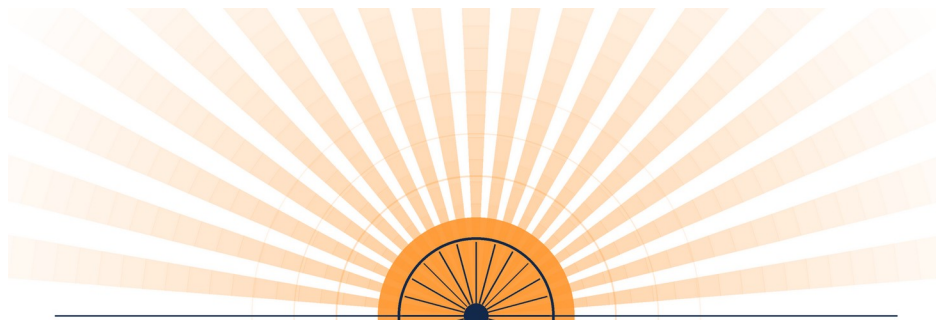




UPSC DARPAN

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.

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Hum jeet ka maja chakh kar rahenge.

Quote of the Day

"In the fields of observation chance favours only the prepared mind."

— Louis Pasteur, lecture at the University of Lille (7 December 1854)

The Hindu, The Indian Express & The Economic Times (Delhi Editions) — 8 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 · 8 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.

“We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale.”

— **Jawaharlal Nehru** · Broadcast “Free India’s Role in World Affairs”, New Delhi (7 September 1946), as Vice-President of the Interim Government

Use in: Today’s IAF warning on Tejas delays, held up by an American engine supplier, and the US proposal of a \$70,000 fee on student work permits. Use it in GS2 answers on non-alignment, strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, and in GS3 answers on defence indigenisation: autonomy needs not only diplomatic distance from blocs but the capacity to build engines, vaccines and chips at home. Note the words “as far as possible”: Nehru’s doctrine was a preference, not a vow of isolation. Balance it: today’s India partners with many powers at once, and licensed production of the GE F414 is a partnership that can build autonomy if it transfers real technology.

“When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind.”

— **Lord Kelvin (William Thomson)** · “Electrical Units of Measurement”, lecture at the Institution of Civil Engineers, London (3 May 1883); *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, Vol. I

Use in: Today’s WWF Living Planet Report (a 73% average fall in monitored populations) and the seed-industry study finding unapproved herbicide-tolerant traits on 24–30% of India’s cotton area. Use it in GS3 answers on biodiversity monitoring, GM crop regulation and evidence-based policy: India counts tigers, tahr and vultures well, but has no official survey of illegal seed. Balance it: numbers must be read correctly — the 73% is an average of trends, not 73% of animals lost — and a study commissioned by an interested party needs an official, independent count before policy rests on it.

“Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons.”

— **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** · Article 3(a), General principles (adopted by the UN General Assembly, 13 December 2006; ratified by India in 2007)

Use in: Today’s Supreme Court notice on accessible air travel, where blind passengers who can walk are forced into wheelchairs and ambulifts, and airports and apps fail screen readers. Use it in GS2 answers on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, Article 21 dignity and the duty of reasonable accommodation, and in GS4 answers on empathy and the dignity of the citizen. The principle shifts the question from “what is safest for the airline?” to “what has the passenger chosen?”. Balance it: some passengers do need assistance, so start from the passenger’s own declaration and override it only for a recorded safety reason.

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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	Karnataka invokes “changed circumstances” to seek reopening of the Cauvery award Why it matters: GS2 federalism: Article 262 and the 1956 Act for Prelims; finality of water awards versus periodic review for Mains.
2.1	RBI raises repo to 5.50%, shifts to calibrated tightening Why it matters: GS3 monetary policy: MPC, LAF corridor and inflation target for Prelims; supply-shock inflation and rate hikes for Mains.
3.1	Up to 30% of cotton area grows illegal herbicide-tolerant Bt hybrids Why it matters: GS3 agriculture and biotech: GEAC and Bt genes for Prelims; GM regulation lagging farmers’ needs for Mains.
6.1	Pandemic Agreement awaits its pathogen-sharing (PABS) annex Why it matters: GS2 global institutions: WHO treaty-making and Nagoya Protocol for Prelims; India and Global South health equity for Mains.
8.1	Supreme Court notice on “systemic failure” of accessible air travel Why it matters: GS2 vulnerable sections: RPwD Act and UNCRPD for Prelims; accessibility as the test of disability rights 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

Today's three stories test whether a settled rule can survive the party that dislikes it. Karnataka wants a water award reopened because the rain failed, Delhi Police run a permit system that permits nothing, and Jharkhand rewrote its rules a day before choosing a police chief. Rules hold only when changing them goes through a process the other side can see.

1.1 Karnataka cites the Centre's Indus Waters stand to seek reopening of the Cauvery award

ISSUE THREAD Inter-State river water disputes (update 4) **LENS** Centre and States - Development and environment

STORY SO FAR The 2007 tribunal award, modified by the Supreme Court in 2018, divides the Cauvery among four riparians. The Court gave Karnataka a week to answer Tamil Nadu's shortfall plea.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 7. Answering Tamil Nadu's complaint of a backlog in Cauvery releases, Karnataka has told the Supreme Court it may seek to reopen the allocation, The Hindu reports. Its 40-page reply calls the allocation "inequitable" and invokes "changed circumstances", or rebus sic stantibus: the idea that an obligation lapses when the facts it assumed change fundamentally. It notes that the Union seeks to modify the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, now in abeyance, on that ground. Karnataka only "reserves its right" to apply; no reopening plea is before the Court and no order has been passed. Its June–September rainfall was 551 mm against a normal 852 mm, 35% short and the second lowest in 70 years. Per the Deccan Herald (August 30), Tamil Nadu sought 17.604 tmc ft due under the pro rata formula.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

1924 Madras–Mysore agreement → tribunal award in 2007 → Supreme Court modifies it in 2018 → a 35% monsoon deficit forces pro rata sharing and Tamil Nadu's backlog plea → Karnataka questions the allocation itself

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	Article 262 and the 1956 Act make an award final, as modified in 2018 — Article 262 lets Parliament provide for deciding inter-State river disputes and bar courts from them. The Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 makes a tribunal's decision final (Section 6) and excludes court jurisdiction (Section 11). Yet in State of Karnataka v. State of Tamil Nadu (February 2018) the Court heard appeals under Article 136, raised Karnataka's share by 14.75 tmc ft and fixed the allocation for 15 years. "Changed circumstances" is a narrow treaty-law exit — Article 62 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969 lets a State end a treaty only for a fundamental, unforeseen change in the basis of consent, and never for a boundary treaty. States, unlike sovereigns, have a common superior, so an award reopens only as the 1956 Act and Court allow.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	Water federalism under climate stress is a recurring GS2 theme — GS2 names "issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure"; deficit monsoons revive river disputes.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 262 lets Parliament exclude the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and other courts over inter-State river water disputes. - The modified Cauvery award shares 740 tmc ft at 50% dependability: Karnataka 284.75, Tamil Nadu 404.25, Kerala 30, Puducherry 7, with 10 tmc ft for environmental flows and 4 tmc ft as inevitable wastage. - The Cauvery Water Management Authority was set up in 2018 under Section 6A of the 1956 Act.
ANALYSIS	Lens — Centre and States: a diplomatic argument cannot unsettle a federal settlement — The Union pleads changed circumstances against Pakistan because no court sits above two sovereigns; between States there is one. If a State hurt by a dry year can call an award inequitable, the finality Article 262 secures collapses in every

	basin. Review should be scheduled and joint, never a reason to withhold releases. 2. Lens — Development and environment: the weak point is the distress rule — Below 740 tmc ft the award says only “pro rata”; Karnataka says no scientific formula exists. Upstream reservoirs fill first, so the downstream State carries the deficit. A pre-agreed formula on basin rainfall and storage data would remove most of the fight. 3. Reserving a right is a bargaining move, not a legal step — Karnataka has filed nothing; it has put a threat on record while answering a complaint about its own releases. The counter-view is that a grievance never voiced is lost. The Court can hear it later without letting it excuse today’s non-release.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Should inter-State river water allocations be periodically revisited? Critically examine in the light of Karnataka’s “changed circumstances” plea on the Cauvery. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh finality against review; judge. 2. Introduction — Karnataka invokes rebus sic stantibus after a 35% deficit — Two lines. 3. Finality is the purpose of the Article 262 design — Value addition: the 2018 judgment fixed shares for 15 years. 4. Fixed shares age as hydrology changes, but treaty doctrine does not transfer — Flowchart: normal year → shares; deficit → pro rata → dispute. 5. Conclusion — scheduled, data-led review with a pre-agreed distress formula — Through the Authority, not unilateral reopening.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Water Resources Secretary of an upstream State in a deficit year, the Authority orders a release that will strain your city’s drinking-water reserve. What do you do? Approach: I would comply, since defiance invites contempt and weakens the State’s later case. I would place storage data before the Authority and seek staged releases, as the 2018 judgment ranks drinking water first, and press for an agreed distress formula.

1.2 Delhi Police’s Jantar Mantar rules and BNSS detention powers test the right to protest

ISSUE THREAD Preventive detention and arrest safeguards (update 7) **LENS** Liberty and order · Rule of law and discretion

STORY SO FAR Courts have been tightening checks on detention. The Supreme Court held arrest without written grounds unconstitutional and, on September 29, quashed a Sambhal accused’s NSA detention resting on a police-custody confession.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 7. Delhi Police have refused permission for an October 10 rally at Jantar Mantar called by the Cockroach Janta Party with Left and youth groups, and a senior officer said orders were issued to pre-emptively detain past agitators if necessary, The Hindu reports. Organisers must apply to the Deputy Commissioner of Police 10 days ahead with date, agenda and expected turnout; an “intimation letter” is not an application. The site’s stated capacity is up to 1,000, and no demonstration has been allowed there since July. Facial recognition will track over 2,800 people flagged then. A Section 163 prohibitory order under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) has covered New Delhi since October 2, and hundreds have been detained, Opposition leaders among them (The Indian Express). Detention means short custody without a case; arrest begins criminal proceedings.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Protests against the SIR and the CEC → a Section 163 order from October 2 → Jantar Mantar requests refused, marchers detained daily → pre-emptive detentions planned for October 10

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. Assembly is a right restricted only for public order or national integrity — Article

	19(1)(a) and (b) protect speech and peaceable, unarmed assembly; Article 19(3) permits reasonable restrictions on assembly only for the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order. <i>Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India</i> (2018) struck down a blanket ban on protests at Jantar Mantar and the Boat Club: restrictions must regulate, not eliminate. Amit Sahni (2020), on Shaheen Bagh, held public roads cannot be occupied indefinitely. 2. The BNSS gives police two separate preventive powers — Section 170, successor to Section 151 CrPC, allows warrantless arrest of a person designing a cognizable offence if it “cannot be otherwise prevented”. Section 172 lets police “detain or remove” anyone ignoring a lawful direction, with production before a magistrate or, in petty cases, release within 24 hours. Neither is “preventive detention” under laws like the National Security Act.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. The new criminal codes now test Articles 19 and 22 on the street — GS2 asks for the Constitution’s “significant provisions”; protest policing is their most visible test.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Section 163 BNSS (prohibitory orders) replaces Section 144 CrPC; disobeying such an order is an offence under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. - Article 22(1)-(2) guarantee grounds of arrest, counsel and production before a magistrate within 24 hours; Article 22(3) excludes preventive detention laws. <i>Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar</i> (2014) barred automatic arrest for offences punishable up to seven years.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Liberty and order: a permit system is lawful, one that never permits is a ban — Notice periods and a capacity cap are the regulation the 2018 judgment accepted. No protest since July, and open calls refused as a class, add up to the elimination it forbade. A thoughtful officer grants permission with conditions and refuses only on a specific, recorded threat. 2. Detention without a case is the least accountable use of State power — Arrest triggers Article 22 and a magistrate; hours in a police bus may leave no record. Section 170 needs a known design to commit an offence, not a protest history, so detaining “past agitators” flagged by facial recognition targets who people are, not what they are about to do. 3. Section 172 turns a police direction into a citizen’s duty — Senior Advocate Sanjay Hegde notes the CrPC never bound citizens to obey police directions; Section 172(2) does. Everything then turns on whether the direction was lawful, which courts should make police prove.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Pre-emptive detention of protesters under the BNSS risks turning regulation of protest into its prohibition. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Comment — Reasoned opinion on one dimension: detention against Article 19. 2. Introduction — Jantar Mantar refusals and daily detentions — About 20 words. 3. Section 170 needs a specific design, not a protest record — Value addition: Joginder Kumar (1994) separated the power to arrest from its justification. 4. Section 172 makes refusing a direction grounds for custody — Flowchart: direction → refusal → detention → release, or arrest under Section 223 BNS. 5. Conclusion — regulate, record, release — As <i>Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan</i> requires.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As DCP, New Delhi, you receive an intimation letter for a rally of uncertain size at Jantar Mantar. What do you do?

Approach: I would ask the organisers to convert it into an application with a turnout estimate, then permit it within capacity and fixed hours. Any refusal would carry written, specific reasons open to challenge, and every detention would be logged with time and release.

1.3 Centre asks Supreme Court to void Jharkhand's DGP rules under Prakash Singh directions

ISSUE THREAD Police reform and the Prakash Singh directions (new thread) **LENS** Centre and States · Independence and accountability

STORY SO FAR In *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006), the Supreme Court issued directions to shield State police from political control, including UPSC-empanelled DGPs with fixed tenure.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 7. The Union government has asked the Supreme Court to declare illegal Jharkhand's 2025 regulation for selecting its Director General of Police (DGP), The Economic Times reports. It filed an interlocutory application, a request within a pending case, in the Prakash Singh case. It objects to Tadasha Mishra's appointment on December 30, 2025, a day before she was due to retire, after the State amended its regulation on December 29 to drop the rule of at least six months' residual service. It also challenges Anurag Gupta's appointment on February 2, 2025, with about three months left. Its core charge: a State cannot claim the two-year tenure while departing from the selection procedure. A Bench headed by CJI Surya Kant agreed to list it on Thursday. Amicus Raju Ramachandran had already reported a violation, per LiveLaw.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Petition filed in 1996 → 2006 directions, clarified in 2018 and 2019 → Jharkhand frames its own 2025 regulation → it drops the six-month rule a day before appointing a retiring DGP → the Centre seeks enforcement

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Police is a State subject led by an All India Service — Entries 1 and 2 of the State List place “public order” and “police” with the States, many of whose police laws still follow the Police Act, 1861. The DGP, however, comes from the Indian Police Service, recruited through the UPSC under the All India Services Act, 1951, which gives the Centre a stake in how its officers are chosen. 2. Prakash Singh (2006) set seven directions; later orders closed loopholes — They require a State Security Commission, a DGP chosen from three senior-most officers empanelled by the UPSC with a minimum two-year tenure, fixed tenure for field officers, separate investigation and law-and-order wings, a Police Establishment Board, Police Complaints Authorities and a National Security Commission. Per LiveLaw, 2018 and 2019 orders barred acting DGPs and required six months' residual service. The Soli Sorabjee committee drafted a Model Police Act, 2006.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Police reform joins two GS papers — GS2 covers “separation of powers between various organs”, GS3 “various security forces and agencies and their mandate”; a court running police appointments touches both.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	“Public order” and “police” are Entries 1 and 2 of List II (State List) of the Seventh Schedule. - Under Prakash Singh, the State picks its DGP from three officers empanelled by the UPSC; the DGP serves at least two years irrespective of superannuation. - The Model Police Act, 2006 was drafted by a committee chaired by Soli Sorabjee.
ANALYSIS	1. Lens — Centre and States: the Union polices a State subject through a court decree

	— The Centre cannot normally tell a State whom to appoint, since police is in List II; here it relies on directions binding all States. States call the directions a stopgap until they legislate. The sound view: rule-making is the State's right, but a rule changed to suit one officer is tailoring. 2. Tenure without neutral selection turns protection into patronage — Tenure lets a DGP resist pressure only if entry was neutral, through a UPSC panel. Appointing an officer a day before retirement turns tenure into a two-year extension granted by the government, buying loyalty rather than independence. 3. Two decades of court-made police reform show its limits — Directions without legislation produce compliance in form and endless applications. The counter-view: without the Court, nothing would have moved. The durable fix is State laws with panels and tenure in statute.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Police reform by judicial direction has reached its limits." Examine with reference to the Prakash Singh directions and the dispute over Jharkhand's DGP appointment. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Probe what court-led reform achieved and where it stalls. 2. Introduction — a DGP appointed a day before retirement — Two lines. 3. The directions created the only national standard for police leadership — Value addition: the seven 2006 directions and the bar on acting DGPs. 4. States comply in form and rewrite rules for individuals, a State subject enforced by court order — Diagram: UPSC panel → State choice → two-year tenure, with Jharkhand's amendment cutting the first link. 5. Conclusion — statutory police Acts on Model Police Act lines — Panels and tenure in law, not court orders.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Home Secretary, the Chief Minister asks you to amend the DGP rules so a favoured officer near retirement can be appointed. How do you advise? Approach: I would advise in writing that this breaches the Supreme Court's directions and invites Jharkhand's fate. Different criteria need the Court's leave or open legislation for all future vacancies, and the UPSC proposal must go three months before the vacancy.

2. Economy

Both stories are about the price of credit. The RBI has raised it for everyone because oil, a weak monsoon and a strong economy together threaten to spread inflation; the GST fitment committee may raise it, more quietly, for small borrowers whom banks reach only through NBFCs. The first is a deliberate trade-off; the second risks being an accidental one.

2.1 RBI Raises Repo Rate to 5.50%, Its First Hike Since February 2023

ISSUE THREAD Inflation, rates and the RBI (update 9) **LENS** Short-term relief and long-term reform · Growth and equity

STORY SO FAR Retail inflation reached 4.82% in August with the repo at 5.25% after 125 bp of cuts. Brent above \$100, a 13% monsoon deficit and a narrowing India-US yield gap had led markets to expect a hike.

THE NEWS Mumbai. Moving from forecast to decision, the Monetary Policy Committee on October 7 unanimously raised the repo rate, at which the RBI lends overnight to banks, by 25 basis points to 5.50%, its first hike since February 2023. Per the RBI's resolution, the Standing Deposit Facility rate is now 5.25% and the Marginal Standing Facility rate and Bank Rate 5.75%. The stance moved from "neutral" to "calibrated tightening" by 4-2; Nagesh Kumar and Ram Singh wanted it kept neutral. Governor Sanjay Malhotra said rate cuts are "off the table in the near term". The RBI raised its 2026-27 growth forecast to 7.1% from 6.7% after first-quarter growth of 7.8%, and projects inflation at 5.2%, averaging almost 5.8% over the next three quarters. It named the West Asia conflict, crude volatility, a deficient monsoon and El Niño.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Crude rises and a weak monsoon meets El Niño → inflation crosses 4% while growth hits 7.8% → price pressure spreads into core items → MPC hikes and shifts to calibrated tightening

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	The RBI Act fixes who sets the target and who hits it — Section 45ZA of the RBI Act, 1934, inserted in 2016, lets the Centre, in consultation with the RBI, set the inflation target every five years: CPI inflation of 4%, band 2-6%. Section 45ZB creates a six-member MPC: the Governor (chair), a Deputy Governor, one RBI officer and three external members appointed by the Centre. Under Section 45ZI, the Governor has a casting vote in a tie. The LAF corridor keeps the overnight rate near the repo — Banks short of cash borrow from the RBI at the MSF rate, the ceiling; banks with spare cash park it at the SDF rate, the floor, without collateral. So the call rate stays near the repo, and moving the repo moves the whole corridor.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	Inflation versus growth is a fixed GS3 question — The syllabus covers "growth, development and employment"; a supply-shock hike tests how inflation targeting works.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The MPC was created by amending the RBI Act, 1934 through the Finance Act, 2016. - The inflation target is set by the Central Government in consultation with the RBI, once every five years. - The Standing Deposit Facility is the floor of the LAF corridor and absorbs liquidity without collateral; the MSF is the ceiling. - External-benchmark-linked loans reset with the repo; MCLR-linked loans move only with banks' cost of funds.
ANALYSIS	A hike cannot make oil or rain cheaper, but it can stop the second round — Higher rates do not lower crude prices. They can stop a supply shock spreading into wages and other prices. CPI items rising faster than 4% grew from 65 in January to 110 in August, per the IE. Crisil's Dharmakirti Joshi notes that inflation broadens when supply

	shocks meet strong demand. 2. Lens — Short-term relief and long-term reform: the stance is the real decision — A 25 bp hike is small; calibrated tightening tells markets cuts are over, so they adjust now. The ET editorial urges frontloading, recalling that the RBI fell behind the curve after the Ukraine shock. A thoughtful officer would accept slower credit now over a costlier fight with entrenched 6% inflation later. 3. Global yields leave less room than the inflation number suggests — Joshi notes the India-US ten-year bond spread has narrowed to about 200 bp from over 400, so foreign money leaves and a weaker rupee raises import prices. The counter-view: fuel taxes and food stocks, which the government controls, act faster on these prices.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Monetary policy cannot cure a supply shock, but it can stop it spreading.” Critically examine with reference to the RBI’s latest policy. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Test the claim from both sides; give a judgement. 2. Introduction — a hike amid supply-driven inflation — Repo 5.50%, calibrated tightening, CPI forecast 5.2%. 3. Rates cannot lower crude but can anchor expectations — Value addition: items above 4% inflation rose from 65 to 110. 4. Strong growth and narrow yield spreads justify acting early — Flowchart: oil and monsoon shock → headline CPI → expectations → core CPI → repo hike. 5. Fiscal tools must carry part of the load — Fuel taxes and food stocks act faster. 6. Conclusion — coordinated tightening — Hike now, with fiscal supply management alongside.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As head of an MSME lending cell in a public sector bank, how would you respond to the hike? Approach: Repo-linked loans will reprice within the quarter, so I would identify units whose instalments now strain thin cash flows. For sound businesses I would offer a longer tenure rather than let accounts slip into stress.

2.2 GST Fitment Committee Proposes 18% Tax on NBFC Services to Banks in Co-Lending

ISSUE THREAD GST revenue and its structure (update 3) **LENS** Market and State · Growth and equity

STORY SO FAR GST, in force since July 2017, had its rates cut in 2025, and gross collections rose 14.7% in September 2026. A Council meeting on process reforms, such as dropping arrest powers and unlocking blocked input credit, was due this week.

THE NEWS New Delhi. The fitment committee of officials under the GST Council has decided that services provided by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) to banks in co-lending will attract 18% GST, while interest on the underlying loan stays exempt. The Economic Times reported on October 8. In co-lending, a bank and an NBFC jointly fund a loan: the NBFC usually finds and assesses the borrower, and the bank provides the larger share. In ET’s illustration, the borrower pays a blended 16%, the bank receives 10% on its share, and the NBFC keeps the remaining 6% on the bank’s share. That spread will be valued by an RBI-prescribed method and taxed as a service. It is a committee view in a package for the Council, scheduled to meet on October 8; CBIC may issue a circular once the Council clears it.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Banks lack reach among small borrowers → RBI lets banks co-lend with NBFCs → industry asks whether the NBFC’s spread is exempt interest or a taxable service → fitment committee calls it a service at 18% → Council to decide

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The GST Council recommends; it does not legislate — Article 279A, inserted by the 101st Amendment, 2016, creates the Council: the Union Finance Minister (chair), the Union Minister of State in charge of Revenue or Finance, and each State's minister in charge of Finance or Taxation or another minister it nominates. Decisions need three-fourths of weighted votes, the Centre's counting one-third. In Mohit Minerals (2022) the Supreme Court held its recommendations persuasive, not binding. 2. Loan interest is exempt; co-lending is an RBI-regulated model — A 2017 CGST rate notification exempts lending services where the consideration is interest. The RBI's 2020 co-lending model let banks fund priority-sector loans jointly with NBFCs, which kept at least 20% of each loan; 2025 directions widened it.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GST design meets financial inclusion — GS3 covers "Inclusive growth and issues arising from it". How tax treatment changes the cost of credit is a fresh angle.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The GST Council was created under Article 279A by the Constitution (101st Amendment) Act, 2016; the Union Finance Minister chairs it. • A GST Council decision needs three-fourths of weighted votes of members present and voting; the Centre's vote carries one-third weight. • Under the RBI's 2020 co-lending model, the NBFC had to retain at least 20% of each loan on its books. • Services of extending loans, where the consideration is interest, are exempt from GST.
ANALYSIS	1. Clarity is worth something even if the tax is not — ET reports the industry asked last year whether the NBFC's spread is interest or a fee, and disputes followed. An RBI-based valuation gives every lender the same answer. A known 18% is easier to price than a surprise demand with interest and penalty years later. 2. Lens — Market and State: a tax on the bridge between banks and the unbanked — Co-lending exists because banks have cheap money and NBFCs reach small firms and rural borrowers. Because a bank's main income, interest, is exempt, it recovers only part of the GST it pays as input credit, so much of the 18% becomes a cost likely passed to borrowers. A sound Council would weigh that before treating the NBFC as a vendor rather than a co-lender. 3. Substance over form cuts both ways — The package treats transfers between a bank's own branches as interest because no outside service exists. The same test could call the NBFC's spread a share of interest, since the borrower pays one rate for one loan. Calling it a service favours revenue over consistency.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine how GST on NBFC services in co-lending could affect the cost of credit to small borrowers. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Trace the mechanism and its likely effect. 2. Introduction — co-lending joins bank money to NBFC reach — Cite the fitment committee's 18% view. 3. The NBFC's spread becomes a taxable cost — Value addition: ET's 16%-10%-6% split. Diagram: borrower → bank and NBFC shares → GST on the 6%. 4. Limited input credit means the borrower likely pays — Banks' exempt interest income caps recovery. 5. Conclusion — certainty without costlier credit — Keep the clarity; consider a lower rate for priority-sector co-lending.

**ADMINISTRATOR'S
BRAINSTORM — Q &
APPROACH**

Q1. As a GST Council member from a State with many small borrowers, would you back the proposal?

Approach: I would back ending the dispute, since uncertainty already deters co-lending. I would ask what the tax adds to a typical small loan after input credit. If borrowers bear it, I would propose a lower rate for priority-sector co-lending.

3. Agriculture & Food

When a quarter of India's cotton grows from seed the law has not approved, the regulator has already lost the decision it was meant to take. Farmers short of labour chose herbicide tolerance themselves, and a black market supplied it. The question is no longer whether India allows the trait, but whether it can regulate what is already in the fields.

3.1 Up to 30% of India's Cotton Area Grows Illegal Herbicide-Tolerant Bt Hybrids, Study Finds

ISSUE THREAD GM crops and biosafety regulation (new thread) **LENS** Innovation and safeguards · Rule of law and discretion

STORY SO FAR Bt cotton is the only GM crop commercially cultivated in India. Approvals rest with the GEAC under the Environment Ministry, and no herbicide-tolerant trait has been cleared.

THE NEWS New Delhi. Of the 114.8 lakh hectares sown to cotton in 2025-26, an estimated 26.2–29 lakh hectares (24–30%) carried hybrids with unapproved genetically modified traits, The Indian Express reported on October 8. The study, commissioned by the Federation of Seed Industry of India and the National Seed Association of India and done by the South Asia Biotechnology Centre, Jodhpur, tested 227 samples from 984 farmers' fields in 16 districts of four States. India allows only the cry1Ac and cry2Ab genes, which kill bollworms. The cp4-epsps gene, which lets cotton survive the weedkiller glyphosate, was found in 72.69% of samples (88.64% in Telangana); Vip3A, a newer Bt gene effective against pink bollworm, in 53.74%. Farmers spend ₹750–850 an acre on glyphosate sprays against ₹12,000–15,000 on manual weeding. Legal Bt seed sales fell from 596 lakh packets in 2022-23 to 463 lakh.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

First-generation Bt weakens against pink bollworm and weeding labour grows scarce → no new trait is approved → an illegal supplier network sells herbicide-tolerant and Vip3A seed → a quarter of cotton area adopts it

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. GEAC approves GM crops under the Environment (Protection) Act — The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, under the Environment Ministry, functions under the Rules, 1989 framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and appraises the environmental release of GM organisms. Bt cotton (Bollgard I) was approved in 2002 and Bollgard II in 2006; no herbicide-tolerant trait is approved. 2. Seed law sits separately with the Agriculture Ministry — The Seeds Act, 1966 regulates seed quality, and the Seeds (Control) Order, 1983, under the Essential Commodities Act, licenses dealers. In July 2024 a two-judge Supreme Court bench split on GM mustard's approval and asked the Centre to frame a national GM policy.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Farm biotechnology is a recurring GS3 theme — The syllabus lists “e-technology in the aid of farmers” and “Awareness in the fields of ... bio-technology”. Illegal HTBt joins biosafety, farm labour and seed markets in one case.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The GEAC functions under the MoEFCC through the Rules, 1989 framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. - Bt cotton is India's only GM crop approved for commercial cultivation; its genes come from the soil bacterium <i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i>. - The cp4-epsps gene makes a plant tolerant to glyphosate; Vip3A is a Bt gene active against a broader range of bollworm larvae. - The Seeds (Control) Order, 1983 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
ANALYSIS	1. Farmers are responding to the price of labour, not defying science — Hand weeding costs up to fifteen times more than spraying, and workers are scarce in peak season. When a technology saves that much, demand finds a supply, legal or not. The 29% jump in glyphosate imports, to 35,642 kilolitres in 2025-26, shows how fast the

	practice has spread. 2. Lens — Innovation and safeguards: a ban without enforcement is no safeguard — Biosafety review exists to test risks such as herbicide-resistant weeds, gene flow and heavy glyphosate use. Yet the trait now grows without testing, labelling or quality checks, and farmers buying ₹820–880 crore of illegal seed have no remedy if it fails. A thoughtful officer would conclude that time-bound, evidence-based review of HT traits, with conditions on herbicide use, protects more than a prohibition the market ignores. 3. The seed industry is both messenger and interested party — Seed associations whose legal sales are falling commissioned the study, and its samples came from hotspot districts picked by glyphosate sales, which may raise the share found. Yet the scale matches the fall in legal packets, so it deserves an official survey, not dismissal.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The spread of unapproved herbicide-tolerant cotton shows that India's GM regulation lags behind farmers' needs. Critically examine. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh regulatory failure against the trait's risks; give a verdict. 2. Introduction — a quarter of cotton outside the law — Cite 24–30% of 114.8 lakh hectares. 3. Labour costs and pest resistance drive demand — Value addition: ₹750–850 spraying against ₹12,000–15,000 weeding per acre. 4. Illegal seed carries untested risks and no remedy — Flowchart: no approval → illegal seed → no testing → weed resistance and farmer losses. 5. Conclusion — evidence-based approval with enforcement — Regulate the trait rather than pretend it is absent.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As District Agriculture Officer in Yavatmal, you find most cotton farmers using HTBt seed. What do you do? Approach: Penalising thousands of farmers would punish the end of a supply chain, so I would act against sellers, with inspectors testing dealer stocks before sowing. Through Krishi Vigyan Kendras I would warn farmers about glyphosate safety and weed resistance, and report the scale to the State and the GEAC.

4. International Relations

Indian students have long treated the United States as their first choice because a US degree came with a chance to work there. That link between study and work is now being priced. When one country can change the terms overnight, talent policy cannot be a bet on it.

4.1 US Homeland Security Proposes \$70,000 School Fee for Each Student's OPT Work Permit

ISSUE THREAD **US visas and Indian students** (new thread) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · National interest and global commons

STORY SO FAR Indian students go to the US on F-1 visas and often stay on through Optional Practical Training (OPT) and then H-1B work visas. Washington has been tightening both.

THE NEWS Washington. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on Wednesday, October 7, proposed a rule under which universities would pay \$70,000 for each new student's initial application to Optional Practical Training (OPT) and \$30,000 for each renewal, Associated Press reports. OPT lets international students work in jobs related to their major during or after their studies, generally for one year after graduation, with an extra two years for certain science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) majors. DHS called the programme a "pipeline for cheap foreign labor" and cited fraud and abuse. It is only a proposal, not yet a final rule. It would hurt colleges that recruit abroad for tuition and tech firms that hire graduates. NAFSA, which represents international educators, said driving students away "will only hurt American innovation".

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

OPT makes a US degree a route to work → it becomes the bridge to the H-1B → Washington calls it cheap foreign labour → DHS proposes a \$70,000 fee per student → universities must decide if foreign graduates are worth the cost

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. OPT is a work authorisation, not a visa — OPT is temporary employment permission for students holding the F-1 non-immigrant student visa, granted by US Citizenship and Immigration Services. It allows up to 12 months of work linked to the field of study, and STEM graduates can apply for a 24-month extension, so up to three years in all. 2. The H-1B visa has an annual cap of 85,000 — The H-1B is a US visa for specialty occupations that need at least a bachelor's degree. Its annual cap is 65,000, plus 20,000 extra for holders of US master's or higher degrees. Universities are among the employers exempt from the cap.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks how other countries' policies affect India — The syllabus covers the "Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora". US visa rules shape where Indian talent trains and works.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Optional Practical Training (OPT) is an employment authorisation for F-1 students in the US, not a separate visa. - Standard OPT allows up to 12 months of work; eligible STEM graduates can get a 24-month extension. - The H-1B annual cap is 65,000, with 20,000 more for holders of US master's or higher degrees; universities are among cap-exempt employers.
ANALYSIS	1. The fee falls on the school but will reach the student — Universities pay the fee, but few can absorb \$70,000 per student. They will raise fees, admit fewer foreign students or stop supporting OPT. The biggest losers are middle-class students who borrow for a US master's and count on OPT earnings to repay the loan. 2. Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: India's talent pipeline depends too much on one country — Because the US is the default destination, one rule change in Washington can upset careers and loans across India. Mobility pacts with Germany,

	the United Kingdom and, earlier this month, Switzerland spread that risk across countries that want skilled workers. A thoughtful officer would widen such pacts and also build research jobs at home. 3. Pushing students away need not bring them back to India — India may gain if some talent stays home, but only if Indian labs and firms can absorb it. Otherwise students will simply shift to Europe, Canada or Australia. Since this is only a proposed rule, India should raise it in talks without overreacting.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Changes in the United States' student and work-visa rules expose the fragility of India's talent pipeline. Critically examine, and suggest how India can reduce this dependence. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Critically examine — Weigh harm and opportunity, then judge. 2. Introduction — the OPT fee proposal of October 7 — \$70,000 per new OPT student, \$30,000 per renewal, proposed by DHS. 3. Body — US policy raises the cost of the study-to-work route — OPT plus the 85,000 H-1B cap is the bridge to US jobs. Draw a flowchart: F-1 → OPT → STEM extension → H-1B. 4. Body — dependence on one country is the real weakness — Value addition: mobility pacts with Germany, the UK and Switzerland; build research jobs at home. 5. Conclusion — diversify destinations and build at home — Engage Washington on the rule while widening mobility pacts.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, how would you respond to this proposal? Approach: It is only a proposed rule, so I would file comments through the embassy with data on Indian students' contribution to US research. Missions would issue a factual advisory so students and lenders do not panic. Over time I would use mobility pacts to widen students' options.

5. Environment & Ecology

A global index says wildlife keeps shrinking; India's species counts say recovery is possible where someone keeps paying for it. The lesson is administrative, not romantic: species return when a State funds one plan through several budgets and the people sharing the habitat gain from it.

5.1 Tahr, Vulture and Dugong Gains Show Recovery Works as WWF Reports 73% Wildlife Decline

ISSUE THREAD Species recovery and captive breeding (update 3) **LENS** Development and environment · Centre and States

STORY SO FAR Captive-bred Great Indian Bustards are being released in the Thar, and Project Cheetah's count reached 60 on October 5.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 7. WWF's biennial Living Planet Report 2026 finds the average size of monitored vertebrate populations fell 73% between 1970 and 2022. The index, compiled by the Zoological Society of London from 35,803 population trends, measures relative abundance, not animals lost. Freshwater populations fell 85%, terrestrial 69%, marine 59%; yet half are stable or rising, and wild tigers grew from 3,200 in 2010 to about 5,700 in 2025. In a Hindu op-ed for Wildlife Week, Supriya Sahu of the Tamil Nadu government and Yash Veer Bhatnagar of IUCN India list Indian gains: Nilgiri tahr up from 1,303 to 1,364 in a year; Madhya Pradesh vultures 12,981 in 2025 against 8,397 in 2019; 270 dugongs; 718 snow leopards. Their thesis: recovery needs political continuity across budgets, science and communities.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Habitat loss, diclofenac and bycatch push species to the brink → the 1972 Act stops outright killing → species plans add breeding, surveys and community roles → State funds and a central scheme back 24 species → counts rise while the global index keeps falling

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 now has four Schedules — The 2022 Amendment cut six Schedules to four: I (highest protection), II (lesser protection), III (protected plants) and IV (CITES-listed specimens); the vermin Schedule went. The Nilgiri tahr, dugong and snow leopard are in Schedule I; the tahr, Tamil Nadu's State animal, is Endangered on the IUCN Red List. 2. The Living Planet Index and 30x30 measure different things — WWF publishes the biennial Living Planet Report with the Zoological Society of London. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at the CBD's COP15 in December 2022, sets 23 targets for 2030; Target 3, called 30x30, asks countries to conserve 30% of land, inland waters and coastal and marine areas.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Recovery stories are GS3 conservation with numbers attached — The syllabus line is "Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation". Prelims favours species status and Schedules.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 reduced the Schedules from six to four and placed CITES-listed specimens in Schedule IV. • The Nilgiri tahr, endemic to the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, is the State animal of Tamil Nadu. • Veterinary diclofenac was banned in India because vultures eating treated carcasses suffer kidney failure. • The Living Planet Index tracks average change in the relative abundance of vertebrate populations, not species lost.
ANALYSIS	1. The 73% is an average of trends, so both despair and comfort misread it — The index averages how fast monitored populations change, so steep falls can drag it down while half the populations hold steady. Rising tiger and tahr counts do not contradict it. The

	85% freshwater fall is the real warning for India, whose rivers and wetlands get less attention than its big mammals. 2. Lens — Centre and States: the Centre sets the law, but States decide whether a species recovers — The 1972 Act and central schemes give a legal shield and some money, but land use, field staff, fishermen's compensation and continuity across budgets are State choices. The risk is uneven protection across a range, as for the tahr in two States; a sound officer backs State funds with shared surveys and inter-State plans. 3. Species-first conservation works best as a door to habitats and livelihoods — A charismatic animal draws budgets that shield its whole habitat. But little-known species struggle for money, and Red List assessments cover only 7.2% of India's documented animals. Paying fishermen for nets lost freeing dugongs shows the durable model: conservation that costs the local person nothing.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India's recent species recoveries show that conservation succeeds through sustained State-level commitment rather than law alone. Examine. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Test the claim with evidence for and against, then judge. 2. Introduction — global decline beside local recovery — The 73% figure against tiger, tahr and vulture gains. 3. Body — law protects, funded plans recover — Schedule I did not save vultures; the diclofenac ban plus breeding at Pinjore did. 4. Body — State ownership turns plans into results — Project Nilgiri Tahr, the Palk Bay dugong reserve. Value addition: KMGBF Target 3. 5. Body — the claim's limits — Freshwater losses need national, habitat-level action. Draw a cycle: law → funding → monitoring → community gain. 6. Conclusion — continuity across budgets — A national Red List with State plans carrying timelines.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a coastal District Forest Officer, fishermen say freeing a dugong from a net costs them their gear. What do you do? Approach: I would ensure net compensation is paid quickly, because a delayed claim teaches fishermen silence. I would publicly recognise those who release dugongs and enlist them in seagrass monitoring, and aim patrols at destructive gear, not cooperative fishermen.

6. Health & Life Sciences

COVID-19 taught poorer countries that sharing a virus sample early earned them nothing when vaccines arrived late. The Pandemic Agreement is the world's attempt to fix that bargain, and its unfinished annex is where the fix will succeed or fail; India, a vaccine giant dependent on imported ingredients, sits on both sides of the table.

6.1 India Urged to Lead Global South as Pandemic Agreement Awaits Its Pathogen-Sharing Annex

ISSUE THREAD WHO Pandemic Agreement and global health (new thread) **LENS** National interest and global commons · Growth and equity

STORY SO FAR After COVID-19 exposed unequal vaccine access, WHO members negotiated a first global pandemic treaty, adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2025.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 8. Writing in The Hindu, Priyadarshini Singh of the Centre for Social and Economic Progress notes that India spoke on the Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response at the UN High Level Meeting in September. The WHO Pandemic Agreement was adopted in 2025 by 124 member-states, India among them, with none against and 11 abstaining. It is not yet open for ratification because the annex on Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) is still being negotiated. PABS is the bargain under which countries share virus samples and genetic data quickly and poorer countries, in return, get a fair share of the resulting vaccines and medicines. The United States rejected the Declaration, objecting to PABS and WHO's role in declaring pandemics. India, the author argues, should lead the Global South.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

COVID-19 vaccines reach rich countries first → WHO members negotiate a treaty → North resists binding technology transfer, South resists unfunded One Health duties → adopted in 2025 with PABS left to an annex → ratification waits, and the U.S. stays out

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Pandemic Agreement is a WHO treaty; the IHR are WHO regulations — Article 19 of the WHO Constitution lets the World Health Assembly adopt conventions by a two-thirds vote; the Pandemic Agreement, adopted on 20 May 2025, uses it and opens for signature only after the PABS annex is adopted. Article 21 allows regulations binding on all members unless they opt out, such as the International Health Regulations (2005). 2. Access and benefit-sharing already exists in law for genetic resources — The Nagoya Protocol (2010) under the Convention on Biological Diversity requires prior informed consent and fair benefit-sharing for use of a country's genetic resources. India implements it through the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, under which foreign users need approval from the National Biodiversity Authority in Chennai.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Global health is now an international-institutions topic — The syllabus asks about "Important International institutions, agencies and fora – their structure, mandate". WHO treaty-making and vaccine equity link health with diplomacy.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The WHO Pandemic Agreement was adopted under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution, which requires a two-thirds vote of the World Health Assembly. - The International Health Regulations (2005) bind all WHO members unless they reject them, and their 2024 amendments created a "pandemic emergency" category. - India's National Biodiversity Authority, under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, approves foreign access to Indian biological resources.
ANALYSIS	1. PABS is a trade of samples for doses, and its value lies in the fixed share — A country reporting a virus suffers travel bans yet without a rule gets nothing from vaccines its sample enabled. PABS makes sharing pay by reserving output for poorer countries; if

	that share is voluntary or small, the incentive to share early collapses. 2. Lens — National interest and global commons: India gains from both sides of the bargain — Pandemic intelligence is a global commons, but each state guards its samples and sovereignty. India makes vaccines at scale, so it wants open access to samples; it relies on foreign patents and imported APIs, so it also wants guaranteed benefit-sharing and technology transfer. A thoughtful officer backs a binding, funded PABS: India loses more from another COVID-style queue than from sharing duties. 3. Without the U.S., the regime's pull depends on what middle powers build — With the largest pharmaceutical power outside, groupings such as the H20 summit and India's 2023 Global Initiative on Digital Health matter more. Critics call a treaty without the biggest player symbolic; but benefit-sharing that works among willing states creates its own pull.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Pathogen access and benefit-sharing is the unfinished core of the WHO Pandemic Agreement. Discuss its significance for India and the Global South. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Discuss — Weigh several sides; reach a view. 2. Introduction — a treaty adopted, an annex pending — 124 votes in 2025; ratification awaits PABS. 3. Body — PABS fixes COVID's broken bargain — Samples shared fast, doses reserved for poorer countries. Draw a loop: sample → data → vaccine → reserved share. 4. Body — India gains as maker and as importer — Foreign patents, imported APIs. Value addition: Nagoya Protocol. 5. Body — fault lines remain — One Health funding, technology transfer, U.S. rejection. 6. Conclusion — lead by domestic example — Equitable national rules give India standing abroad.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a State Health Secretary, a lab detects a new pathogen. A colleague says delay sharing until benefits are assured. What do you do? Approach: I would report at once through the national IHR focal point, because delay costs lives and breaches a binding obligation. Benefit-sharing is the Union's negotiation, not a State lab's trade; I would document the sample's origin so India's claim is clear.

7. Science & Technology

Both stories are about invisible asymmetries with very visible consequences. A molecule's handedness decides whether a drug heals or harms, and the quantum computer that does not yet exist already threatens bank data stolen today. In each case India's exposure lies less in the science than in whether its industry and regulators prepare before the cost arrives.

7.1 Chemistry Nobel 2026 Rewards Kagan and Soai for Making and Amplifying Molecular Handedness

ISSUE THREAD Frontier science and India (update 3) **LENS** Innovation and safeguards · Tradition and social justice

STORY SO FAR Darpan tracks the 2026 Nobel science prizes for lessons on Indian research: Medicine rewarded optogenetics, and Physics went to Francis Halzen for the IceCube neutrino observatory.

THE NEWS Stockholm, October 7. The 2026 Chemistry Nobel goes to Henri B. Kagan, 95, of Université Paris-Sud, France, and Kenso Soai, 76, of the Tokyo University of Science, “for the discovery of non-linear effects and autocatalysis in asymmetric organic synthesis”. Many molecules are chiral: they exist in two mirror-image forms, like left and right hands. In 1986, Kagan’s team showed that a catalyst only slightly biased towards one hand could bias the product far more than expected. About a decade later, Soai found a reaction in which a chiral product catalyses more of itself, ending with 99.5% of one form. Enzymes and receptors are chiral, so a drug’s two forms can act differently. Thalidomide, a late-1950s sedative, caused birth defects across 46 countries; one form was harmful. Drugs once made as mixtures and separated expensively are now made in the wanted form directly.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Life uses one hand of amino acids and sugars → laboratory reactions yield both hands equally → thalidomide shows the wrong hand can maim → Kagan shows small catalyst bias is amplified, Soai shows a product can copy its own hand → drugs and agrochemicals made in a single form

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Chirality: same atoms, mirror arrangement, different biology — Enantiomers have the same formula and bonding but are non-superimposable mirror images; a 50:50 mix is a racemic mixture. Homochirality is life’s use of a single form, as with the amino acids in proteins. The 2001 Chemistry Nobel to Knowles, Noyori and Sharpless rewarded chirally catalysed reactions. 2. India’s bulk-drug policy is where chemistry meets self-reliance — Active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) are the chemicals that make a medicine work, and India imports many of them. The Production Linked Incentive scheme for critical key starting materials, drug intermediates and APIs, approved in 2020, pays incentives on incremental domestic sales; a parallel scheme supports bulk drug parks.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Nobel science is a GS3 awareness item with a policy hook — The syllabus line is “Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, Nano-technology, bio-technology”. Examiners ask the concept and its use, not biography.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- The Nobel Prize in Chemistry is awarded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. - Enantiomers are non-superimposable mirror-image forms of a chiral molecule; an equal mixture of both is called racemic. - In autocatalysis, a product of a reaction acts as a catalyst for the same reaction. - Thalidomide, a sedative of the late 1950s, caused phocomelia, a birth defect in which limbs are shortened or absent.
ANALYSIS	1. The prize honours amplification, which is how chemistry becomes industry — A perfectly pure catalyst is costly to make, so Kagan’s finding that a slightly biased one

	can still give a strongly biased product makes single-form manufacturing affordable. Soai's self-copying reaction shows how a tiny chance imbalance could snowball, a plausible route to life's single-handedness, though not proof of it. 2. Lens — Innovation and safeguards: chiral precision raises the bar for regulators — Making one form directly is cheaper and greener, but the thalidomide lesson is that the other form must still be tested, and IE notes the two thalidomide forms interconvert in the body. A regulator should therefore demand data on both forms and on purity, not just on the active ingredient. 3. For India, the gain is in API chemistry, not formulations — India's generics strength lies largely in finishing medicines from imported inputs. Asymmetric synthesis needs advanced catalysts, process chemists and quality systems, the capability the PLI aims to build. Without it, India pays others for the hardest and most profitable step.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Explain why a drug molecule's "handedness" matters, and how asymmetric synthesis can strengthen India's self-reliance in active pharmaceutical ingredients. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Explain — Clarify the concept, then link it to policy. 2. Introduction — one molecule, two hands — Define chirality; cite the 2026 Nobel. 3. Body — the wrong hand can harm — Thalidomide; chiral enzymes and receptors. Draw two mirror molecules fitting or failing a receptor. 4. Body — direct synthesis is cheaper and cleaner — Kagan's amplification and Soai's autocatalysis replace costly separation. Value addition: 2001 Nobel lineage. 5. Body — India must move up to API chemistry — PLI for bulk drugs and bulk drug parks need catalysis skills. 6. Conclusion — chemistry as strategic capacity — Pair research funding with strict single-form drug testing.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a State Drugs Controller, a firm switches to a new asymmetric route for a chiral drug. What do you check? Approach: I would ask whether the product's purity and its share of the unwanted form match the approved specification. If the impurity profile changed, I would require fresh stability and bioequivalence data before release. Cheaper chemistry is welcome; unchecked change is not.

7.2 Banks Told to Build Quantum-Safe Encryption Plan After Financial Sector Declared Critical Infrastructure

ISSUE THREAD Quantum computing and cyber security (new thread) **LENS** Innovation and safeguards · Independence and accountability

STORY SO FAR Quantum computers, still immature, could one day break the public-key encryption that protects online banking; India's National Quantum Mission funds their development.

THE NEWS New Delhi, October 7. The government has directed banks to develop a sector-wide quantum transition and adoption strategy, with an artificial intelligence resilience framework, after the banking, financial services and insurance sector was identified as critical information infrastructure, The Economic Times reports, citing people familiar with the matter. A working group under the State Bank of India chairman is examining it, and the finance ministry has asked banks to assess post-quantum vulnerabilities. The main fear is "harvest now, decrypt later": attackers copy encrypted banking data today and wait for quantum computers able to read it. A Department of Science and Technology report in May, "Quantum-Safe Ecosystem in India", said ministries and regulators should set up cryptographic asset repositories for critical information infrastructure by 2027. In September, PwC said banks should begin migrating to post-quantum cryptography immediately.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Banking runs on public-key encryption → quantum algorithms could break it in future → adversaries harvest encrypted data now → BFSI identified as critical information infrastructure → banks told to inventory cryptography and plan migration

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The IT Act, 2000 gives critical systems a special legal shield — Section 70 lets the government declare a computer resource that affects critical information infrastructure a protected system, with unauthorised access punishable by up to ten years. Section 70A makes the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre the nodal agency, and Section 70B makes CERT-In the national agency for cyber incident response. 2. The National Quantum Mission builds the capability that creates the risk — Approved by the Union Cabinet in April 2023 with ₹6,003.65 crore for 2023-24 to 2030-31, the Mission under the Department of Science and Technology funds quantum computing, communication, sensing and materials. Quantum-safe migration is its defensive twin.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Cyber security of the financial system is a GS3 favourite — The syllabus asks about “Basics of cyber security”. Quantum risk adds a time dimension: data must stay safe for years.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under Section 70A of the IT Act, 2000, the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre is the nodal agency for protecting critical information infrastructure. - In August 2024 the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology published its first post-quantum cryptography standards. - Shor’s algorithm, run on a large quantum computer, could factor the large numbers on which RSA encryption relies. - CERT-In functions as the national agency for incident response under Section 70B of the IT Act, 2000.
ANALYSIS	1. The deadline is set by data lifetime, not by when quantum computers arrive — Loan records and identity data stay sensitive for decades, so data stolen now is exposed whenever decryption becomes possible. If migration takes years and data must stay secret for years, the clock has already started. That is why an inventory of where cryptography is used comes first. 2. Lens — Innovation and safeguards: one sector cannot migrate alone — Banks connect to payment networks, insurers and government systems, so a weak link anywhere exposes all, as ET’s summary of the concerns notes. A common standard set by regulators avoids incompatible choices. The counter-risk is a rushed switch to immature algorithms; a sound officer phases migration, beginning with the longest-lived data. 3. Directing banks informally weakens accountability — The direction is reported through anonymous officials, not a published notification. Regulated entities answer to RBI rules; clear, public timelines would let boards budget and auditors check progress.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	What is the “harvest now, decrypt later” threat? Examine why India’s banking sector must begin migrating to post-quantum cryptography now. (10 marks, 150 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Examine — Explain the threat, then test the case for acting now. 2. Introduction — today’s theft, tomorrow’s decryption — Define HNDL in one line. 3. Body — long-lived data makes the risk current — Migration time plus secrecy time

	exceeds the quantum horizon. Value addition: DST's 2027 repository target. Draw a timeline. 4. Body — interlinked systems need a common standard — CII status under Section 70; NIST's 2024 standards. 5. Conclusion — inventory first, phased migration — RBI-led roadmap with public timelines.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Chief Information Security Officer of a public sector bank, where do you start? Approach: I would build an inventory of every system using public-key cryptography, ranked by how long its data must stay secret. Long-lived records would move first to standardised post-quantum algorithms, tested alongside existing ones. I would report progress to the board as a risk metric.

8. Society

India has written some of the world's better disability laws and then left them to depend on goodwill at the counter. Air travel shows the gap: the market grows yearly, yet a blind passenger still cannot call the cabin crew. Rights not built into design remain favours.

8.1 Supreme Court Seeks Centre's Reply on "Systemic Failure" of Accessible Air Travel

ISSUE THREAD Accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities (new thread) **LENS** Liberty and order · Independence and accountability

STORY SO FAR The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 requires accessible transport and services. In November 2024 the Supreme Court, in *Rajive Raturi*, held that accessibility norms must be mandatory and binding, not mere guidelines.

THE NEWS New Delhi. A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Wednesday, October 7, issued notice to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the Airports Authority of India, the Central Industrial Security Force and the Digi Yatra Foundation. Notice only asks them to respond; nothing has been decided. The petitioner, Mumbai company secretary and advocate Turab Chimthanawala, has Leber's Congenital Amaurosis, an inherited eye disease causing severe vision loss. His counsel said India, the third-largest aviation market, handles over 350 million passengers a year; at Census 2011's 2.21% disability prevalence, that is over seven million disabled flyers annually. The plea lists blind passengers forced into wheelchairs or ambuliifts, in-flight systems without accessibility settings, "silent airports" without audio or visual alerts, apps unusable with screen readers, and no grievance channel.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 2016 Act promises accessible transport → rules leave norms as guidelines → *Rajive Raturi* (2024) orders mandatory norms → air traffic booms but practice lags → a PIL alleges systemic failure and the Court issues notice

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The RPwD Act, 2016 turns accessibility into a legal duty — Sections 40 to 46 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 deal with accessibility: the Centre frames standards for the physical environment, transport and information technology (s.40), governments must make transport accessible (s.41) and service providers must comply within set time limits (s.46). The Act recognises 21 disabilities; a "benchmark disability" is one of at least 40%. 2. India is bound by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — India ratified the UNCRPD in 2007, and the 2016 Act was passed to implement it. Article 9 of the Convention obliges states to ensure equal access to transport, information and public facilities. It treats disability as the result of social barriers, not only impairment.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 covers laws and bodies for vulnerable sections — The syllabus names "mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections".
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Sections 40 to 46 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 deal with accessibility of buildings, transport, information and services. - Under the RPwD Act, 2016, a person with benchmark disability has at least 40% of a specified disability; the Act lists 21 disabilities. - Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities deals with accessibility; India ratified the Convention in 2007.
ANALYSIS	1. The failures listed are design choices, not accidents — An app that cannot be read aloud, or a seat screen with no audio mode, was built that way. Designing it right costs little; retrofitting costs much. That is why the Act sets standards instead of relying on staff kindness.

	2. Lens — Liberty and order: safety rules are being used to deny independence — Ambulifts and wheelchairs are usually justified as safety measures, and some passengers do need them. But forcing a blind person who can climb stairs into a wheelchair treats disability as incapacity and takes away choice. The test is proportionality: a thoughtful officer would start from the passenger's own declaration at check-in and override it only for a recorded safety reason. 3. Too many agencies means no one owns the problem — Five bodies got notice because one journey passes through airport, security, Digi Yatra and airline, each with its own rules. A disabled traveller has no single place to complain. The Court may need to make the DGCA answerable for the whole journey, with one grievance window and published audits.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Without accessibility, the rights of persons with disabilities remain on paper. Discuss with reference to India's fast-growing civil aviation sector. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — Discuss — Explain the claim, test it on aviation. 2. Introduction — seven million disabled flyers a year — The petition's estimate and the Court's notice. 3. Body — the law is strong on paper — RPwD Act ss.40–46, UNCRPD Article 9. Value addition: Rajive Raturi (2024) made accessibility norms mandatory. 4. Body — implementation fails at every stage of the journey — Draw a flowchart: booking app → check-in → security → boarding → in-flight → grievance, marking each barrier. 5. Conclusion — one accountable regulator, design-stage standards — Accessibility audits and a single grievance window.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Director of an airport, a blind passenger complains he was forced into a wheelchair. What do you do? Approach: I would apologise, record the complaint and find out who decided. I would issue a standing instruction that assistance is offered, not imposed, based on what the passenger declares. I would train staff with disabled persons' groups and publish monthly complaint and action data.

9. Internal Security

An air force is measured not by its best aircraft but by how many it can put in the sky on a bad day. India's fighter fleet has been shrinking for years because old jets retire faster than new ones arrive, and the slowest link is an engine India still imports. Self-reliance is now a production problem more than a design one.

9.1 IAF Chief Flags Tejas Delays on 94th Air Force Day; GE Engine Supplies Stabilise

ISSUE THREAD Air power and defence indigenisation (new thread) **LENS** Strategic autonomy and partnership · Short-term relief and long-term reform

STORY SO FAR The IAF is sanctioned 42 fighter squadrons but has stayed well below that as MiG-21s and other ageing jets retired. Indigenous jets such as the Tejas were meant to fill the gap but have arrived slowly.

THE NEWS New Delhi. On the eve of the Indian Air Force's 94th anniversary on October 8, Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, who retires this month, said the force is moving in the "right direction" but "can be a little faster", needing "greater capacity, faster induction and more combat mass", PTI reports. He said the IAF had shifted from a "platform-centric to capability-centric" approach, proven in Operation Sindoor, and flagged LCA Mk-1A delays. At his annual press conference on October 3 he put the force at 29 operational fighter squadrons against 42 authorised, as reported by Outlook. The Economic Times reports that GE Aerospace shipped four engine sets to HAL last month and HAL expects over 20 engines a year from 2027. Deliveries on a \$700 million order for 99 F404 engines, due from 2024, slipped; sources told ET that penalties have been imposed on GE.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

MiG-21s retire faster than replacements arrive → squadrons fall to 29 against 42 → Tejas Mk-1A is held up by imported F404 engines → GE supplies stabilise after penalties → HAL seeks F414 technology transfer and India an engine of its own

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 gives first preference to Indian-designed equipment — DAP 2020 lists acquisition categories in order of priority, with Buy (Indian-IDDM), meaning indigenously designed, developed and manufactured, at the top and Buy (Global) last. IDDM needs at least 50% indigenous content. The Defence Ministry also notifies Positive Indigenisation Lists of items that can no longer be imported after set dates; the first, in August 2020, had 101 items. 2. Tejas is designed by ADA and built by HAL — The Light Combat Aircraft Tejas is designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency under the Defence Ministry's Department of Defence Research and Development and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, a Defence PSU in Bengaluru. It flies on the American GE F404 engine; the Mk-2 is to use the more powerful GE F414.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 links security to indigenisation — The syllabus covers "Indigenization of technology and developing new technology"; a falling squadron count tests it directly.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under DAP 2020, Buy (Indian-IDDM) is the highest-priority acquisition category; IDDM stands for Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured. - The Tejas Light Combat Aircraft is designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency and produced by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. - The Indian Air Force was founded on October 8, 1932, which is observed as Air Force Day. - The Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) is India's planned fifth-generation fighter.
ANALYSIS	1. The squadron gap is a production-rate problem — India can design a fighter; the difficulty is building enough each year. With old jets retiring, induction has to run faster

	than retirement just to stop the decline. That depends on HAL's lines, its suppliers and, above all, engines arriving on time. 2. Lens — Strategic autonomy and partnership: an Indian jet with a foreign heart is only half independent — The Tejas is Indian, but its delays came from a US engine maker's supply chain, and the Mk-2 will also use a GE engine built under licence. A foreign supplier thus sets the pace. A thoughtful officer would accept licensed engines and a foreign multi-role fighter for now to keep the fleet strong, while funding an indigenous engine steadily for the long term. 3. Buying abroad now and building at home later must not cancel each other — A large foreign multi-role fighter purchase closes the gap quickly but takes money and orders away from Indian programmes. The way out is to tie foreign purchases to local manufacture and to ensure firm, long-term orders for Tejas so HAL and private suppliers can invest.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India's fighter squadron strength has fallen well below its sanctioned level. To what extent can indigenisation close the gap? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Directive — To what extent — Judge how far indigenisation can go, with limits. 2. Introduction — 29 squadrons against 42 authorised — Cite the Chief's October 3 figure, as reported by Outlook. 3. Body — retirements outpaced inductions — MiG-21 exits and Tejas Mk-1A engine delays. Draw a graph of retirements against inductions. 4. Body — indigenisation works on design, not yet on engines or pace — Value addition: DAP 2020's Buy (Indian-IDDm) priority; F404 delays. 5. Conclusion — buy now, build steadily — Bridge purchases with local manufacture, assured Tejas orders and an engine mission.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Defence Production Secretary, how would you speed up fighter deliveries? Approach: I would track engine and component supplies weekly with HAL and the engine maker and enforce penalties for delay. I would give HAL and its suppliers firm long-term orders so that they invest in capacity.

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 — “Detain Them Tonight”: The Police Officer and the Rally That Has Not Yet Happened

SCENARIO The Hindu and The Indian Express (8 October) report that Delhi Police have refused permission for a protest at Jantar Mantar, a designated site, because organisers did not apply ten days ahead. A police officer says orders exist to monitor and, if necessary, “pre-emptively detain” past agitators, and that facial recognition will track about 2,800 people flagged in an earlier protest. Imagine you are a Deputy Commissioner of Police in a similar situation. The night before a peaceful rally, your superiors tell you to detain its organisers and known participants. You have no specific intelligence that any of them plans violence. The organisers say they will keep to the site and the time, but a senior colleague argues that “it is safer to lock them up than to explain a riot”.

- Q1.** Which values pull against each other, and does a person’s earlier participation in a protest count as evidence of danger?
- Q2.** What will you do about the order, the organisers and the public-order risk?
- Q3.** How will you use surveillance and prior records without turning them into punishment before any offence?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. Suspicion about a person is not a reason to act on a person** — Peaceful assembly is protected by Article 19(1)(a) and (b) and may be limited only by reasonable restrictions on grounds such as public order (Article 19(2) and (3)). In *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (2018) the Supreme Court held that restrictions on protest must regulate the right and not extinguish it. Preventive arrest under Section 170 of the BNSS needs an apprehended cognizable offence that “cannot be otherwise prevented”. Past attendance at a rally, with no present information, does not meet that test.
- 2. Choose the least intrusive measure that works** — Proportionality, accepted in *Puttaswamy* (2017), asks whether a lesser step would do. Meet the organisers, agree on numbers, timing and routes, deploy barricades and medical help, and publish clear conditions. If real, specific intelligence about named individuals emerges, act only against them, record the reasons in writing, and produce anyone held before a magistrate within 24 hours (Article 22(2)).
- 3. Obey the lawful, question the unlawful, and record it** — A superior’s oral order does not excuse an illegal detention. Ask for written reasons, put your legal concern to the Commissioner, and keep the record. The officer’s duty is to the law and to neutrality towards the protesters’ cause.
- 4. Conclusion — trust is the security asset** — Pre-emptive mass detention erodes the consent that makes policing possible. Prefer dialogue, a clear permission process, and audited use of facial recognition with data limits.

Case 2 — Most of My Block Is Breaking the Law: The Agriculture Officer and the Unapproved Cotton Seed

SCENARIO The Indian Express (8 October) reports an industry-commissioned study that estimates 24–30% of India’s cotton area in 2025–26 was under hybrids carrying unapproved genes, including glyphosate tolerance. India permits only the Bt genes cry1Ac and cry2Ab. The study puts farmers’ cost at Rs 750–850 an acre for glyphosate sprays against Rs 12,000–15,000 for manual weeding, and attributes the shift to labour shortage. Now imagine you are a District Agriculture Officer. In your block most cotton farmers are sowing unapproved herbicide-tolerant seed because weeding labour is unavailable. The packets come through local seed dealers who are influential in the village and the panchayat, and who warn you that action will anger farmers at sowing time. Your own staff say, “Everyone knows, nobody acts.”

- Q1.** Who is more responsible, the farmer who sows or the dealer who sells, and why does the answer matter?
- Q2.** What will you do immediately, and what will you do to remove the reason farmers turn to illegal seed?
- Q3.** How will you resist pressure from local influentials without harming small farmers?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Separate the lawbreaker from the trapped** — Genetically modified organisms need approval from the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and its 1989 Rules. A farmer who cannot hire labour is acting from need, while a dealer who profits from an unapproved product is acting from choice. Enforcement should aim at the supply chain, with advisory and persuasion for farmers.
2. **Act lawfully on the dealers, and report upward** — Where notified as a seed inspector, inspect shops, draw and seal samples, check licences and stock records under the Seeds Act, 1966, and refer evidence of unapproved GM seed to the police and the state agriculture department for action under the Environment (Protection) Act. Put the block-level picture in writing to the Joint Director and the Collector, since one officer cannot manage a local supply network alone.
3. **Remove the cause as well as the symptom** — Run campaigns on risks of unapproved seed, such as no legal recourse for crop failure, residue and trade concerns. Offer approved alternatives: pre-emergence weed management advice, custom-hiring centres for inter-row weeder, and mechanisation support. Report the labour problem and bollworm resistance to the state and the Centre, so that regulators can speed up safe trials of new traits.
4. **Conclusion — firmness without cruelty** — Keep written records, rotate inspection teams, seek police protection if threatened, and reject any pressure to look away. The test is whether farmers are better off once enforcement and extension work together.

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
NBFC–Account Aggregator interoperability — RBI's 7 October measures	In its Statement on Developmental and Regulatory Policies of 7 October, the RBI said it will enable interoperability among NBFC–Account Aggregators and that SEBI-regulated depositories will include bank deposit data in the Consolidated Account Statement through them, both by 31 December 2026 (RBI; ET; IE). An Account Aggregator is an RBI-regulated non-banking financial company that moves a user's financial data between institutions only with the user's consent, without being able to read it.
Paytm Payments Bank and the Second Schedule to the RBI Act, 1934	The RBI announced on 7 October the exclusion of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd from the Second Schedule to the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (RBI press releases). The Second Schedule lists the 'scheduled banks', those that meet the conditions in section 42(6) of the Act and so get access to RBI refinance and liquidity facilities and are bound by reserve requirements. Exclusion removes that status. Payments banks are a differentiated category that may take deposits but cannot lend.
Punjab ward elections set aside — State Election Commission and the bar on courts	The Supreme Court (bench of CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana) set aside elections to 50 local-body wards, 28 in Patiala and 22 in Moga, after a court-appointed commission found nomination papers snatched or torn, and ordered fresh polls within six weeks (IE). Articles 243K and 243ZA give the State Election Commission superintendence of panchayat and municipal elections; Articles 243O and 243ZG bar courts from questioning the validity of constituency delimitation or seat allotment, and require election disputes to go by election petition. The Court acted on its own appointed commission's findings.
CEC and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 — selection panel and the recall plea	A recall application before a three-judge bench led by the CJI challenges the 23 September split verdict by Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma on the constitutional challenge to the 2023 appointment law (ET; The Hindu). The Act replaced the CJI on the selection committee, as directed in Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023), with a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister, so that the panel is the PM, that Minister and the Leader of the Opposition (IE). Article 324(2) says appointments are 'subject to' a law made by Parliament.
SIR appellate tribunals — the remedy after deletion from the roll	In West Bengal, voters removed from the electoral roll during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) appeal to appellate tribunals set up in March under Supreme Court supervision, staffed by judicial officers; of 19 tribunals, 16 remain functional (The Hindu). ECI sources say a special Form 6 enrolment drive will not apply to cases pending before them. 'ASDD' stands for absent, shifted, dead or duplicate. Article 324 gives the Election Commission superintendence of rolls, and Article 326 guarantees adult suffrage.
Press Council Act, 1978 — composition of the Press Council of India	On 7 October the I&B Ministry notified 13 journalist members of the Press Council of India, six newspaper editors and seven working journalists other than editors (IE). The Council consists of a chairperson and 28 members, each serving a three-year term; until now only 14 of the 28 were appointed, including five MPs and three nominees. It is a statutory, quasi-judicial body that preserves the freedom of the press and maintains standards of newspapers and news agencies. It can warn or censure, but has no power to punish.
Odisha's commission on SEBCs — the 'triple test' for local-body reservation	Odisha has set up a commission under a retired High Court judge to study the numerical strength, political representation and political backwardness of Socially and Educationally Backward Classes in rural and urban local bodies (The Hindu). It responds to the 'triple test' for OBC reservation in local bodies, laid down in K. Krishna Murthy (2010) and Vikas Kishanrao Gawali (2021): set up a dedicated commission for empirical inquiry, specify the proportion of seats in each body, and keep total SC, ST and OBC reservation within 50%. Articles 243D(6) and

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	243T(6) allow State reservation for backward classes.
Satellite spectrum — administrative assignment under the Telecommunications Act, 2023	Starlink holds a GMPCS (Global Mobile Personal Communication by Satellite) authorisation but awaits security clearance and spectrum pricing; telcos want auctions, and Reliance Jio cites the 2012 2G judgment against administrative assignment (The Hindu; ET). The Telecommunications Act, 2023 lists satellite services among those for which spectrum is assigned administratively (First Schedule). In the 2012 Presidential Reference the Supreme Court held that auction is not the only constitutionally permissible method of allocating natural resources.
FCRA registration and conversion — Madras High Court	A Division Bench of the Madras High Court (Madurai Bench) held that religious organisations engaged in conversion cannot be given registration under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, while dismissing an appeal by a Zen meditation trust that was refused registration as 'religious in nature' (The Hindu). The Act, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs, requires registration or prior permission to receive foreign contribution, and Rule 9 of the FCRA Rules, 2011 requires an applicant on Form FC-3A to disclose the nature of its work. Articles 25 and 26 protect religious freedom, subject to public order, morality and health.
UCIL — uranium from copper-mine residue	The Uranium Corporation of India Ltd (UCIL), headquartered at Jaduguda in Jharkhand, plans to double uranium output by 2036 through four greenfield projects, and from 2029–30 to recover uranium from Hindustan Copper Ltd's mine residue; HCL extracts about 5% of ore as copper and UCIL would recover about 10% of the rest (The Hindu). UCIL is a public sector undertaking under the Department of Atomic Energy. India's three-stage nuclear programme moves from natural uranium to plutonium and then to thorium-based fuel.
TTAADDC — the Sixth Schedule and Village Committee elections in Tripura	Tipra Motha won the Village Committee elections of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADDC), and its founder then announced that he was quitting active politics (The Hindu). Autonomous District Councils are created under the Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)) in tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. A council can make laws on land, forests and village administration, subject to the Governor's assent, and collects certain taxes. Tripura's council was brought under the Sixth Schedule by the 49th Amendment, 1984.
MeitY's SOP for reporting child sexual exploitation material	MeitY is preparing a Standard Operating Procedure for users to report child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSEAM), modelled on the November 2025 SOP for non-consensual intimate imagery, after the Supreme Court on 24 September gave the Centre a final two weeks (ET). The statutory base is the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, which obliges anyone who knows of a sexual offence against a child to report it (section 19), and section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which punishes publishing or transmitting child sexual abuse material.
Lakhpati Didi — DAY-NRLM's target for women in self-help groups	The Lakhpati Didi initiative, launched in 2023, seeks to help women in self-help groups (SHGs) earn a sustainable annual household income of at least Rs 1 lakh; it is an outcome of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), the flagship livelihoods programme of the Ministry of Rural Development (ET). An IIM Ahmedabad study reports gains in income and savings. The NRLM was launched in 2011 and builds on SHGs and the SHG–bank linkage.
Ghana's BRICS bid — decisions by consensus	Ghana's foreign minister said that President Mahama's cabinet had decided that Ghana will join BRICS; External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in Accra, said India is 'very sympathetic and supportive' but that admission is 'an issue of collective consideration' for the bloc (ET). BRICS takes decisions by consensus among members. At the 2024 Kazan summit it also created a category of 'partner countries' short of full membership.
India-EU Green Shipping Corridor — launched at Sagar Manthan	An industry coalition for the India-EU Green Shipping Corridor was launched at Sagar Manthan 2026, the third edition of a global maritime summit; Indian ports aim to raise the renewable share of their energy use above 60% by 2030 and above 90% by 2047 (ET). A green shipping corridor is a specific shipping route on which zero- or low-emission ships and fuels are used; the idea took shape with the Clydebank Declaration at COP26 in 2021. The International Maritime Organization regulates ship emissions.

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Urea fixed-cost review — a statutorily fixed price and a payout formula	The Government is setting up a sub-committee to review the fixed-cost component used to pay India's 27 domestic urea makers, a formula dating from 2002–03 (ET). Urea is the one major fertiliser whose maximum retail price is set by the Government, with the difference between that price and the cost of production, including the fixed cost, met by subsidy; other fertilisers are under the Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme. The Department of Fertilizers administers the subsidy.
Mepco Industries v CIT — the 'purpose test' for a subsidy	In Mepco Industries Ltd v CIT, decided on 7 October, the Supreme Court (Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Shree Chandrashekhar) held that a Puducherry power-charges subsidy was a taxable revenue receipt (LiveLaw; ET). The 'purpose test', drawn from Sahney Steel and Press Works v CIT (1997), asks for what purpose the subsidy was given: if it helps create or expand a capital asset it is a capital receipt, but if it supports running costs, such as power charges, it is a revenue receipt under the Income-tax Act, 1961.
Cement — clinker factor and refuse-derived fuel	Ordinary Portland cement is more than 95% clinker mixed with gypsum; Portland pozzolana cement has 65–80% clinker, with fly ash, and Portland slag cement 35–64%, with granulated slag (The Hindu). The clinker factor is the share of clinker in cement, and cutting it is a way of lowering emissions because clinker is made by heating limestone, which releases carbon dioxide. A NITI Aayog decarbonisation roadmap also leans on refuse-derived fuel (RDF), processed waste, to replace coal in kilns.
Leprosy — SDR-PEP, a preventive dose for contacts	Single-Dose Rifampicin Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (SDR-PEP) is a preventive dose given to people who have been in contact with a leprosy patient; it was administered to 91.2% of the 16.94 lakh eligible contacts in the programme year 2025–26 (The Hindu). Leprosy is caused by Mycobacterium leprae and is treated with multidrug therapy. India declared leprosy eliminated as a public health problem (fewer than 1 case per 10,000 population) in 2005 under the National Leprosy Eradication Programme.

Source note: All items are drawn from The Hindu, The Indian Express & The Economic Times (Delhi Editions) — 8 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 2.1 (15 marks, 250 words)

“Monetary policy cannot cure a supply shock, but it can stop it spreading.” Critically examine with reference to the RBI’s latest policy. (15 marks, 250 words)

Introduction — Today’s inflation is driven mainly by supply: crude above \$100 amid the West Asia war, a deficient monsoon and El Niño. Yet on October 7 the MPC raised the repo by 25 bp to 5.50%, its first hike since February 2023, and changed its stance to “calibrated tightening”.

- 1. A rate hike cannot lower oil prices or bring rain** — The repo acts on demand through credit; it adds no barrels or harvests. Tightening against a pure supply shock only slows growth; two of six MPC members wanted a neutral stance.
- 2. But it can stop the shock becoming general inflation** — CPI items rising faster than 4% grew from 65 in January to 110 in August. With first-quarter growth at 7.8%, strong demand lets firms pass on costs and workers seek higher wages. Acting early anchors expectations around the 4% target set under Section 45ZA of the RBI Act.
- 3. External pressure strengthens the case** — The India-US ten-year bond spread has narrowed to about 200 bp from over 400. Foreign money leaves, the rupee weakens and imports grow dearer, so the hike also guards against imported inflation.
- 4. Yet the State’s own supply levers act faster** — Fuel taxes and food stocks work directly on prices. Higher repo-linked EMIs also fall on small borrowers and MSMEs, who did not cause the shock.

Conclusion — The claim largely holds: the hike treats the second round, not the first. Having fallen behind the curve after the Ukraine shock, the RBI is right to move early. Way forward: fiscal management of fuel and food alongside it.

Draw this: Flowchart beside the second point: oil and monsoon shock → headline CPI → inflation expectations → core CPI → repo hike, with the hike shown cutting the arrow at “expectations”.

(255 words)

11.2 GS1 corner — Geography: El Niño, the Indian Ocean Dipole and the Indian monsoon

Today’s peg: 2.1

- 1. El Niño shifts the Pacific’s rising air away from India** — El Niño is an unusual warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific; with the linked swing in air pressure, the Southern Oscillation, it is called ENSO. It weakens the Walker circulation, so rising air and rain shift eastwards across the Pacific, and India’s south-west monsoon tends to be weaker.
- 2. The link is strong but not certain** — Several Indian droughts, such as 2009, came in El Niño years, yet the strong El Niño of 1997 brought a near-normal monsoon. A positive Indian Ocean Dipole, with a warmer western Indian Ocean, can offset El Niño’s drag.

Prelims facts

- La Niña is the cool phase of ENSO and is generally linked with a stronger Indian monsoon.
- The Southern Oscillation is measured by the difference in sea-level pressure between Tahiti and Darwin.
- In a positive Indian Ocean Dipole, the western Indian Ocean is warmer than the eastern part near Indonesia.

11.3 Places in news — mark them on your atlas

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
Cauvery basin	Rises in Kodagu’s Brahmagiri hills, Karnataka; flows south-east through Tamil Nadu to the Bay of Bengal; Kerala	Karnataka tells the Supreme Court it may seek to reopen the 2018 allocation after a	The Kabini, a Cauvery tributary, rises in Wayanad, Kerala; Puducherry’s share is

Place	Where it is	Why in news	Prelims fact
	and Puducherry share it.	35% rainfall deficit (1.1).	for its Karaikal region.
Jantar Mantar, New Delhi	On Sansad Marg near Connaught Place, central New Delhi; the capital's designated protest site.	Delhi Police refused an October 10 rally; no protest allowed there since July (1.2).	It is one of the astronomical observatories built by Sawai Jai Singh II; the one at Jaipur is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Palk Bay	Between Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka; Rameswaram and Adam's Bridge separate it from the Gulf of Mannar to the south.	Holds India's first dugong conservation reserve, 448.34 sq km; 158 of an estimated 270 dugongs live here (5.1; TH p6).	Dugongs graze on seagrass and are in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.
Telangana	Deccan State bordering Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka; the Godavari and Krishna cross it.	Glyphosate-tolerance gene found in 88.64% of tested cotton samples (3.1).	Cotton does best on the moisture-holding black (regur) soils of the Deccan, formed from basalt.

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

Meaning — A limit on a right is justified only if it serves a legitimate aim, suits that aim, is the least intrusive means available and does more good than harm. Officials should choose the smallest step that works.

In today's news — Case 1 (1.2): detaining “past agitators” the night before a peaceful rally fails it when talks, conditions and barricades would do. In 8.1, forcing a blind flyer who can climb stairs into a wheelchair fails it too.

Use in an answer — Public-order and rights dilemmas: name it while weighing options, then justify the least intrusive one.

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.

Every autumn the science prizes renew an old habit: we tell the story of discovery as the story of a few gifted people. The habit is understandable: a name gives the public someone to admire. But the places where much modern science is done look very different from that picture.

A detector buried in ice, a telescope spread across continents or a particle collider is built by hundreds of people over many years. Engineers design instruments that will never carry their names, technicians keep them running through long winters, and young researchers write the software that separates signal from noise. The person who first proposed the idea matters, but without the others the idea would have remained a proposal.

When rewards go only to the few at the top, the many learn a quiet lesson about what is valued. Able students may avoid shared projects, where credit is thin, and choose narrower work that they can claim alone. Over time this can starve the very collaborations that answer the largest questions.

None of this means that individual brilliance should go unrecognised. Large teams still depend on people who see further than others, and a famous prize can draw a child towards science. The point is that recognition should match the way knowledge is actually produced. Prizes that can honour teams, papers that name every contributor and career systems that count shared work would cost little and keep the public picture honest.

A country building its research system makes this choice early. If it measures scientists only by what they own, it will get many owners and few builders.

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

- (a) Scientific prizes should be abolished because they distort research.
- (b) Recognition in science should reflect the collaborative way in which much modern research is done.
- (c) Individual scientists contribute little to modern discoveries.

(d) Large scientific instruments are too costly for developing countries.

Q2. The claim that able students may avoid shared projects assumes that

- (a) shared projects are less important than individual work.
- (b) students' choice of work is influenced by how credit is distributed.
- (c) students are not good at working in teams.
- (d) large projects always fail to produce results.

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

- (a) A famous prize has no value for the public.
- (b) Engineers and technicians are usually named on Nobel Prizes.
- (c) The author would favour research evaluation that gives weight to contributions to team projects.
- (d) Most important questions in science can be answered by individuals working alone.

Reasoning and quantitative aptitude

Q4. A borrower owes ₹4,00,000. The annual interest rate rises from 8% to 8.25%. By how much does one year's simple interest increase?

- (a) ₹100
- (b) ₹1,000
- (c) ₹2,500
- (d) ₹10,000

Q5. A pilot flies 30 km north, turns right and flies 40 km, then turns right again and flies 60 km. How far, and in which direction, is the pilot from the starting point?

- (a) 50 km south-east
- (b) 50 km north-east
- (c) 70 km south-east
- (d) 30 km south

Answer key and explanations

Q1: (b) Recognition should match how knowledge is produced; option 0 fails because the fourth paragraph defends individual prizes.

Q2: (b) Avoiding work "where credit is thin" presumes credit shapes choices; option 0 contradicts the passage.

Q3: (c) The author wants career systems that "count shared work"; option 0 contradicts the fourth paragraph.

Q4: (b) Increase = 0.25% of ₹4,00,000 = $4,00,000 \times 0.25 \div 100 = ₹1,000$.

Q5: (a) North 30, then right = east 40, then right = south 60. Net: 30 km south and 40 km east; distance = $\sqrt{(30^2 + 40^2)} = 50$ km, to the south-east.

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 · 7 min read

Handedness: small asymmetries, patiently amplified, decide great outcomes.

Themes: Small biases and compounding in science, nature and the economy · Policy as the patient choice of which asymmetries to amplify · The dark side of compounding: inequality, spreading harm and the limits of small steps

I used to believe that preparation was decided by big days: the full mock test, the long Sunday of revision. My scores told a different story. The students who moved ahead were not those who had heroic weeks but those who read for forty minutes more every day, wrote one answer every evening and corrected it the next morning. The difference between us was small on any single day and enormous after a year. This essay argues that great outcomes in nature, in economies and in nations are often decided not by great forces but by small asymmetries that are patiently amplified. It also argues that this law cuts both ways, so the real skill of a citizen, a scientist or a state is to choose which small biases to feed and which to stop early.

Nature itself is lopsided at its root. Many molecules come in two mirror-image forms, like a left and a right hand: the same atoms, the same bonds, yet they cannot be laid on top of each other. In 1848 Louis Pasteur sorted the tiny crystals of a tartrate salt, with tweezers, into two mirror-image sets and found that their solutions turned polarised light in opposite directions. Life chose one hand. The amino acids in our proteins are almost all of one form, and our enzymes and receptors are therefore chiral too. That is why the two forms of a drug can act very differently, a lesson the world learnt at terrible cost from thalidomide, a sedative of the late 1950s that caused birth defects in children across 46 countries.

This year's Chemistry Nobel honours two scientists who showed how a small bias grows into a large one. In 1986 Henri Kagan's team found that a catalyst only slightly biased towards one hand could bias the product far more than expected. About a decade later Kenso Soai found a reaction in which a chiral product catalyses more of itself and ends with 99.5 per cent of one form. A tiny imbalance, copied upon itself, snowballs into near purity. It is a plausible route to life's single-handedness, though not a proof of it, and it has made it cheaper to manufacture medicines in the wanted form directly. The meteorologist Edward Lorenz reached a similar insight from the other side when, in a talk in 1972, he asked whether the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas: in some systems, tiny differences at the start decide the whole path.

The economy obeys the same law. On 7 October the Monetary Policy Committee raised the repo rate by just 25 basis points, to 5.50 per cent. The number is small; the shift of stance to "calibrated tightening" is not, because it tells every lender and borrower that the direction has changed, and markets adjust before the next decision is taken. Inflation works the same way. A price rise of half a per cent above target looks harmless in one month, but once workers, traders and landlords begin to expect it, it compounds into wage demands, rents and contracts, and becomes far costlier to remove. A central bank that acts early with a small step often spares the country a large and painful one later.

Ecology gives the most hopeful example. The Living Planet Report 2026 finds that monitored vertebrate populations have fallen by 73 per cent on average since 1970. Yet in the same week we learnt that the Nilgiri tahr rose from 1,303 to 1,364 in a year, that Madhya Pradesh counted 12,981 vultures in 2025 against 8,397 in 2019, and that wild tigers grew from about 3,200 in 2010 to about 5,700 in 2025. Sixty-one more tahr is a modest number. But a population that adds a little each year, protected by law, field staff and patient budgets, compounds like savings in a bank. Recovery is rarely a dramatic rescue; it is a small surplus of births over deaths, held steady for decades. Kabir put the same truth in a

gardener's words: "धीरे-धीरे रे मना, धीरे सब कुछ होय । माली सींचे सौ घड़ा, ऋतु आए फल होय ॥" Slowly, O mind, everything happens in its time; the gardener may pour a hundred pots of water, but the fruit comes only in its season.

History shows that the same is true of political courage. When Gandhi set out from Sabarmati on 12 March 1930 and broke the salt law at Dandi on 6 April, the act itself was tiny: a handful of salt picked up on a beach. But it was a bias placed exactly where it could be copied. Every village by the sea could repeat it, and every repetition made the next easier. An empire that could have survived a single grand rebellion found it far harder to answer millions of small acts.

The counter-argument deserves a full hearing, because compounding has no conscience. The sociologist Robert K. Merton described a "Matthew effect" in science: recognised scientists receive more credit for similar work than unknown ones, so small early advantages grow into large inequalities. The same happens with wealth, schools and cities. Harm compounds too. Today's study estimates that 24 to 30 per cent of India's cotton area carries herbicide-tolerant seed that was never approved, while legal Bt seed sales fell from 596 lakh packets to 463 lakh. That did not begin as a national crisis; it began as a few farmers saving a few thousand rupees on weeding, and it spread because each field made the next one more likely. A second objection is equally serious: celebrating small steps can become an excuse to avoid big ones. No amount of daily discipline replaces an irrigation canal, a land record or a fighter-jet engine that a country must decide, at one stroke, to build.

These objections do not refute the argument; they complete it. Since small biases decide large outcomes, governance is largely the art of placing them deliberately. A good policy creates a small, permanent tilt in the right direction: a default that enrolls every child in school, a modest but certain penalty that makes cheating unprofitable, a steady budget line that lets a forest guard stay in post for ten years. It also watches the harmful snowball while it is still small. A time-bound scientific review of new seed traits, with honest field surveys, would have caught the illegal spread when it was a district problem rather than a national one. And small steps work best when they serve a big decision taken clearly, as a steady annual order book serves a long-term goal of building an Indian aircraft engine.

I return to my study table. I cannot add ten hours to tomorrow, but I can add forty minutes, and I can choose what those minutes will compound into. That is the quiet lesson of the chemist's flask, the central bank's quarter-point and the tahr on its cliff in the Western Ghats. The world is lopsided at its root; we do not choose whether small asymmetries will shape our future. We choose only which ones we feed, how early we notice the wrong ones, and whether we have the patience to wait for the season of the fruit.

Built from today's cards: