilege and free speech — Articles 105 and 194	Articles 105 and 194 give Parliament and State legislatures their powers, privileges and immunities. In Pandit M S M Sharma v. Sri Krishna Sinha (the Searchlight case, 1959, 4:1) the Supreme Court held that privilege under Article 194(3) prevails over Article 19(1)(a); Special Reference No. 1 of 1964 (Keshav Singh) held that courts can examine privilege detentions. A seven-judge Bench has a long-pending reference arising from a 2003 Tamil Nadu Assembly resolution against journalists (IE, TH).
Size of the Union Council of Ministers — Article 75(1A)	Under Article 75(1A), added by the 91st Amendment, 2003, the Council of Ministers may not exceed 15% of the Lok Sabha's strength, so it can have at most 81 ministers (ET). Under Article 75(5), a minister who is not a member of either House for six consecutive months ceases to be a minister (IE, on two Union ministers whose Rajya Sabha terms end on 25 November).
Shakti helicopter engine — HAL and Safran	The Shakti engine is a joint Indo-French programme of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Safran Helicopter Engines (IE). It powers the Advanced Light Helicopter Dhruv and the Light Combat Helicopter Prachand. The Indian Express reports a second production line at HAL's Koraput division in Odisha.
Choosing the UN Secretary-General — Article 97	Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. The Council's recommendation needs 9 of 15 votes with no veto from any of the five permanent members (ET). António Guterres's second term ends on 31 December 2026.

Source note: All items are drawn from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Economic Times* (Delhi Editions) — 6 October 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 2.2 (10 marks, 150 words)

Does the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 dilute the States' taxing powers recognised by the Supreme Court in 2024?

Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)

Introduction — In Mineral Area Development Authority v. SAIL (2024), a nine-judge bench held 8:1 that royalty is not a tax and that States may tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing land. Section 9D of the 2026 Act bars such levies except on the Centre's terms and cancels uncollected dues.

- 1. On land, the dilution is real** — Entry 49 cannot be curtailed through Union List Entry 54. Minerals give 85% of Jharkhand's and 80% of Odisha's non-tax revenue.
- 2. On mineral rights, Parliament has room** — Entry 50 is expressly subject to Parliament's limits, and the Centre rightly argues that overlapping levies make Indian minerals costly.
- 3. Cancelling past dues is the weakest part** — It rewards firms that did not pay, raising an Article 14 objection; Karnataka, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala plan to challenge it.

Conclusion — The Act dilutes the 2024 verdict on land and on past dues. Way forward: a jointly agreed formula for future levies, on the GST Council model, leaving past dues alone.

Draw this: Flowchart in the body: State List Entry 23 → subject to Union List Entry 54 → State List Entries 49 (tax on land) and 50 (tax on mineral rights, subject to Parliament), each marked "regulate" or "tax".

(159 words)

11.2 GS1 corner — Geography: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands: peaks of a drowned mountain chain

Today's peg: 4.1

- 1. The islands are the summits of a submerged mountain range** — They continue the Arakan Yoma of Myanmar southwards into the Bay of Bengal, rising from the sea floor between the Bay and the Andaman Sea. Barren Island, east of the Andamans, is India's only active volcano.
- 2. Channels divide the chain into groups** — The Ten Degree Channel separates the Andaman group from the Nicobar group. Great Nicobar is the largest and southernmost Nicobar island, and Indira Point at its southern tip is India's southernmost point.

Prelims facts

- The Ten Degree Channel separates the Andaman Islands from the Nicobar Islands.
- Barren Island in the Andaman Sea is India's only active volcano.
- Saddle Peak in North Andaman is the highest point of the Andaman Islands.

11.3 Places in news — mark them on your atlas

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
Great Nicobar Island	Southernmost island of the Nicobar group, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, between the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea; Indonesia's Sumatra lies to the south-east.	Supreme Court refused to stay Calcutta High Court hearings on the Great Nicobar project (4.1).	It holds Campbell Bay and Galathea National Parks; the Shompen, a PVTG, live here.
Kuno National	Sheopur and Morena districts, northern	Five Botswana-lineage cubs	First site of Project Cheetah

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
Park	Madhya Pradesh, on the Kuno river, a tributary of the Chambal.	born; India's cheetah count reaches 60 (4.2).	(2022); Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, also in Madhya Pradesh, is the second.
Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary	Southern Karnataka, along the Cauvery river where it borders Tamil Nadu.	CID questions the forest department's account of three killings on August 15 (Case 1; IE p5).	The Cauvery rises at Talakaveri in Kodagu, Karnataka, and enters the Bay of Bengal in Tamil Nadu.
Botswana	Landlocked country of southern Africa, bordered by South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia.	Source of the nine cheetahs whose lineage produced Kuno's new cubs (4.2).	The Okavango Delta, an inland delta in Botswana's Kalahari, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

11.4 Ethics term of the day (GS4 Section A): Gandhi on means and ends

Meaning — Gandhi held that means and ends cannot be separated: an impure means corrupts even a good end. For a public servant, a right outcome reached through deceit or coercion is not a right outcome.

In today's news — In Case 2 an ERO is told to restore wrongly deleted voters by having them sign Form 6's false "first time" declaration. In Case 1 loyalty to forest staff cannot extend to a cover story.

Use in an answer — Use it where a case study tempts a shortcut to a good goal: name the principle, then propose a lawful route and report the defect upward.

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.

When a country decides to count something properly for the first time, the early figures often bring bad news. A disease that was once recorded only when patients happened to reach a large hospital is suddenly reported from clinics, laboratories and small towns. The totals rise, and a hasty reader concludes that the illness is spreading. Often it is only being seen.

This matters because public money follows numbers. A health department that cannot say how many people fall ill each year, at what age or at what stage, can only guess where to place screening centres, how many specialists to train or which drugs to stock. Estimates built from a few well-run districts may describe those districts well and the rest of the country poorly. Planning on such figures is like steering by a map drawn for a different road.

Better counting, however, carries its own duties. Reports must use the same definitions everywhere, or one region's rise will merely reflect a broader definition. Doctors and laboratories need training and time to comply, and the record of a person's illness must be guarded, because people who fear exposure will avoid being counted at all. A system that collects data carelessly may end up with less of it.

The first years of honest counting therefore call for patience from those who read the figures. A rising line may be a sign that the system is working. The real test comes later, when the counts are steady and complete enough to show whether earlier detection and better treatment are actually saving lives.

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

- (a) Diseases are spreading faster than governments admit.
- (b) Complete and careful reporting of illness is needed for sound planning, even if early figures look alarming.
- (c) Health planning should rely on well-run districts as models for the country.
- (d) Privacy concerns make disease reporting impossible.

Q2. The author's warning that people "will avoid being counted at all" rests on the assumption that

- (a) doctors deliberately hide cases from authorities.
- (b) laboratories cannot be trained to report.

- (c) people's willingness to be recorded depends on trust that their data will be protected.
- (d) privacy laws forbid the collection of health data.

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

- (a) A rise in recorded cases soon after reporting begins does not by itself prove that a disease is increasing.
- (b) Recorded cases will fall as soon as reporting becomes complete.
- (c) Estimates from a few districts are always wrong.
- (d) Common definitions matter only for rare diseases.

Reasoning and quantitative aptitude

Q4. An urban worker spends ₹1,044 a month on commuting and a rural worker ₹612. How much more does the urban worker spend in a year?

- (a) ₹4,184
- (b) ₹5,184
- (c) ₹5,284
- (d) ₹6,184

Q5. Five cubs A, B, C, D and E were born one after another. B was born after A but before C. D was born last. E was born immediately after A. Which cub was born third?

- (a) E
- (b) C
- (c) B
- (d) A

Answer key and explanations

Q1: (b) The passage defends better counting and warns against misreading early rises. Option 0 is the hasty reading it rejects; option 2 is criticised as a poor map.

Q2: (c) The warning links fear of exposure to avoidance, so it assumes trust drives participation. Options 0, 1 and 3 are not stated.

Q3: (a) The passage says a rising line may only show the system working. Option 2 overstates: estimates describe the rest of the country "poorly", not always wrongly.

Q4: (b) Monthly difference = $1,044 - 612 = ₹432$; yearly = $432 \times 12 = ₹5,184$.

Q5: (c) D is 5th. E immediately follows A, and B comes after A, so B also comes after E; C follows B. The only order is A, E, B, C, D, so B is third.

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 B • 6 min read

What a society is willing to wait for tells you what it truly values.

Themes: Time horizons in governance, science and trust • Slow to build, quick to destroy: the asymmetry of value • Who is asked to wait, and for whose benefit

I will confess an impatience at the start. Like most people preparing for this examination, I want results I can see: a mark, a rank, an answer that is clearly right. Most of public life works the same way. Budgets are annual, elections come every five years, and news cycles last a day. Yet the things I most depend on, a teacher's patience, a trustworthy institution, the forest that keeps a river running, were built over spans much longer than any of these clocks. That gap is the subject of this essay. My argument is that a society shows its real values less in what it says than in what it agrees to wait for, and that the hardest part of public judgment is telling a wise wait from a convenient delay.

Begin with knowledge, where the case for waiting is clearest. In *A Mathematician's Apology* (1940) G. H. Hardy took a certain pride in the uselessness of number theory, which he believed would never serve any practical end. Within forty years the properties of prime numbers had become the basis of public-key cryptography, and today they protect every online payment. Einstein's general theory of relativity (1915) looked like pure speculation about the universe; satellite navigation now works only because engineers correct the satellites' clocks for the effects that theory predicted. Abraham Flexner gave the argument its name in 1939, in an essay called "The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge". India learnt the same lesson in its own way. When the first sounding rocket rose from Thumba in November 1963, with parts reportedly carried to the launch site by bicycle, Vikram Sarabhai was defending the programme as a means of serving the real problems of a poor country, not as prestige. Chandrayaan-3 touched down sixty years later. A society that funds only what pays back within a budget cycle will never get there.

Trust follows the same rule, with one cruel difference: it is slow to build and quick to destroy. Robert Putnam's study of Italy's regional governments, *Making Democracy Work* (1993), found that regions with long traditions of civic association governed far better than others, and he traced those traditions back across centuries. India's federal bargain is a smaller version of the same story. Since the first Finance Commission in 1951, the Union and the states have argued over every rupee, yet they have kept returning to the table, because each award built on the credibility of the last. Compare how fast trust can disappear. When Lehman Brothers collapsed in September 2008, banks that had lent to each other for decades stopped doing so in a matter of days. A habit of fair dealing takes a generation to form and one broken promise to undo. A government that spends its credibility for a quick win is drawing on capital it did not create and cannot quickly replace.

Nature and culture make the asymmetry absolute, because some losses cannot be repaired at all. In the 1960s Soviet planners diverted the rivers that fed the Aral Sea to grow cotton. Harvests rose for a time; the sea, once among the largest lakes in the world, largely disappeared. The Great Andamanese, who numbered in the thousands when colonial settlement began in the 1850s, were reduced to a few dozen within a century. When Nehru wrote his foreword to Verrier Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA*, he set out what became known as the tribal Panchsheel: that tribal people should develop according to their own genius, and that outsiders should not impose on them. It was in effect a request to wait, to let consent and understanding come before roads and projects. The Supreme Court followed the same instinct in 2013 when it asked the gram sabhas of Niyamgiri to decide on bauxite mining in their sacred hills. Every one of them refused. A forest of a thousand years or a language spoken for ten thousand cannot be rebuilt by the project that removes it.

Literature has always understood this. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's Kutuzov frustrates his own officers by refusing to give battle; his faith rests in "patience and time", and it is Napoleon, always in a hurry, who is ruined. Cicero, in his dialogue on old age, quotes the poet Caecilius Statius on the farmer who plants trees for another generation: "serit arbores, quae alteri saeculo prosint". The farmer will not sit in their shade. He plants anyway, and that is the clearest picture I know of what it means to value something.

Yet the counter-argument deserves its full weight, because waiting is very often a polite name for injustice. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963), Martin Luther King Jr. answered white clergymen who urged patience: "This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'" A child who is hungry today cannot be fed by a research programme that will mature in 2050. Keynes warned economists against hiding behind long-run equilibrium: "In the long run we are all dead." In India, the word "eventually" has too often been offered to the landless, the displaced and the undertried prisoner. A society can make a virtue of patience only when it is the powerful who do the waiting.

The two positions can be reconciled once we ask who waits and what is at stake. The state should be impatient about the dignity of citizens: about food, schooling, justice and the hearing promised to a person in a cell. It should be patient about things that compound slowly and cannot be undone: basic research, institutional trust, ecosystems and ways of life. Most failures of governance reverse this order. The poor are told to wait for their entitlements while forests, budgets and reputations are spent in a hurry. The second thing a good society needs is institutions that protect a long wait from short tempers: a stable research grant, a Finance Commission with a fixed term, a court that insists on hearing affected people before a project begins. Such bodies are a society's way of binding its own hands.

Every generation is in the position of the man in Cicero's line, planting what it will not use. The question is not whether we are patient people. It is whether we have put our patience in the right place: hurrying to remove the suffering of the present, and willing to wait for the knowledge, trust and living heritage that belong to people not yet born. What we choose to wait for, and what we refuse to make others wait for, is the most honest statement of our values we will ever make.

Built from today's cards: