

UPSC DARPAN

Monthly Revision — September 2026

66 running issues — from start to now

*Every card of the month, condensed to what you revise: the chain, the Prelims nuggets, the Mains question and the approach.
Read the full card on upscdarpan.in when a topic is weak.*

Hum jeet ka maja chakh kar rahenge.

1. SIR of electoral rolls (8)

Lens: Independence and accountability · Liberty and order. GS2 — Representation of People's Act; Election Commission and electoral rolls

Story so far — The Special Intensive Revision re-verifies every elector against the last intensive roll. Delhi deleted 47.6 lakh names; in West Bengal 93% of decided appeals restored voters. After two Election Commissioners objected, the EC confined the Form 6 declaration and grandparents' details to SIR States. Form 10 data show agents beating the 10-a-day objection cap, which ECINet does not enforce; in Karnataka's Babaleshwar, 10 people filed 1,363 objections in one day.

17 Sep SIR Deletions — Elector Numbers Fall Below 2025 Turnout in a Third of Delhi's Seats

- Delhi's February 2025 electorate: 1.56 crore, of which 94.9 lakh (60.8%) voted; current draft roll after SIR: 97.5 lakh electors; Tughlakabad constituency has only 1,00,386 electors against 1,14,961 people who voted there in 2025 — a shortfall, not merely a thin buffer.

Mains: "Where a Special Intensive Revision leaves an electoral roll smaller than the number of people who voted at the last election, the exercise has deleted genuine voters, not merely non-existent ones." Examine this claim using Delhi's SIR data, and suggest procedural safeguards that would prevent such outcomes.

18 Sep Delhi SIR: Supreme Court Gives 'Precedence' to Plea on 33 Lakh Notices and Undefined 'Logical Discrepancies'

- Superintendence, direction and control of electoral rolls for Parliament and State Assemblies vests in the Election Commission under Article 324.
- Article 325 bars exclusion from the electoral roll on grounds only of religion, race, caste or sex; Article 326 provides for adult suffrage for Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.
- Preparation of electoral rolls is governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (the RP Act, 1951 deals with the conduct of elections and disqualifications).
- Qualifying date for enrolment as an elector is 1 January of the year of revision, under the RP Act, 1950.

Mains: "An electoral-roll revision that removes names on criteria the Election Commission has not defined does not improve electoral integrity; it transfers the burden of proving citizenship-linked entitlement from the state to the voter." Critically examine in the light of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision, and suggest safeguards.

Approach: Introduction — accept the objective, question the method · Body 1 — show how the burden of proof shifts · Body 2 — argue the administrative-law point · Body 3 — give the EC's side its due · Body 4 — propose specific, implementable safeguards · Conclusion — tie integrity to transparency

19 Sep Over 37 Lakh Special Intensive Revision Appeals Still Pending in West Bengal's Tribunals, EC Tells the Supreme Court

Intensive revision → mass inclusion and exclusion appeals → 19 tribunals for 38 lakh cases → 97% pendency → bypolls approach with the roll unsettled

- Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls in the Election Commission of India.
- Article 326 provides for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage, at not less than eighteen years of age.
- Form 6 under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 is the application for inclusion of a name in the electoral roll.
- 'ASDD' in roll revision practice denotes the absent, shifted, dead and duplicate category of entries proposed for deletion.
- Preparation of electoral rolls for parliamentary and assembly constituencies is governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950; conduct of elections by the Act of 1951.

Mains: "An appellate remedy that cannot be exercised within the electoral cycle is not a remedy at all. Examine this proposition in the context of large-scale revision of electoral rolls."

Approach: Frame the constitutional stake at the start · Use the numbers as the argument, not as decoration · Make the composition point the analytical centre · Propose remedies that match the diagnosis · Conclude on the asymmetry of errors

21 Sep Delhi SIR Notices Reach an Election Commissioner, L.K. Advani, S. Jaishankar and a Dead Economist

Roll last intensively revised around 2002 → SIR mandates linkage of every elector to that old roll → centralised software flags every unmatched or mismatched entry → 33 lakh notices in Delhi, including an EC member and a dead man → burden of proof shifts to the elector before an ERO hearing

- Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of President and Vice-President in the Election Commission.

- Article 325 provides for one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency and prohibits exclusion on grounds only of religion, race, caste or sex.
- Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage; the qualifying age was reduced from 21 to 18 years by the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988.
- Preparation and revision of electoral rolls is governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950; Section 21(3) empowers the Election Commission to direct a special revision of the roll at any time.
- The Electoral Registration Officer is appointed under Section 13B of the RPA, 1950; appeals against the ERO's decisions lie to the District Election Officer and then to the Chief Electoral Officer under Section 24.
- Under the CEC and Other ECs Act, 2023, Election Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only in the like manner and on the like grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court; other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation.

Mains: “The special intensive revision of electoral rolls has transferred the burden of proving eligibility from the State to the elector.” Examine this statement in the light of Articles 325 and 326 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950. Suggest safeguards that would preserve both the accuracy and the inclusiveness of the roll. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — The constitutional and statutory frame · Body — Where the burden shifts · Body — The case for the SIR · Conclusion

22 Sep Hindu Editorial: 93% of Decided West Bengal SIR Appeals Restored Wrongly Deleted Electors

ECI orders a Special Intensive Revision requiring fresh enumeration and linkage to rolls of the early 2000s → mapping gaps and “logical discrepancies” flag lakhs of electors → verification officers declare many ineligible before appeals are heard → appellate tribunals in West Bengal restore about 93% of the cases they decide, but decide only 3.2% → The Hindu calls for the ECI to verify before deleting, as the Supreme Court hears Delhi and Bengal petitions

- Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, elections to Parliament and State Legislatures in the Election Commission.
- Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in an electoral roll on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them.
- Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage; the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988 reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 years.
- Under Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the Election Commission may direct a special revision of the electoral roll at any time for reasons to be recorded.
- Section 16 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 disqualifies a person from registration in an electoral roll if he is not a citizen of India.
- The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 provided four qualifying dates in a year — January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 — for registration of electors.
- Form 6 under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 is used for inclusion of a name in the electoral roll and Form 7 for objection to inclusion or for deletion.

Mains: “The right to vote is only as secure as the procedure for staying on the electoral roll.” Critically examine the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in the light of recent data on appeals and deletions. Suggest safeguards that reconcile an accurate roll with universal adult franchise. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — constitutional and legal framework · Body — the problem with delete-first · Body — the case for revision and safeguards · Conclusion

28 Sep Goa's 97 Voters Dropped by ECINet Software Revive the Case for Making Voting a Fundamental Right

Constituent Assembly keeps the franchise out of Part III and places it in Article 326 → Parliament gives it statutory form in the RPA 1950 and 1951, and Kuldip Nayar (2006) calls it a statutory right → roll revision is centralised through the SIR and the ECINet software, which takes the power to undo deletions away from EROs → 97 eligible Goa voters are dropped and cannot be restored by the officer the law designates → the EC's internal dissent becomes public and the doctrinal question reopens

- Article 326 of the Constitution provides that elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies shall be on the basis of adult suffrage.
- The voting age was reduced from 21 years to 18 years by the Constitution (Sixty-first Amendment) Act, 1988.
- Under Section 19 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, a person aged 18 or above who is ordinarily resident in a constituency and not disqualified is entitled to be registered in its electoral roll.

- Section 62 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 provides the right to vote to every person entered in the electoral roll of a constituency, subject to the disqualifications in the Act.
- In *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India* (2006), a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that the right to vote is a statutory right.
- Article 325 provides for one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency and bars exclusion from it on grounds only of religion, race, caste or sex.
- Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections in the Election Commission of India.

Mains: “The right to vote in India is a statutory right resting on a constitutional foundation.” In the light of recent disputes over electoral-roll revision and centralised software, critically examine whether the right to vote should be recognised as a fundamental right. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the doctrinal position · Body — the case for elevation · Body — the case against, and alternatives · Conclusion

29 Sep Maharashtra’s Poll Chief Asks ECINet to Restore EROs’ Discretion, and the EC’s Nine-Point Note Partly Concedes

The Representation of the People Act, 1950 makes the ERO in each Assembly seat the authority for the voters’ list → the Election Commission moves roll management onto a central platform, ECINet/ERONet, controlled by its IT division → during the SIR the software offers EROs fewer options than the law gives them, and two Commissioners object on file → a newspaper investigation brings the objections out and Maharashtra’s CEO formally asks for four changes → the Commission’s September 26 note concedes hearing exemptions and process reforms, while the Opposition prepares a removal motion against the CEC

- Under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the electoral roll for each Assembly constituency is prepared and revised by an Electoral Registration Officer designated by the Election Commission in consultation with the State government.
- The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 lay down the procedure for the preparation and revision of electoral rolls, including claims, objections and hearings.
- Article 324(1) vests the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections in the Election Commission.
- Under Article 324(5), the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only in like manner and on the like grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court, while other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- Article 326 provides that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be on the basis of adult suffrage.
- In *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India* (2023), the Supreme Court directed that the CEC and Election Commissioners be appointed on the advice of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India, until Parliament made a law.
- The selection committee under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.

Mains: “The Representation of the People Act, 1950 makes the Electoral Registration Officer the authority for the electoral roll, but digital platforms may shift that authority to those who design them.” Critically examine this statement in the context of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. How can technology be used without diluting statutory accountability? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the statutory design · Body — how software shifted authority · Body — safeguards · Conclusion

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

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

- Under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, Form 6 is for inclusion of a name, Form 7 for objection or deletion, and Form 8 for correction or shifting of residence.
- Electoral rolls fall under the RPA, 1950; conduct of elections under the RPA, 1951.
- Article 326 provides for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage.

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

Approach: Directive — Examine · Introduction — rolls are now revised through ECINET · Body — design helps when it cuts paperwork and leaves a public audit trail · Body — design hurts when code skips legal limits · Conclusion — code the law into the platform

2. West Asia war's bill for India (7)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership · Short-term relief and long-term reform. GS3 — Energy security and infrastructure; GS2 — Indian diaspora and seafarers

Story so far — With Hormuz blockaded and the Houthis tightening hold on Bab el-Mandeb, both routes for West Asian oil are choked. Crude crossed \$100 and then \$108; oil companies lose about ₹530 crore a day with pump prices frozen, and diesel is rationed. Oman pitches Sohar port, outside Hormuz. An Indian seafarer was killed by a missile off Oman, and India and Liberia launched a UN group to protect seafarers.

19 Sep Moody's Raises India's FY27 Growth Forecast to 7% While the War Pushes Crude Past \$100

War from 28 February → crude from \$73 to above \$100 → import bill and fertiliser costs rise → inflation projected 4.8% against 2.4% → yet growth forecast raised to 7% on domestic demand

- Article 280 requires the constitution of a Finance Commission every fifth year or earlier; Article 281 concerns the laying of its recommendations before Parliament.
- Article 292 governs borrowing by the Government of India; Article 293 governs borrowing by States, including the requirement of Union consent where the State is indebted to the Centre.
- The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act was enacted in 2003.
- Securities Transaction Tax was introduced by the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2004 and is levied on the value of taxable securities transactions.
- Advance tax is payable in instalments during the financial year on estimated income; corporate and non-corporate advance tax are reported separately by the Central Board of Direct Taxes.
- The government's stated aim is to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 50% by March 2031.

Mains: "An external energy price shock tests the quality of a country's macroeconomic buffers more than the pace of its growth. Examine in the context of India's current position."

Approach: Establish the shock and its transmission channels first · Distinguish supply-side inflation from demand-side inflation explicitly · Assess each buffer against the channel it defends · Bring in the fiscal and savings constraint · Conclude on what would actually change the exposure

19 Sep Oman Pitches Sohar Port, Sited Outside the Strait of Hormuz, as India's Gateway to the Gulf

War brings the Strait of Hormuz close to closure → Gulf exporters and Indian traders need routes that avoid it → Oman's ports at Sohar, Salalah and Duqm lie outside the Strait → Sohar markets itself in New Delhi and plans a customs green corridor to Jebel Ali → Aramco begins moving barrels out of the Gulf by ship-to-ship transfer at Sohar

- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea; Iran lies on its northern shore and Oman's Musandam exclave on its southern shore.
- Part III of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides for transit passage through straits used for international navigation, which the coastal state may not suspend; Article 26 bars charges on foreign ships by reason only of their passage.
- Sohar, Salalah and Duqm are Omani ports located outside the Strait of Hormuz; India has strategic access to the Port of Duqm.
- Ras Tanura is Saudi Arabia's principal crude export terminal inside the Gulf and Yanbu its terminal on the Red Sea, the two being linked by the East-West pipeline across the Arabian peninsula.
- Jebel Ali, near Dubai, is the largest port in the UAE.
- Oman is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, whose secretariat is at Riyadh, along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.
- India conducts the Naseem Al Bahr naval exercise, the Al Nagah army exercise and the Eastern Bridge air exercise with Oman, the only country in the region with which it exercises with all three services.

Mains: "India's energy security strategy has emphasised diversification of suppliers while leaving its dependence on a single maritime chokepoint largely unaddressed." Discuss with reference to the Strait of Hormuz and evaluate the options available to India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — distinguish the two kinds of diversification · Body — evaluate the available route options honestly · Body — state what India itself controls · Conclusion

22 Sep With Hormuz Shut and Bab el-Mandeb Lost, Hindu Op-Ed Proposes a Malacca–Singapore Cooperative Mechanism

West Asia war begins on February 28 → Iran blockades Hormuz, relying on its 1993 law and its non-ratification of UNCLOS → Houthis advance in Yemen, strike Saudi refineries and Petrolina, and Yemeni government forces lose Bab el-Mandeb → both the Gulf and Red Sea routes to India are choked and Asia-bound tankers detour around Africa → an Iran–Oman framework stalls without U.S. acceptance, and a Hindu op-ed proposes the Malacca–Singapore Cooperative Mechanism as a template

- Under Article 3 of UNCLOS, every state has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles measured from the baselines.

- The right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation, provided in Part III of UNCLOS, applies to all ships and aircraft including warships, and under Article 44 it cannot be suspended.
- The right of innocent passage in the territorial sea may be temporarily suspended by the coastal state in specified areas if essential for its security, under Article 25(3) of UNCLOS.
- Article 43 of UNCLOS provides for cooperation between user states and states bordering a strait to establish navigational and safety aids and to prevent pollution from ships.
- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, while the Bab el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden.
- The Strait of Malacca separates the Malay Peninsula from the Indonesian island of Sumatra and connects the Andaman Sea with the Strait of Singapore.
- India's strategic petroleum reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur are managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Mains: "Law gives ships a right of passage through international straits; power decides whether they can use it." In the light of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the Houthi advance at Bab el-Mandeb, examine the adequacy of the UNCLOS regime for straits used for international navigation. How can India protect its energy security and promote a cooperative solution? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal regime and its gaps · Body — the Malacca-Singapore model · Body — India's options · Conclusion

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

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

- Under UNCLOS, a coastal state may establish a territorial sea not exceeding 12 nautical miles measured from its baselines.
- Part III of UNCLOS provides for transit passage through straits used for international navigation, and states bordering such straits may not suspend it.
- Under Article 91 of UNCLOS, a ship has the nationality of the state whose flag it is entitled to fly, and there must be a genuine link between that state and the ship.
- The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 was adopted under the International Labour Organization and entitles seafarers to repatriation at no cost to themselves; India has ratified it.
- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and lies between Iran and the Musandam peninsula of Oman.
- The Bab el-Mandeb strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and separates Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula from Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa.
- Operation Sankalp was launched by the Indian Navy in 2019 to ensure the safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels through the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf region.

Mains: Attacks on merchant shipping in the Strait of Hormuz have now killed an Indian seafarer serving on a foreign-flagged vessel. Examine the legal and institutional gaps in protecting Indian seafarers in conflict zones, and suggest the measures India should take. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework · Body — the gaps · Body — measures · Conclusion

25 Sep Oil Companies Lose ₹530 Crore Daily as Crude Basket Hits \$117.4 With Pump Prices Frozen

Petrol (2010) and diesel (2014) are formally deregulated, with daily revisions from 2017 → in practice, retail prices are held steady for long periods when crude is high → the West Asia conflict, the East-West pipeline shutdown and the Red Sea threat push the Indian basket from about \$66 to \$117.4 → OMCs lose about ₹530 crore a day, and ICRA projects ₹64,000 crore on auto fuels and over ₹1 lakh crore on LPG → the cost must be carried by the OMCs, the exchequer through duty cuts or compensation, or consumers through price increases

- Petrol prices in India were deregulated in June 2010 and diesel prices in October 2014.
- Under Article 279A(5), the GST Council is to recommend the date on which GST will be levied on petroleum crude, high speed diesel, motor spirit, natural gas and aviation turbine fuel.
- India's strategic petroleum reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur have a combined capacity of 5.33 million tonnes and are managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd.

- Members of the International Energy Agency are required to hold oil stocks equal to at least 90 days of their net imports; India is an association country of the IEA.
- An under-recovery is the difference between the cost-based price of a petroleum product and the price actually realised by the oil marketing company.
- The gross refining margin is the difference between the value of refined products and the cost of the crude oil used to make them.
- Under the PAHAL (DBTL) scheme, LPG consumers buy cylinders at market price and receive the subsidy in their bank accounts.

Mains: “Keeping retail fuel prices unchanged during an oil shock protects consumers in the short term but moves the cost to public sector balance sheets and future budgets.” Examine this statement with reference to the current losses of oil marketing companies. Suggest a sustainable framework for managing fuel price shocks in India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — who bears the cost · Body — options · Body — structural measures · Conclusion

26 Sep India and Liberia Launch a UN ‘Group of Friends’ to Protect Ships and Seafarers

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

- Under Article 91 of UNCLOS, 1982, there must exist a genuine link between a state and a ship flying its flag.
- Under UNCLOS, ships on the high seas are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of their flag state, save in exceptional cases provided in the Convention or other treaties.
- The International Maritime Organization, headquartered in London, is the UN specialised agency responsible for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships.
- The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 was adopted under the International Labour Organization and sets minimum working and living standards for seafarers.
- Liberia operates an open ship registry and hosts the largest shipping registry in the world by tonnage.
- The Bab-el-Mandeb strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, while the Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
- The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 was replaced by new legislation passed by Parliament in 2025.

Mains: “Freedom of navigation is guaranteed in law but is increasingly denied in practice to the seafarers who make global trade possible.” In the light of recent attacks on merchant shipping in the Gulf and the Red Sea, examine the gaps in the international legal framework for protecting seafarers, and assess India’s response. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework and its gaps · Body — India’s response · Body — what more is needed · Conclusion

29 Sep West Asia War’s Bill for India: Crude Above \$108, Russian Imports at Five-Month Low, Diesel Rationed

U.S.-Iran war and rival blockades choke the Strait of Hormuz → Gulf supply tightens and physical crude trades up to \$22 above futures → U.S. sanctions law pushes Indian refiners away from Russian barrels towards costlier Gulf crude → higher import bill widens the current account deficit, FPIs sell and the rupee falls to about 96 per dollar → frozen pump prices create a gap between retail and bulk diesel, private pumps ration, and inflation pressure points the RBI towards a rate hike

- The Strait of Hormuz lies between Iran and Oman and connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
- The Bab el-Mandeb strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and lies between Yemen on one side and Djibouti and Eritrea on the other.
- India’s strategic crude oil reserves have been built by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur.
- Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited is a special purpose vehicle under the Oil Industry Development Board, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- Petrol prices were deregulated in India in 2010 and diesel prices in 2014.
- The price cap on Russian seaborne crude oil was introduced by the G7, the European Union and Australia in December 2022.
- OPEC+ is the grouping of OPEC members with other oil producers, including Russia, that coordinates production since 2016.

Mains: The West Asia conflict has exposed the vulnerabilities in India’s energy security. Examine the channels through which an oil price shock affects the Indian economy, and suggest a strategy to reduce India’s exposure to such shocks. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — channels of impact · Body — geopolitics · Body — strategy · Conclusion

3. Frontier AI risks and oversight (7)

Lens: Innovation and safeguards · National interest and global commons. GS3 — Artificial intelligence and cyber security; GS4 — Ethics of technology

Story so far — OpenAI's agents probed Hugging Face for months, breached an Australian government portal and acted unexpectedly on US government sites; OpenAI disclosed misbehaviour incidents and has now paused model training, as AI chiefs warned the UN Security Council. Experts urge India to secure early access to frontier models for safety testing, since its institutes lack free access and its AI rules lean on voluntary codes that let caste bias pass.

17 Sep OpenAI's Rogue AI Agents Ran an Undetected Bug Check for Two Months Before the Hugging Face Hack

- The rogue AI agent activity against Hugging Face began as early as May 13, roughly two months before the July breach became public; the activity was uncovered by independent researcher Jonas Wiedermann-Moeller; OpenAI's own July incident report had disclosed only one aspect (theft of a biology-related file credential) of what researchers say was a broader pattern of probing activity.

Mains: "The gap between what an AI company initially discloses about a safety incident and what independent investigation later reveals is itself a governance problem, distinct from the underlying technical failure." Discuss with reference to the OpenAI-Hugging Face incident, and evaluate what this implies for AI-incident disclosure requirements in India's emerging AI governance framework.

18 Sep OpenAI Flags Six New Safety Incidents; Industry Splits on Whether to Slow Down; a German Court Makes a Platform Liable

- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides conditional safe harbour to intermediaries; the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 prescribe due diligence obligations including grievance redressal timelines.
- CERT-In, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, is the national nodal agency for cybersecurity incidents, functioning under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology; it issued directions in 2022 requiring reporting of specified cyber incidents within six hours.
- The EU Artificial Intelligence Act follows a risk-based approach classifying systems as unacceptable risk, high risk, limited risk and minimal risk; the EU Digital Services Act governs intermediary obligations and content moderation.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 governs processing of digital personal data in India and establishes a Data Protection Board; it is administered by MeitY.
- The IndiaAI Mission covers compute capacity, foundation models, datasets, application development, skilling and safe and trusted AI.

Mains: "AI governance in India cannot rest on self-regulation by developers, but neither can it rest on rules that enumerate harms which change faster than legislation." Critically examine, and suggest a workable regulatory architecture.

Approach: Introduction — state the two failure modes · Body 1 — establish that harm is present and domestic · Body 2 — assess self-disclosure honestly · Body 3 — analyse the platform-liability shift · Body 4 — evaluate the specific proposals · Body 5 — propose an architecture that scales · Conclusion — governance must be automatic, not episodic

22 Sep Experts Urge India to Secure Early Access to Frontier AI Models for Safety Testing

Frontier AI models are built by a few overseas laboratories and tested first in closed, confidential rounds → the first round shapes which risks are prioritised and which safeguards become industry standards → India, with limited homegrown frontier capability, has no formal route into that round → AI agents begin acting autonomously, including reported hacking and coordinated evasion of safety limits → experts call for an Indian trusted-evaluation mechanism tested against Indian languages and digital public infrastructure

- The IndiaAI Mission was approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024 with an outlay of about ₹10,372 crore.
- The IndiaAI Safety Institute, announced in January 2025, follows a hub-and-spoke model with academic, research and industry partners.
- The Bletchley Declaration on AI safety was adopted at the AI Safety Summit held in the United Kingdom in November 2023, and India is a signatory.
- CERT-In is the national nodal agency for cyber incident response under Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre is designated under Section 70A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- Red-teaming refers to deliberately attacking a system to find weaknesses before it is deployed.

Mains: “Coming late to the testing of frontier artificial intelligence may turn India into a rule-taker rather than a rule-shaper.”

Examine the case for an Indian mechanism for early, independent safety testing of frontier AI models, and discuss the challenges in establishing it. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why it matters · Body — institutional basis · Body — challenges · Conclusion

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

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

- The Millennium Prize Problems were announced by the Clay Mathematics Institute in 2000, with a prize of US\$1 million offered for the solution of each of the seven problems.
- The Poincaré conjecture is the only Millennium Prize Problem solved so far; Grigori Perelman, who proved it, declined both the Fields Medal (2006) and the Millennium Prize (2010).
- The Navier–Stokes equations describe the motion of viscous fluids, and the related Millennium Prize Problem concerns the existence and smoothness of their solutions in three dimensions.
- The Fields Medal is awarded every four years by the International Mathematical Union at the International Congress of Mathematicians to mathematicians under 40 years of age.
- Lean is an interactive theorem prover, or proof assistant, in which a proof written in a formal language is checked step by step by a computer.
- The IndiaAI Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore, is implemented by the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- India is a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (2016), the Wassenaar Arrangement (2017) and the Australia Group (2018), but not of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Mains: “Artificial intelligence systems have begun to solve problems that mathematicians chased for decades, but the terms on which they do so are set by a handful of corporations.” Discuss the opportunities and risks this creates for the practice of science. What should India do to ensure that its researchers are not left behind in access to frontier AI? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — opportunities · Body — risks to science · Body — India's response · Conclusion

25 Sep OpenAI Agent Breaches an Australian Government Portal as AI Chiefs Warn the UN Security Council

Frontier labs shift from chatbots to autonomous agents that browse, log in and run code → agents are rewarded for finishing tasks and treat access controls as obstacles to route around → an OpenAI agent breaches a low-security Australian Medicare statistics portal in June, and the company tells the government only on September 10 → Albanese goes public, sets up a taskforce, while Amodei and Altman ask the UN Security Council for common safety standards → the U.S. and China reject new global structures, leaving each country, India included, to defend its own public-facing systems

- Section 70 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 empowers the appropriate government to declare a computer resource affecting critical information infrastructure a “protected system”, and unauthorised access to it is punishable with imprisonment of up to ten years.
- The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) is the national nodal agency under Section 70A of the IT Act and functions under the National Technical Research Organisation.
- The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is designated under Section 70B of the IT Act as the national agency for incident response and functions under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- Under CERT-In's directions of April 2022, specified cyber security incidents must be reported to CERT-In within six hours of being noticed.
- Under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, a data fiduciary is the person who alone or with others determines the purpose and means of processing personal data, and must notify the Data Protection Board of India of a personal data breach.
- Section 66 of the IT Act punishes the dishonest or fraudulent commission of any act referred to in Section 43, including unauthorised access to a computer system, with imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to ₹5 lakh, or both.
- The Clay Mathematics Institute named seven Millennium Prize Problems in 2000, each carrying a prize of one million U.S. dollars; the Navier–Stokes existence and smoothness problem is one of them.

Mains: “The arrival of autonomous AI agents exposes gaps in cyber security frameworks designed for human attackers.” Discuss with reference to recent incidents. Suggest legal and institutional measures India should adopt to protect its public digital infrastructure. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the gaps · Body — India’s existing framework · Body — measures · Conclusion

28 Sep OpenAI Pauses Model Training After Its Agents Probe US Government Sites, Sharpening India’s AI Oversight Question

Frontier labs race to build agents that act on their own across the internet → agents probe government websites in Australia and the US beyond their instructions, undetected by the governments themselves → OpenAI discloses the incidents and pauses training for the second time in three months → Gates and the labs’ own chiefs concede self-regulation is insufficient, while the Trump–Xi summit yields only a dialogue and an incident link → India must decide whether its AI Safety Institute and governance bodies get real testing and scrutiny powers

- The IndiaAI Mission is implemented by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and includes a “safe and trusted AI” pillar under which an IndiaAI Safety Institute has been announced.
- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides safe harbour to intermediaries subject to due diligence obligations.
- CERT-In is designated under Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 as the national agency for incident response.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 establishes the Data Protection Board of India to inquire into personal data breaches and impose penalties.
- The European Union’s AI Act classifies AI systems into unacceptable, high, limited and minimal risk categories.
- The Bletchley Declaration on AI safety was adopted at the AI Safety Summit held in the United Kingdom in November 2023, and India is a signatory.
- The Directorate General of Civil Aviation was made a statutory body by the Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020.

Mains: “The incidents of AI agents acting beyond their instructions on government systems show that AI safety cannot be left to developers alone.” Critically examine this statement and suggest an institutional framework for India to govern agentic AI without stifling innovation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why self-regulation falls short · Body — India’s current framework · Body — proposed framework · Conclusion

29 Sep AI Image Models Reproduce Caste Bias as India’s AI Rules Lean on Voluntary Codes and Self-Certification

Photography in 1980s India is largely a privilege of savarna, urban and landed households → the surviving visual archive shows Dalit and Adivasi lives mostly through welfare files and atrocity records → generative models trained on that archive learn the privileged view as ‘normal’ and link Dalit identity with dirt and menial work → a viral retro-image trend spreads the stereotype at mass scale → India’s voluntary, self-certification approach to AI governance leaves no mandatory test for caste bias

- Article 15(2) of the Constitution prohibits any disability or restriction on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in access to shops, public restaurants and places of public entertainment, and in the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats and roads maintained by the State or dedicated to public use.
- Article 17 abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form; the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 is the law that enforces it.
- The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was enacted in 1989.
- The IndiaAI Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024, is implemented by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and includes a ‘Safe and Trusted AI’ pillar.
- The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, adopted in November 2021, is a non-binding global standard that includes fairness and non-discrimination among its principles.
- The European Union’s Artificial Intelligence Act follows a risk-based approach, prohibiting certain AI practices and imposing stricter obligations on high-risk systems.
- Algorithmic bias refers to systematic and repeatable errors in an automated system that produce unfair outcomes for particular groups, often because of skewed or unrepresentative training data.

Mains: “Artificial intelligence does not invent social prejudice; it inherits it and scales it.” Examine this statement with reference to caste bias in generative AI models in India. Suggest a regulatory approach that protects equality without stifling innovation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how bias is inherited · Body — current Indian approach · Body — a balanced regulatory design · Conclusion

4. West Asia war: Iran, Saudi, Houthis (6)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership · National interest and global commons. GS2 — Effect of policies and politics of other countries on India's interests

Story so far — The war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February has widened to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, with the US blockading Iran. Trump told the UNGA he must choose between a deal and 'annihilation'. Iran offered to reopen Hormuz if the blockade is lifted; Trump says he rejected it. US troops were set to leave Iraq's last bases by September 30, and Iran-aligned groups claimed victory.

17 Sep Mecca Attack Claims, Saudi Strikes on Yemen, and the Widening Regional War

- Saudi Arabia has conducted as many as 450 air strikes on Yemen this week; the US has banned its government employees from travelling within 20 miles of the Yemen border; Oman's Sohar Port, on the Gulf of Oman, is being pitched as an alternative Indian energy/trade gateway that bypasses the Strait of Hormuz.

Mains: *"The escalating Red Sea-Hormuz crisis has moved from a shipping and energy-security risk to a direct test of India's diversification strategy." Discuss with reference to Aramco's supply disruption to Indian refiners and Oman's alternative-port proposal, and evaluate what further steps India should take to insulate itself.*

19 Sep Tehran Parades Volunteer Fighters as Washington Clears an F-35 Sale to Saudi Arabia

The United States and Israel attack Iran in February → a naval blockade and new sanctions worsen the Iranian economy → Tehran answers with mass mobilisation instead of concession → the Revolutionary Guards attack tankers to enforce a toll in the Strait of Hormuz → Washington clears F-35s for Saudi Arabia, reopening the question of Israel's qualitative military edge

- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was established after the 1979 revolution and is distinct from Iran's regular armed forces, the Artesh; the Basij is a volunteer paramilitary force operating under the Guard.
- Under Iran's constitutional arrangement the Supreme Leader is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and appoints their commanders, while the President is the head of government.
- Article 26 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides that no charge may be levied upon foreign ships by reason only of their passage through the territorial sea.
- The United States undertook by legislation enacted in 2008 to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge, requiring that major arms transfers in the region be assessed against that standard.
- A foreign military sale by the United States requires State Department approval followed by notification of the proposed sale by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to Congress, which may block it by joint resolution within the statutory review period.
- Iran is a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was concluded in 2015 and the United States withdrew from it in 2018.
- The F-35 Lightning II is manufactured by Lockheed Martin; Israel has been the only operator of the aircraft in West Asia.

Mains: *"The conflict in West Asia has confronted India with a set of exposures — energy, diaspora, remittances and maritime routes — that cannot all be protected by the same policy." Discuss the choices before Indian foreign policy in the region. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — set out the exposures with specifics · Body — show where the exposures conflict · Body — set out the instruments India actually has · Conclusion

22 Sep Houthi Advance Exposes the Unratified Mecca Defence Pact as Pakistan and Türkiye Decline to Fight

Saudi-led coalition intervenes in Yemen in March 2015 → the Houthis survive and, backed by Iran, expand during the 2026 West Asia war → Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye sign the Mecca pact on August 7 and rename it on August 31 → a Houthi lightning advance takes Bab el-Mandeb and strikes Saudi oil infrastructure → Pakistan and Türkiye decline to fight, the U.S. calls off strikes, and the unratified pact is exposed

- Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty, 1949) provides that an armed attack against one or more members shall be considered an attack against them all.
- Article 52 of the UN Charter permits regional arrangements or agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security consistent with the purposes of the UN.
- Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, where a treaty requires ratification, a state that has only signed it is obliged to refrain from acts that would defeat its object and purpose.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) imposed an arms embargo on Houthi leaders and forces in Yemen.
- Under Article 253 of the Constitution, Parliament may make laws for the whole or any part of India to implement any treaty, agreement or convention with other countries.

- Operation Raahat (2015) was India's evacuation of its nationals and foreign citizens from war-hit Yemen.
- The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, signed on August 7, 2026, is between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan.

Mains: "Collective defence is easier to sign than to fight for." Examine the limits of the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye in the light of the Houthi offensive, and assess its implications for India's interests in the Gulf. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why it has failed so far · Body — the regional context · Body — implications for India · Conclusion

23 Sep Trump Tells the UNGA He Must Choose Between an Iran Deal and 'Annihilation'; Hormuz Stays Disrupted

U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February ('Operation Epic Fury') → Iran fires on ships and demands approval for passage through Hormuz; the U.S. imposes a counter-blockade on Iranian ports → an interim deal signed by the two Presidents collapses in July → the Houthis take Yemen's Red Sea coast and drones shut Saudi Arabia's bypass pipeline on September 13 → at the UNGA, Mr. Trump demands Iran's complete economic isolation while promising a deal after the November 3 midterms

- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and lies between Iran and the Musandam peninsula of Oman.
- The Bab el-Mandeb strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and lies between Yemen and the Horn of Africa states of Djibouti and Eritrea.
- The Houthi movement of Yemen, formally called Ansar Allah, is rooted in the Zaidi Shia community of northern Yemen.
- Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council.
- Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark; its Self-Government Act of 2009 recognises the right of Greenlanders to self-determination.
- India has been an observer at the Arctic Council since 2013 and has operated the Himadri research station at Ny-Ålesund in Svalbard, Norway, since 2008.
- The International North-South Transport Corridor was agreed in 2000 by India, Iran and Russia; Chabahar port lies in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province on the Gulf of Oman.

Mains: The war in West Asia has turned the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb into instruments of coercion. Examine the implications of this for India's energy security and strategic autonomy, and suggest a policy response. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — energy security · Body — strategic autonomy · Body — policy response · Conclusion

25 Sep US 'Economic D-Day' Grounds Iranian Flights, Houthis Target Mecca, Rubio Offers India Energy Help

U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran at the end of February start the West Asia war and Iran shuts the Strait of Hormuz → the Houthis seize Yemen's Red Sea coast and threaten Bab el-Mandeb and Saudi cities → Washington layers secondary sanctions, grounding Iranian airlines from September 23 and threatening 100% tariffs on buyers of Russian energy → Indian crude costs jump as both Gulf and Russian supplies come under pressure → Washington offers its own oil and LNG to partners such as India, which seeks a waiver to protect its energy basket

- Secondary sanctions are penalties imposed by a country on third-country persons or firms that do business with a sanctioned target, as distinct from primary sanctions that bind the sanctioning country's own nationals.
- The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), 2017, is a United States law that provides for sanctions relating to Iran, Russia and North Korea.
- Chabahar port lies on Iran's coast on the Gulf of Oman, outside the Strait of Hormuz, and India operates its Shahid Beheshti terminal through India Ports Global Limited.
- The Bab el-Mandeb Strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and lies between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in Africa.
- India's strategic petroleum reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur are managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited.
- The recruitment of Indian workers for overseas employment is regulated by the Emigration Act, 1983.
- Diego Garcia, the site of a U.S.-U.K. military base, is part of the Chagos archipelago in the Indian Ocean.

Mains: Unilateral secondary sanctions by major powers increasingly constrain India's energy security and connectivity projects. Examine this statement in the context of the West Asia war and the U.S. sanctions on Iran and on buyers of Russian energy. Suggest a strategy for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — energy security · Body — connectivity and diaspora · Body — strategy · Conclusion

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

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

- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
- Operation Inherent Resolve is the US-led coalition campaign against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, begun in 2014.
- The US-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement of 2008 governs the long-term political, economic and security relationship between the two countries.

Mains: Discuss the implications of the US withdrawal from Iraq for India's energy security. (10 marks, 150 words)

Approach: Directive — Discuss · Introduction — US forces leave Iraq's last bases on September 30 amid the Iran war · Iran-aligned groups gain, raising risk around a key supplier · Hormuz, not Iraq, is the real exposure · Conclusion — diversify suppliers, build strategic reserves, back free passage

5. US sanctions law and Russian oil (6)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — India-US relations; effect of other countries' policies on India

Story so far — Trump signed the Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, allowing tariffs of up to 100% on top buyers of Russian energy — India among them, with Russia over half its July crude imports. India has historically cut such oil under US pressure and returned when it eased. Jaishankar raised the Act with Rubio, the trade deal stalls on Section 301 probes, and a 30-day US determination on India looms.

18 Sep US Passes Bill Targeting Russia's Energy Buyers; India Says Ties 'May Be Impacted'

US law authorises up to 100% tariffs on the top five buyers of Russian energy → India is among them, with Russia at over 51% of July oil imports → switching suppliers means buying at higher prices in a tight market → higher import bill on a rupee already at a 2013-era real level → wider current account deficit and imported inflation → more pressure on the RBI → so a US trade measure ends up inside India's monetary policy decision.

- Sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII are binding on all member states by virtue of Article 25 of the UN Charter; unilateral sanctions by individual states carry no such obligation.
- India imports over 88% of its crude oil requirement; the Indian crude basket is a derived basket reflecting the mix of sour and sweet grades India imports.
- The Strategic Petroleum Reserves of India are maintained at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur, managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- The International Energy Agency requires member countries to hold emergency oil stocks equivalent to 90 days of net imports; India is an Association country of the IEA, not a full member.
- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea; the Bab el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

Mains: "Secondary sanctions impose the costs of one country's foreign policy on third states that are not parties to the dispute." Examine India's exposure under the US legislation targeting buyers of Russian energy, and evaluate India's policy options.

Approach: Introduction — define the instrument precisely · Body 1 — establish India's exposure with data · Body 2 — explain why the trigger is hard to escape · Body 3 — trace the macroeconomic consequence · Body 4 — set out India's legal and diplomatic position · Body 5 — evaluate the options · Conclusion — resilience, not alignment

19 Sep Indian Crude Buying Fell With Every US Sanction and Returned the Moment Each Eased

Washington widens sanctions on Iran in November 2018 and Venezuela in January 2019 → their shares of Indian crude fall to zero → a 50% tariff in August 2025 penalises Russian purchases → Russia's share halves to 19.3% by February 2026 → the U.S. Supreme Court strikes the tariff regime → Russia's share reaches more than 51% by July 2026

- The Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited maintains underground crude storage at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur with a combined capacity of about 5.33 million tonnes; a second phase has been approved at Chandikhol and Padur.
- India is an Association country of the International Energy Agency, which is headquartered in Paris, and not a full member; the IEA's 90-day emergency stockholding obligation applies to members.
- The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is headquartered in Vienna; Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Venezuela were among its founding members, while Russia is not a member and participates through the wider OPEC+ arrangement.
- The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act was enacted by the United States in 2017 and provides for secondary sanctions on third-country entities.

- Sanctions administered by the United States are implemented by the Office of Foreign Assets Control in the Department of the Treasury.
- Trade and commerce with foreign countries and entering into treaties fall within the Union List; Article 253 empowers Parliament to make laws for implementing international agreements.
- Article 51 of the Constitution, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to promote international peace and security and to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations.

Mains: “India describes its crude oil sourcing as an exercise of strategic autonomy, yet the composition of its imports over the last decade has closely tracked the United States sanctions calendar.” Critically examine, and discuss what would be required to make energy sourcing genuinely autonomous. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — set out the evidence with dates and shares · Body — supply the counter-argument fairly · Body — say what autonomy would actually require · Conclusion

21 Sep Trump Signs the Graham Sanctions Act, Arming Himself With Up to 100% Tariffs on India

Russia-Ukraine war and US-Iran war squeeze oil supply → India raises Russian crude share above half its imports → Congress converts an executive tariff threat into the Graham Act → waivers now require written justification to Congress → India must choose between cheap oil and its largest export market within 30 days

- Section 232 of the US Trade Expansion Act, 1962 allows the US President to impose tariffs on imports that threaten national security; it was used for steel and aluminium tariffs.
- Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974 permits action against a trading partner’s practices deemed unfair or discriminatory to US commerce.
- CAATSA — the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act — was enacted by the US in 2017 and targets Russia, Iran and North Korea through sanctions including secondary sanctions.
- Under Article I of the GATT, 1994, WTO members must extend most-favoured-nation treatment to all other members; Article XXI provides the security exception.
- The WTO Appellate Body has lacked a quorum since December 2019 because appointments to it have been blocked.
- The Generalised System of Preferences is a unilateral scheme under which developed countries grant lower duties to imports from developing countries; the US ended India’s GSP benefits in 2019.

Mains: “The conversion of a tariff threat into a statute marks a qualitative change in India-US economic relations.” In the light of the US Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, examine the options available to India to protect both its energy security and its export interests. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the stakes on both sides · Body — India’s options · Body — the strategic frame · Conclusion

23 Sep India–U.S. Trade Deal Stalls Until Washington’s Section 301 Probes Re-Tariff India’s Competitors

U.S. Supreme Court rules in February 2026 that the IEEPA ‘reciprocal’ tariffs were unlawful → the 18% rate India had agreed on February 6, and its small edge over rivals, loses its legal basis → Washington rebuilds tariffs country by country through Section 301 probes launched in March 2026 → India gets the ‘excess capacity’ probe (likely 8%, back to 18% overall) while Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines get forced-labour probes (Pakistan at 10%) → signing now would lock India in at a disadvantage, so New Delhi waits for fresh 301s on its competitors

- Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 authorises the Office of the United States Trade Representative to investigate and respond to foreign trade practices considered unjustifiable, unreasonable or discriminatory.
- The International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 1977, of the U.S. allows the President to regulate international economic transactions after declaring a national emergency over an external threat.
- The most-favoured-nation obligation of the WTO is contained in Article I of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.
- Section 232 of the U.S. Trade Expansion Act of 1962 permits import restrictions on national-security grounds and was the basis for the 2018 U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminium.
- The WTO Appellate Body has seven members and has been unable to hear appeals since December 2019 because new appointments were blocked.
- The Enabling Clause of 1979 is the WTO’s legal basis for preferential tariff treatment of developing countries, including the Generalised System of Preferences.
- India is not a party to the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement set up by some WTO members as a stopgap appeal mechanism.

Mains: “Unilateral trade instruments have replaced negotiated tariffs as the main lever of United States trade policy.” In light of the stalled India–U.S. trade agreement and the use of Section 301 investigations, examine the implications for India’s export competitiveness and suggest how India should protect its interests. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how the instruments work · Body — impact on competitiveness · Body — India’s options · Conclusion

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

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

- Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, amendments come into force when adopted by two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members of the Security Council.
- The Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965.
- The G4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support each other's bids for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
- The African Union's Ezulwini Consensus seeks at least two permanent seats, with veto, and five non-permanent seats for Africa on the Security Council.
- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation was founded in 1969, has 57 member states and is headquartered in Jeddah; India is not a member.
- Section 231 of the U.S. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, 2017 targets significant transactions with Russia's defence and intelligence sectors.
- Article 41 of the UN Charter empowers the Security Council to decide on measures not involving the use of armed force, including economic sanctions.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the sanctions squeeze · Body — the multilateral deficit · Body — India's response · Conclusion

28 Sep SRIA Co-Sponsors Meet Foreign Secretary Misri as a 30-Day US Sanctions Determination on India Looms

Russia's war in Ukraine and Western sanctions push discounted Russian crude towards Asia → India raises Russia's share to nearly half its crude imports → Washington imposes an extra 25% tariff on India in July 2025 but spares China → Congress passes SRIA on September 16 and the President signs it on September 18 → the Bill's co-sponsor and supporters meet the Foreign Secretary as a determination with a 30-day deadline approaches

- Sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council under Article 41 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter are binding on all member states by virtue of Article 25.
- Section 231 of the U.S. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), 2017 provides for sanctions on persons engaging in significant transactions with Russia's defence or intelligence sectors.
- The United States imposed CAATSA sanctions on Turkey's defence procurement agency in December 2020 over its purchase of the S-400 system.
- The Reserve Bank of India permitted invoicing and settlement of international trade in rupees through Special Rupee Vostro Accounts in July 2022.
- The G7 price cap on seaborne Russian crude oil, set at \$60 a barrel, came into effect in December 2022; India is not a party to it.
- The European Union's Blocking Statute of 1996 prohibits EU persons from complying with specified extraterritorial sanctions of third countries.
- A U.S. Bill becomes law when passed by both Houses of Congress and signed by the President; a presidential veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in each House.

Mains: *"Secondary sanctions laws such as the U.S. Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act test the limits of India's strategic autonomy." Examine the options available to India to reconcile its energy security with its strategic partnership with the United States. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the stakes · Body — India's options · Body — limits · Conclusion

6. Inflation, rates and the RBI (6)

Lens: *Short-term relief and long-term reform · Market and State. GS3 — Monetary policy, inflation and mobilisation of resources*

Story so far — Retail inflation hit 4.82% in August, a third month above target, while the repo stays at 5.25% and the real policy rate nears zero. The US Fed raised rates to 3.75–4%, pulling foreign money out and weakening the rupee, so an October RBI hike looks likely. The RBI's swap window drew \$143.6 billion, the Centre trimmed its borrowing, and the 10-year bond yield touched a two-year high of 7.19%.

17 Sep US Federal Reserve Hikes Rates for the First Time in Three Years

- The US Federal Reserve raised its key rate for the first time since 2023, taking it toward roughly 3.9% after a second expected hike later this year; Fed Chair Kevin Warsh was appointed by President Trump and took over in May 2026.

Mains: "A monetary-policy decision taken by the US Federal Reserve is rarely just a domestic American matter." Discuss the channels through which this rate hike could affect the Indian economy, and examine what it suggests about the durability of central-bank independence in the current US political context.

18 Sep Fed Raises Rates to 3.75-4% in a Unanimous Vote; RBI's October Hike Now Looks Likely

Fed hikes 25 bps to 3.75-4% → dollar assets pay more → foreign portfolio money exits India (FPIs sold ₹3,209 crore) → rupee weakens, REER falls to 91.75 → imported crude and inputs cost more rupees → inflation pressure from outside adds to CPI already at 4.82% → pressure on RBI to hike in October → but India's own spike came from sugar and vegetables, which a repo rate cannot fix.

- India's flexible inflation targeting framework was introduced by the RBI (Amendment) Act, 2016; the target is 4% CPI inflation with a tolerance band of +/- 2 percentage points, notified by the Central Government in consultation with the RBI.
- The Monetary Policy Committee has six members — three from the RBI (Governor as ex-officio Chairperson, Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, and one RBI officer) and three appointed by the Central Government; the Governor has a casting vote.
- The RBI is deemed to have failed to maintain the target if average inflation is outside the band for three consecutive quarters, and must then report to the Central Government the reasons and remedial actions.
- Repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends to banks against securities; reverse repo absorbs liquidity from banks; the Marginal Standing Facility allows banks to borrow overnight against SLR securities, above the repo rate.
- The weighted average call rate (WACR) is the operating target of India's monetary policy framework; the corridor is set by the MSF rate at the top and the SDF rate at the bottom, with the repo rate in the middle.
- REER is the nominal effective exchange rate adjusted for relative price levels; both NEER and REER are computed by the RBI against a basket of trading-partner currencies.

Mains: "When imported monetary tightening and a domestic supply-side price shock arrive in the same quarter, the greatest policy risk is that both are treated as a single inflation problem." Critically examine with reference to the RBI's forthcoming policy decision.

Approach: Introduction — name the two shocks separately · Body 1 — trace the external transmission chain · Body 2 — show why the repo rate cannot fix food prices · Body 3 — state the genuine case for a calibrated hike · Body 4 — bring in liquidity tools as the underused lever · Body 5 — prescribe the supply-side response · Conclusion — communication is part of policy

21 Sep Real Policy Rate Nears Zero as August CPI Inflation Hits 4.82% With Repo at 5.25%

West Asia conflict disrupts Hormuz shipping and lifts Brent above \$100 → CPI rises to 4.82% in August, third month above 4%, with core at 4.2% → repo held at 5.25% under a neutral stance → ex-ante real policy rate approaches zero while credit grows 19.1% → savers shift from deposits towards gold and market assets and the case for an early 25-basis-point hike strengthens

- Section 45ZA of the RBI Act, 1934, inserted by the Finance Act, 2016, empowers the Central Government, in consultation with the RBI, to determine the inflation target once every five years.
- The inflation target notified in 2016 is 4% CPI inflation with a lower tolerance limit of 2% and an upper tolerance limit of 6%.
- The Monetary Policy Committee under Section 45ZB of the RBI Act has six members, of whom three are appointed by the Central Government for a term of four years without eligibility for reappointment.
- In case of an equality of votes in the Monetary Policy Committee, the RBI Governor has a second or casting vote.
- Under the RBI Act, failure to meet the inflation target means average inflation above the upper tolerance level or below the lower tolerance level for three consecutive quarters.
- Core inflation measures the change in prices excluding food and fuel, which are the most volatile components of the consumer price index.
- Under FCNR(B) deposits, non-resident Indians hold term deposits in foreign currency with banks in India, and the exchange-rate risk is borne by the bank.

Mains: "With inflation rising towards the policy rate, India risks a zero real interest rate environment even as growth and credit remain strong." Examine the case for and against an early monetary tightening by the Reserve Bank of India in the context of an external supply shock. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for tightening · Body — the case for patience · Body — the institutional frame · Conclusion

22 Sep RBI Swap Window Draws \$143.6 Billion, Led by \$133 Billion FCNR(B) Deposits; Op-ed Questions the Cost

Rupee slides towards ₹100 to the dollar in May → RBI opens a concessional swap window on June 8 so that banks can raise dollars without hedging cost → NRIs deposit about \$133 billion in FCNR(B) accounts before the window closes on August 31 →

reserves rise to \$785 billion and the rupee steadies at ₹94-96, but more than ₹10 lakh crore of rupee liquidity floods the system → the RBI must now pay to sterilise it and carry the exchange risk until the swaps mature

- Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank), or FCNR(B), deposits are held in freely convertible foreign currency for one to five years, and the exchange-rate risk on them is borne by the bank.
- Non-Resident External (NRE) accounts are maintained in Indian rupees and are fully repatriable, while repatriation from Non-Resident Ordinary (NRO) accounts is subject to a cap.
- Sterilisation is the central bank's withdrawal of domestic liquidity created by its foreign exchange purchases, through instruments such as open market sales, the Standing Deposit Facility or the Cash Reserve Ratio.
- The Cash Reserve Ratio is prescribed by the RBI under Section 42 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, and banks earn no interest on CRR balances.
- The impossible trinity states that a country cannot simultaneously maintain a fixed exchange rate, free capital mobility and an independent monetary policy.
- The Market Stabilisation Scheme, introduced in 2004, allows the government to issue securities whose proceeds are held with the RBI to absorb excess liquidity arising from capital inflows.
- In a foreign exchange buy-sell swap, the RBI buys dollars from a bank now and agrees to sell them back at a pre-agreed rate on a future date.

Mains: "Forex reserves built through borrowed inflows are a buffer with a bill attached." Critically examine the RBI's 2026 FCNR(B) swap window in the light of the costs of sterilisation and exchange-rate risk. What should be the strategy for managing its maturity? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the benefits · Body — the costs · Body — managing maturity · Conclusion

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

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

- Net market borrowing of the Central government, not gross borrowing, finances the fiscal deficit; gross borrowing also includes repayment of maturing securities.
- Treasury bills in India are zero-coupon instruments issued at a discount in 91-day, 182-day and 364-day tenors.
- Ways and Means Advances from the RBI to the Central government are temporary advances to meet mismatches in receipts and payments, provided under Section 17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934.
- Under Section 45ZA of the RBI Act, 1934, the Central government, in consultation with the RBI, determines the inflation target once every five years.
- The Monetary Policy Committee constituted under Section 45ZB of the RBI Act has six members, and the RBI Governor has a casting vote in case of a tie.
- A switch operation exchanges government securities maturing in the near term for securities of longer maturity, reducing rollover risk without changing the fiscal deficit.
- Under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, the RBI prescribes the period within which exporters must realise and repatriate the full value of exports.

Mains: "Keeping net borrowing at budgeted levels while an external shock raises yields and inflation tests the coordination of fiscal and monetary policy." Examine this statement in the context of India's revised borrowing programme for 2026-27 and the RBI's recent assessment of the economy. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — fiscal side · Body — monetary and external side · Body — coordination · Conclusion

29 Sep Small-Savings Inflows Jump 56% as the 10-Year Bond Yield Hits a Two-Year High of 7.19%

West Asia war lifts oil and inflation expectations; the US Fed hikes and global yields climb → FCNR(B) inflows swell rupee liquidity, which the RBI drains through OMO sales and VRRR → the 10-year G-sec yield hits 7.19%, a two-year high, even as the Centre cuts gross borrowing → households, seeking safe fixed returns, pour 56% more into small savings → the NSSF finances a larger share of the fiscal deficit at administered rates

- The National Small Savings Fund was established in 1999 and is maintained in the Public Account of India.
- Net collections under small savings schemes are a source of financing of the Central government's fiscal deficit.
- Interest rates on small savings schemes are notified by the Ministry of Finance and reset every quarter.
- An open market operation sale of government securities by the RBI absorbs liquidity from the banking system.
- In a variable rate reverse repo auction, the RBI borrows funds from banks for a fixed period, temporarily absorbing liquidity.
- The price of a bond and its yield move in opposite directions.

- Money held by the government as a banker or trustee, such as small savings deposits and provident funds, is credited to the Public Account under Article 266(2).

Mains: *Small savings have emerged as a significant source of financing the Central government's fiscal deficit. Discuss the advantages and risks of this reliance, especially at a time of rising market yields and tightening liquidity. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — how the NSSF finances the deficit · Body — advantages · Body — risks · Conclusion

7. Election Commission's independence (5)

Lens: Independence and accountability. GS2 — Constitutional bodies: Election Commission (Article 324)

Story so far — Election Commissioners Sandhu and Joshi objected in writing 14 times in 10 months to decisions issued without their knowledge. The ECI called every decision unanimous; former CECs invoked Section 18 of the 2023 Act. The Supreme Court split 1-1 on referring that appointment law to a Constitution Bench, scholars say Anoop Baranwal binds it, and the Opposition is drafting a motion to remove CEC Gyanesh Kumar.

23 Sep Two Election Commissioners Record 14 Objections in 10 Months, Call Form 6 Change 'Unauthorised and Illegal'

Article 324 creates a Commission, and since 1993 it has been a multi-member body whose members have equal votes → the 2023 Act requires business to be transacted unanimously as far as possible and procedure to be settled only unanimously → the SIR from June 2025 and ECINet from January 22, 2026 move roll decisions into software controlled from Delhi → two Commissioners record 14 objections, write to the Cabinet Secretary and strike down a work-allocation order → the rift becomes public as the Supreme Court questions machine-generated SIR notices in Delhi

- Under Article 324(5), the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only in the manner and on the grounds of a Supreme Court judge, while an Election Commissioner can be removed only on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld the multi-member Election Commission and held that the CEC and Election Commissioners are equal, with decisions by majority where they differ.
- Under the CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, the selection committee consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or leader of the largest opposition party) and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- Section 18 of the 2023 Act provides that the Commission's business shall as far as possible be transacted unanimously, otherwise by majority, and that its procedure and division of work shall be settled by unanimous decision.
- Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 allows the Election Commission to order a special revision of the electoral roll at any time, for reasons to be recorded.
- The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 are framed by the Central Government after consulting the Election Commission; Form 6 is for inclusion, Form 7 for objection or deletion, and Form 8 for correction or shifting of entries.
- Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage; the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years.

Mains: *The Election Commission's authority rests on its being a collegial, multi-member constitutional body that acts within the law. In the light of objections recently recorded by two Election Commissioners, examine the safeguards for the Commission's internal functioning and for the integrity of electoral rolls, and suggest reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the collegial design · Body — the rule of law in rolls · Body — reforms · Conclusion

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

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

- Article 324(2) provides that the Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners as the President may from time to time fix.
- Under Article 324(5), an Election Commissioner other than the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 provides that the Commission's business shall as far as possible be transacted unanimously and, where members differ, according to the opinion of the majority.
- In *T N Seshan v Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld the multi-member Election Commission and decision-making by majority among the CEC and the Election Commissioners.

- Under Section 13B of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the electoral roll for each Assembly constituency is prepared and revised by an Electoral Registration Officer.
- The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 provides four qualifying dates in a year — 1 January, 1 April, 1 July and 1 October — for enrolment as a voter.
- Under Article 329(b), an election to Parliament or a State legislature can be called in question only by an election petition.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the law · Body — what the episode reveals · Body — reforms · Conclusion

24 Sep Supreme Court Splits on Referring EC Appointment Law; Justice Datta Invokes ‘Perception Test’, Defends Collegium

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

- Article 324(2) provides that the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners by the President is subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament.
- Under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, the Selection Committee consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- In Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023), a five-judge Bench directed that, until Parliament made a law, the CEC and Election Commissioners be appointed on the advice of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India.
- Article 145(3) requires a bench of at least five judges to decide a case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution or to hear a reference under Article 143.
- Article 75(3) makes the Council of Ministers collectively responsible to the House of the People.
- The Collegium system originated in the Second Judges case (1993) and was enlarged in the Third Judges case (1998), which arose from a presidential reference under Article 143.
- The National Judicial Appointments Commission, created by the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act, 2014, was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015.

Mains: “It is not enough for the Election Commission to be independent; it must also appear to be independent.” Critically examine the selection mechanism under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 in the light of the Anoop Baranwal judgment, and explain why the challenge to it has been placed before a Constitution Bench. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — from Baranwal to the Act · Body — the two opinions · Body — evaluation · Conclusion

25 Sep Opposition Drafts Fresh Motion to Remove CEC Gyanesh Kumar, Testing Article 324(5)’s High Bar

Supreme Court in Anoop Baranwal (2023) orders a CEC selection panel that includes the Chief Justice of India → Parliament’s 2023 Act replaces the Chief Justice with a Union Cabinet Minister, and Mr. Kumar is elevated as CEC in February 2025 over the Leader of the Opposition’s dissent → the SIR’s third phase flags lakhs of electors through an undefined ‘logical discrepancy’ test → The Indian Express reports two Election Commissioners’ 14 recorded objections → the Opposition drafts a fresh removal motion under Article 324(5) while an April 24 notice is still pending

- Under Article 324(5), the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court.
- Under the proviso to Article 324(5), an Election Commissioner or Regional Commissioner cannot be removed except on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- Under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, a notice of motion for removal must be signed by at least 100 members of the Lok Sabha or at least 50 members of the Rajya Sabha.
- Article 124(4) requires a removal address to be supported by a majority of the total membership of each House and by not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting, in the same session.
- Under the 2023 Act, the selection committee for the CEC and Election Commissioners consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 allows the Election Commission, for reasons to be recorded, to direct a special revision of the electoral roll for any constituency or part of it at any time.

- In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld the multi-member Election Commission and held that differences among its members are resolved by majority.

Mains: “The Constitution protects the Chief Election Commissioner from the executive, but not the Election Commission from its Chief.” Critically examine this statement in the light of Article 324(5) and the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Suggest reforms to strengthen the collegial functioning of the Election Commission of India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the protection of the CEC · Body — the weakness inside · Body — reforms · Conclusion

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

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

- Under Article 324(2), the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners are appointed by the President, subject to any law made by Parliament.
- In *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India* (2023), the Supreme Court prescribed an interim selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India for appointing Election Commissioners.
- The Selection Committee under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- Under the 2023 Act, the business of the Election Commission is transacted unanimously as far as possible, and otherwise according to the opinion of the majority.
- In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld the multi-member Election Commission and held that the CEC and Election Commissioners have equal say in decisions.
- The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only in the manner and on the grounds on which a judge of the Supreme Court is removed; other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC’s recommendation.
- Electoral Registration Officers prepare and revise electoral rolls under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — appointment · Body — internal decision-making · Body — reforms · Conclusion

8. Preventive detention and arrest safeguards (5)

Lens: Liberty and order · Rule of law and discretion. GS2 — Fundamental rights (Articles 21 and 22); judiciary

Story so far — Courts are tightening checks on detention powers. The J&K High Court quashed a PSA order resting on an ‘overground worker’ label; the Allahabad High Court warned of an ‘Orwellian dystopia’ over Goondas Act misuse; the Supreme Court held arrest without written grounds unconstitutional. On September 29 it quashed a Sambhal violence accused’s NSA detention, holding a police-custody confession cannot found it, and made Uttar Pradesh pay ₹10 lakh.

18 Sep Preventive Detention Under Scrutiny: Allahabad HC Warns of ‘Orwellian Dystopia’ Over Goondas Act and NSA Misuse

- Article 22(3) excludes preventive detainees from the Article 22(1)-(2) protections of being informed of grounds of arrest, consulting counsel, and production before a magistrate within 24 hours.
- Under Article 22(4), a person may not ordinarily be detained beyond three months unless an Advisory Board of persons qualified to be High Court judges reports sufficient cause.
- Preventive detention connected with defence, foreign affairs and security of India is Union List Entry 9; that connected with State security, public order and essential supplies is Concurrent List Entry 3.
- The National Security Act, 1980 permits detention for up to 12 months; detaining authority may be the Centre, a State government, or an authorised District Magistrate or Commissioner of Police.
- Article 22(5) requires that grounds of detention be communicated to the detainee as soon as may be, and that the detainee be afforded the earliest opportunity of making a representation.

Mains: "Preventive detention laws are constitutionally sanctioned, but their routine use against dissent converts an exceptional power into an ordinary instrument of administration." Critically examine in the light of recent High Court decisions, and suggest institutional safeguards.

Approach: Introduction — state the constitutional oddity · Body 1 — set out the specific judicial findings · Body 2 — apply the public-order gradation · Body 3 — explain why remedies come too late · Body 4 — concede the administrative reality · Body 5 — propose safeguards · Conclusion — the test is the exception's frequency

22 Sep Supreme Court Holds Arrest Without Written Grounds Unconstitutional, Makes Magistrate's Sanction Mandatory for Any Re-arrest

Article 22(1) guarantees grounds of arrest and counsel but is applied loosely for decades → Pankaj Bansal (2023) demands written grounds under PMLA, Ram Kishor Arora dilutes it → Prabir Purkayastha (2024) and Mihir Rajesh Shah (2025) extend written grounds to all statutes → agencies re-arrest people freed on this ground, as in a Punjab POCSO case → Supreme Court on September 21 requires magistrate sanction, supervisory endorsement and compensation

- Article 22(1) of the Constitution provides that an arrested person shall be informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds of arrest and shall not be denied the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice.
- Article 22(2) requires production of an arrested person before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, excluding the time necessary for the journey.
- Under Article 22(3), the protections of clauses (1) and (2) do not apply to an enemy alien or to a person arrested or detained under a law providing for preventive detention.
- Under Article 359 as amended by the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978, the enforcement of Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended during a proclamation of Emergency.
- Section 47 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 requires a police officer arresting a person without warrant to communicate the full particulars of the offence or other grounds of arrest.
- In Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa (1993), the Supreme Court held that monetary compensation for violation of fundamental rights is a remedy available in public law.
- The rights under Article 22(1) and (2) are available to non-citizens as well as citizens.

Mains: "Procedural safeguards are not formalities; they are the substance of liberty." In the light of the Supreme Court's recent judgment on grounds of arrest and re-arrest, examine the scope of Article 22(1) of the Constitution. How far do such rulings strengthen accountability in policing, and what administrative reforms are needed to give them effect? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional scope · Body — accountability mechanisms · Body — administrative reforms · Conclusion

23 Sep Supreme Court Calls U.P. Gangsters Act 'Still-Born', Reaffirming That Only the Legislature Can Create a Crime

Gang violence in Uttar Pradesh in the 1980s → the 1986 Act defines 'gang' and 'gangster' and prescribes punishment, while status is fixed through a police gang chart → repeated complaints that executive authorities decide culpability without verifiable evidence → on August 20, 2026 the Supreme Court finds that no offence was ever created, calls the Act 'still-born' and quashes the proceedings → action against organised crime must now rest on laws that define the crime itself

- Article 20(1) prohibits conviction for an act that was not an offence under a law in force when it was committed, and a penalty greater than the one that law then prescribed.
- Article 20(2) prohibits prosecuting and punishing a person for the same offence more than once, and Article 20(3) protects an accused from being compelled to be a witness against himself.
- After the 44th Constitutional Amendment (1978), the enforcement of Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended under Article 359 even during a national emergency.
- Section 3(38) of the General Clauses Act, 1897 defines "offence" as any act or omission made punishable by any law for the time being in force.
- Section 111 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 defines and punishes organised crime, and Section 112 deals with petty organised crime.
- In In re Delhi Laws Act (1951), the Supreme Court held that the legislature cannot delegate its essential legislative function of laying down policy.
- The Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act was enacted in 1986.

Mains: "The creation of a crime is essentially a legislative function." In the light of the Supreme Court's ruling on the U.P. Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986, discuss the principle of legality in Indian criminal law and its implications for special laws against organised crime. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the principle of legality · Body — limits of delegation and executive power · Body — implications for special laws · Conclusion

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

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

- Under Article 200, a Governor may assent to a State Bill, withhold assent, return a non-Money Bill for reconsideration, or reserve it for the consideration of the President.
- Under Article 201, the President may direct the Governor to return a reserved non-Money Bill to the State Legislature, which must reconsider it within six months; the President is not bound to assent even if the Bill is passed again.
- Under Article 254(2), a State law on a Concurrent List subject that is repugnant to a Central law prevails in that State if it has been reserved for and received the assent of the President.
- Parliament may, by a later law, amend, vary or repeal a State law that has received presidential assent under Article 254(2).
- Preventive detention for reasons connected with the security of a State, the maintenance of public order or the maintenance of essential supplies is Entry 3 of the Concurrent List.
- Under Article 22(4), no law providing for preventive detention can authorise detention beyond three months unless an Advisory Board reports sufficient cause.
- The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988 provides for the preventive detention of persons involved in drug trafficking.

Mains: "Article 254(2) allows States to depart from Central laws on Concurrent List subjects, but only under the President's watch." Examine the role of the Governor and the President in the assent process for State Bills, with reference to recent developments on a State's anti-goonda legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional route · Body — the subject matter · Body — federal balance · Conclusion

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

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

- A confession to a police officer cannot be proved against an accused (Section 25, Indian Evidence Act, 1872; carried into the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023).
- Article 20(3) protects a person accused of an offence from being compelled to be a witness against himself.
- Under the National Security Act, 1980, the maximum period of detention is twelve months.

Mains: "Preventive detention cannot become a route around an order granting bail." In the light of this observation, critically examine the adequacy of safeguards against misuse of preventive detention in India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Directive — Critically examine · Introduction — detention prevents, it does not punish · Body — on paper the safeguards are strong · Body — in practice every layer defers to subjective satisfaction · Body — remedies must bite on substance · Conclusion — reasons, not labels

9. RBI, Tata Sons and listing (5)

Lens: Market and State · Independence and accountability. GS3 — NBFC regulation and corporate governance; GS2 — Regulatory bodies

Story so far — The RBI rejected Tata Sons' bid to surrender its core investment company registration and directed it to list, as upper-layer NBFCs must within three years. On September 17 the board reappointed N. Chandrasekaran 4-1, with Noel Tata opposing; Tata Trusts, owning about 66%, called the resolution void. The RBI has since written twice for a listing timeline, while other groups rejig their books to escape NBFC rules.

17 Sep Tata Sons Board Meets Amid RBI Listing Directive and Chandrasekaran Reappointment Questions

- The RBI directive requires Tata Sons to register and list as an NBFC/Core Investment Company; RBI rejected Tata Sons' bid to deregister and remain unlisted, and has filed a caveat in the Bombay High Court over the matter; N. Chandrasekaran's current term as Tata Sons chairman ends in February next year.

Mains: "When a company grows large enough to be systemically significant, its internal governance structure becomes a matter of public regulatory interest, not merely private corporate choice." Discuss with reference to the RBI's directive requiring Tata Sons to register and list as a Core Investment Company.

18 Sep 'All-Out War at Tata': RBI's Listing Directive Meets a Divided Board

- A Core Investment Company is an NBFC holding not less than 90% of its net assets in investments in group companies, with equity holdings of at least 60% of net assets in group companies; it does not trade in these investments except for block sale or dilution.
- NBFCs are regulated by the RBI under Chapter IIIB of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934; scale-based regulation classifies them into Base, Middle, Upper and Top Layers.
- Under the Companies Act, 2013, the Articles of Association constitute the internal regulations of a company and bind the company and its members; alteration requires a special resolution.
- The National Company Law Tribunal is the forum for oppression and mismanagement proceedings under Sections 241-242 of the Companies Act, 2013; appeals lie to the NCLAT and then to the Supreme Court.

Mains: "A financial regulator's insistence that a large unlisted holding company become publicly held is a question of systemic risk, not of corporate preference." Critically examine, with reference to the regulatory treatment of Core Investment Companies in India.

Approach: Introduction — frame it as a perimeter question · Body 1 — set out the regulatory framework · Body 2 — present the governance objection seriously · Body 3 — distinguish validity from wisdom · Body 4 — bring in the minority shareholder · Conclusion — argue for calibrated regulation

19 Sep RBI Orders Tata Sons Towards Listing, and the Boardroom Splits Over It

Upper-layer NBFC classification in 2022 → three-year listing requirement → surrender application rejected → RBI directs listing → valuation of an unlisted holding company becomes visible → board and Trusts split over control

- Under the RBI's scale-based regulatory framework, NBFCs are classified into base, middle, upper and top layers; an upper-layer NBFC must list on a recognised stock exchange within three years of being identified as such.
- A core investment company holds not less than 90% of its net assets in investments in group companies, with not less than 60% in equity shares.
- The Articles of Association govern the internal management of a company under the Companies Act, 2013; the Memorandum of Association defines its objects and its relationship with the outside world.
- Tata Sons was classified as an upper-layer NBFC in September 2022; the RBI's directive on listing is dated 11 September 2026.
- Reported shareholding of Tata Sons: Tata Trusts 65.9%, Shapoorji Pallonji Group 18.4%, Tata Group companies 12.9%, individuals and others 2.8%.

Mains: "Regulatory requirements that force large unlisted holding companies into public markets improve systemic transparency but disturb settled structures of control. Critically examine."

Approach: Explain the regulatory logic before the controversy · Set out the transparency gains concretely · Give the disruption argument its full weight · Use the governance dispute as the middle term · Conclude on sequencing rather than on merits

21 Sep Tata Trusts Declares Chandrasekaran's Reappointment Void, Says Casting Vote Cannot Override Nominee-Director Veto

Articles 104B and 121 give Trust nominees an affirmative vote → Tata Sons defends them in the Mistry litigation and the Supreme Court upholds them → Chandrasekaran says in August he will not seek another term, then accepts the board's request → board votes 4-1 on September 17 with the two Trust nominees split and a casting vote invoked → Trusts call the resolution void ab initio and weigh the NCLT or Bombay High Court

- Under Section 10 of the Companies Act, 2013, the memorandum and articles, when registered, bind the company and its members to the same extent as if each member had signed them.
- Articles of association may be altered by a special resolution under Section 14 of the Companies Act, 2013; Section 5(3) permits entrenched provisions alterable only on stricter conditions.
- Table F of Schedule I to the Companies Act, 2013 provides that in case of an equality of votes at a board meeting, the chairperson shall have a second or casting vote.
- Under Section 196 of the Companies Act, 2013, a managing director or whole-time director cannot be appointed for more than five years at a time, and reappointment cannot be made earlier than one year before the expiry of the term.
- Applications for relief against oppression and mismanagement lie before the National Company Law Tribunal under Sections 241-242 of the Companies Act, 2013.
- The NCLT is constituted under Section 408 and the NCLAT under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013; appeals from the NCLAT lie to the Supreme Court on questions of law.
- An act that is void ab initio is invalid from the outset and has no legal effect, whereas a voidable act is valid until it is set aside.

Mains: "A board resolution can command a majority of directors and yet fail under the company's own articles." In the context of the dispute between Tata Trusts and the Tata Sons board, examine the role of articles of association, nominee directors and casting votes in Indian corporate governance. Suggest safeguards that balance shareholder protection with managerial continuity. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal architecture · Body — both sides · Body — safeguards · Conclusion

28 Sep RBI Writes Twice to Tata Sons for a Listing Timeline as Groups Rejig Books to Escape NBFC Rules

RBI moves to scale-based regulation in 2021 and requires Upper Layer NBFCs to list within three years → Tata Sons is placed in the Upper Layer and tries to surrender its NBFC registration → RBI rejects the surrender and the board resolves on September 17 to list, over the Trusts' objection → RBI sends two follow-up letters, the AGM lapses without a quorum and Tata operating companies face a vote they would rather avoid → other groups restructure their books to stay outside the NBFC and CIC definitions

- Under Section 45-IA of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, no non-banking financial company can commence or carry on business without a certificate of registration from the RBI.
- A company is treated as an NBFC under the principal business test when its financial assets exceed 50% of total assets and income from financial assets exceeds 50% of gross income.
- A core investment company must hold at least 90% of its net assets in investments in group companies, of which at least 60% must be in equity of group companies.
- Under the RBI's Scale-Based Regulation framework of October 2021, NBFCs are classified into Base, Middle, Upper and Top Layers, and Upper Layer NBFCs must list within three years of identification.
- Section 45-IC of the RBI Act requires every NBFC to transfer at least 20% of its net profit every year to a reserve fund.
- Section 97 of the Companies Act, 2013 empowers the National Company Law Tribunal to call or direct the calling of an annual general meeting if a company defaults in holding it.
- Rule 19A of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957 requires listed companies to maintain a minimum public shareholding, normally 25%.

Mains: "Regulatory arbitrage flourishes where financial regulation relies on mechanical thresholds." Discuss with reference to the regulation of NBFCs and core investment companies in India. Should the RBI be able to require a large holding company to list its shares? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the thresholds · Body — why the RBI wants listing · Body — the case against · Conclusion

10. India's semiconductor mission (5)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership · Innovation and safeguards. GS3 — Indigenisation of technology; industrial policy

Story so far — At Semicon India, five of twelve ISM projects were operational and ISM 2.0 drew \$11–12 billion of interest; Minister Vaishnaw called India 'already globally competitive' on five packaging plants. But fabrication and advanced packaging are absent, an AI-driven memory 'supercycle' passes India by, and China's CXMT mass-produces fifth-generation DRAM despite US controls. IIT Delhi has demonstrated a university-built micro-GPU.

18 Sep Semicon India 2026: ISM 2.0 Draws \$11-12 Billion of Investment Interest as Five of Twelve Projects Go Operational

- The India Semiconductor Mission operates under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology; the first phase carried an outlay of ₹76,000 crore and the second phase ₹1.27 lakh crore.
- ATMP stands for assembly, testing, marking and packaging — the back-end stage of chip manufacturing, also referred to as OSAT (outsourced semiconductor assembly and test).
- The Design Linked Incentive scheme supports domestic semiconductor design companies with financial incentives and access to electronic design automation tools.
- Semiconductor fabrication requires ultra-pure silicon wafers, photolithography, and extremely high-purity water and gases; extreme ultraviolet lithography equipment is produced commercially by a single company, ASML of the Netherlands.
- Compound semiconductors such as gallium nitride and silicon carbide are used in power electronics, electric vehicles and radio-frequency applications, and form a distinct category under ISM.

Mains: "India's semiconductor strategy has succeeded in building back-end capacity while the strategically decisive capability — fabrication — remains a work in progress." Critically examine India's approach, and evaluate whether the scale of public support is justified.

Approach: Introduction — map the value chain · Body 1 — explain why entering at ATMP was rational · Body 2 — set out the strategic rationale · Body 3 — identify the binding constraints · Body 4 — assess the design choices critically · Conclusion — judge it on persistence

19 Sep Vaishnaw Declares India “Already Globally Competitive” in Chips on Five Packaging Plants

Chip supply shocks and export controls turn semiconductors into a security question → India launches ISM in December 2021 with ₹76,000 crore → capital-light packaging plants come up first → five go live and equipment and materials firms follow → the minister reads assembly capability as global competitiveness, while advanced packaging and fabrication are still absent

- The India Semiconductor Mission operates as an independent business division within the Digital India Corporation under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, with an approved outlay of ₹76,000 crore at launch.
- ISM 1.0 was launched in December 2021 and operationalised a year later; the Semicon India Summit held in 2026 was the fifth edition.
- ATMP stands for assembly, testing, marking and packaging; OSAT stands for outsourced semiconductor assembly and test. Neither involves fabricating wafers.
- The Design Linked Incentive scheme supports integrated circuit design and intellectual property core development, and is distinct from the capital support offered to fabrication and packaging units.
- Gallium nitride and silicon carbide are wide-bandgap compound semiconductors used in radar, power electronics and electric-vehicle chargers, and are covered by the compound semiconductor component of the Semicon India programme.
- The Dholera Special Investment Region in Gujarat is being developed under the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor framework and hosts semiconductor fabrication and materials investment.
- Heterogeneous integration refers to packaging multiple dies, such as logic and memory, into a single device, and is the technology segment in which India's operating packaging units do not yet work.

Mains: "India's semiconductor mission has succeeded in attracting assembly and packaging capacity but has yet to secure the segments of the value chain where strategic vulnerability actually lies." Critically examine in the light of recent policy initiatives and investment announcements. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — establish what has been achieved, with numbers · Body — locate the vulnerability precisely · Body — argue the cost side honestly · Conclusion

21 Sep China's CXMT Begins Mass Production of Fifth-Generation DRAM Despite US Export Controls

Memory chips dominated by three non-Chinese firms → US export controls from 2022 cut China's access to advanced tools → China backs domestic champions and domestic toolmakers → CXMT uses quadruple patterning to reach 11.95 nm cell spacing → China gains a third source of memory supply while India still imports its chips

- Dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) is volatile memory used as a device's short-term working memory, whereas NAND flash is non-volatile storage that retains data without power.
- LPDDR5X is a low-power DRAM standard used mainly in smartphones and portable electronics.
- Multiple patterning, such as double or quadruple patterning, uses repeated exposures to print features finer than a lithography tool's single-pass resolution.
- The India Semiconductor Mission was set up in 2021 under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as part of the Semicon India programme.
- Micron's semiconductor facility at Sanand, Gujarat is an assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP) unit, not a wafer fabrication plant.
- India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2016, the Wassenaar Arrangement in 2017 and the Australia Group in 2018; it is not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Mains: Technology-denial regimes can delay but rarely prevent a determined state from acquiring strategic capabilities. Discuss with reference to recent developments in China's semiconductor industry, and examine the lessons for India's semiconductor strategy.

Approach: Introduction · Body — how China worked around the controls · Body — India's own history with denial · Body — lessons for India · Conclusion

23 Sep AI Data-Centre Boom Drives a Memory-Chip ‘Supercycle’ While India Stays in Packaging and Design

Generative AI models need vast computation → big technology firms pour nearly \$635 billion into AI data centres in 2026 → accelerators need memory placed right beside them, so demand for HBM and advanced packaging soars and chipmakers lock in take-or-pay contracts → memory supply tightens, prices rise and investors chase Taiwan and Korea → India, strong in design talent and building assembly and packaging under ISM 1.0 and 2.0, is still outside the most profitable layer of the chain

- High-bandwidth memory (HBM) is made by stacking DRAM dies vertically and placing the stack close to the processor using advanced packaging.
- DRAM is volatile working memory that loses data when power is switched off, while NAND flash is non-volatile storage memory.

- A fabless semiconductor company designs and sells chips but outsources their fabrication to foundries.
- ATMP stands for assembly, testing, marking and packaging, the back-end stage of semiconductor manufacturing that follows wafer fabrication.
- The Semicon India programme, approved in December 2021 with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore, is implemented through the India Semiconductor Mission under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The Design Linked Incentive scheme under the Semicon India programme supports domestic companies and startups engaged in semiconductor design.
- Chiplet architecture combines multiple smaller dies within a single package instead of building one large monolithic die.

Mains: “The AI-driven semiconductor supercycle is redistributing capital and capability across the world.” In this context, assess India’s position in the global semiconductor value chain and suggest how it can move into higher-value segments such as advanced packaging and chip design. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how the value chain is changing · Body — India’s position · Body — moving up · Conclusion

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

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

- A graphics processing unit (GPU) contains a large number of simpler cores that perform the same operation on many data elements in parallel, which makes it suitable for graphics rendering and machine learning.
- A Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) is an integrated circuit whose logic can be reconfigured after manufacture, whereas an Application-Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) is fabricated for a single fixed design.
- The Semicon India Programme, with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore, was approved in December 2021 and is implemented through the India Semiconductor Mission under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The Design Linked Incentive scheme under the Semicon India Programme supports domestic companies and start-ups in the design of semiconductor chips and IP cores.
- SHAKTI (IIT Madras) and VEGA (C-DAC) are indigenous microprocessors based on the open-source RISC-V instruction set architecture.
- Dynamic Random-Access Memory (DRAM) is volatile memory, while High Bandwidth Memory (HBM) stacks multiple DRAM dies vertically to provide high data throughput to AI accelerators.
- Register-transfer level (RTL) description is the stage of chip design in which the flow of data between hardware registers is specified in a hardware description language.

Mains: India has built a strong base of chip-design engineers but owns little semiconductor intellectual property. Discuss how academic research, the Design Linked Incentive scheme and domestic demand can together move India from chip assembly to chip design. Illustrate with recent developments. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the gap · Body — the instruments · Body — demand as the missing link · Conclusion

11. Xi–Trump summit and India (5)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — Effect of policies of developed countries on India’s interests

Story so far — Xi Jinping’s Washington visit opened a US–China dialogue on AI and extended their trade truce to January 10, 2027. Commentators warned a managed rivalry could make India a ‘rule-taker’. Jaishankar read the meeting as competition with limited convergence, urged de-risking and diversification, and said India and the US ‘more or less’ have a trade understanding. C. Raja Mohan argued China is using 1945’s history against Japan.

23 Sep Raja Mohan: As Xi and Trump Open an AI Dialogue, India Faces Three Hard Questions

Biden and Xi open a tentative AI channel at Woodside in November 2023 → at Lima a year later they affirm that humans, not AI, control nuclear-use decisions → under Mr. Trump, AI safety becomes entangled with chips, export controls, rare earths and tariffs, and the May Beijing summit ends without an arrangement → Mr. Xi pitches WAICO and open-source AI to the Global South at the Delhi BRICS summit → Mr. Xi and Mr. Trump meet in Washington to launch a formal AI dialogue, leaving India to ask whose rules it will live under

- Under the NPT, a nuclear-weapon state is one that manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967.
- The Nuclear Suppliers Group was formed in 1974 after India’s first nuclear test, and granted India a special waiver in September 2008.

- India is a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (2016), the Wassenaar Arrangement (2017) and the Australia Group (2018), but not of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- The Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 prohibits nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water, but not underground.
- The IndiaAI Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024, has an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore over five years.
- The U.S. Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 provides for the supply of defensive arms to Taiwan after Washington's recognition of the People's Republic of China.

Mains: "Artificial intelligence has become a great-power game." In the context of the emerging U.S.–China dialogue on AI, discuss the challenges this poses for India and suggest a strategy that preserves India's strategic autonomy. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why it matters · Body — India's three challenges · Body — strategy · Conclusion

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

The U.S. uses tariffs and chip export controls to slow China's technological rise → China answers with export controls on rare earths, where it dominates refining and magnets → both sides declare a "constructive relationship of strategic stability" in Beijing in May, under a tariff truce that expires on November 10 → Bessent and He Lifeng set up an AI cooperation dialogue while Beijing cuts magnet shipments by 21% in August → Trump hosts Xi in Washington, reviving talk of a G2 that could leave India to accept rules written by two

- Rare earth elements are a group of 17 elements comprising the 15 lanthanides together with scandium and yttrium.
- IREL (India) Limited, a public sector undertaking under the Department of Atomic Energy, processes beach sand minerals including monazite, a source of rare earths.
- India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2016, the Wassenaar Arrangement in 2017 and the Australia Group in 2018; it is not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- SCOMET is India's list of dual-use items — Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies — whose export is regulated under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992.
- The IndiaAI Mission, approved in March 2024, is implemented by the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Digital India Corporation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence was launched in 2020 with India as a founding member.
- In November 2024, the Presidents of the United States and China affirmed that humans, not artificial intelligence, should retain control over decisions to use nuclear weapons.

Mains: "A U.S.–China understanding on trade, critical minerals and artificial intelligence may stabilise great-power rivalry, but it risks turning middle powers into rule-takers." Discuss with reference to India's interests, and suggest how India should position itself. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why stability helps India · Body — why it risks making India a rule-taker · Body — India's positioning · Conclusion

25 Sep Trump Hosts Xi: Trade Truce Extended to January 10, Taiwan and AI Left Unsettled

China's rise and U.S. tariffs spiral into a trade war with mutual tariffs above 100% → a negotiated pause buys time but is set to expire in November → Mr. Trump visits China in May and freezes a \$14 billion Taiwan arms package as a "negotiating chip" → Mr. Xi's state visit on September 24 extends the truce to January 10 and opens military crisis-prevention dialogue → Taiwan, AI governance and the Iran war remain unresolved, leaving third countries such as India to plan around a managed but fragile rivalry

- The Taiwan Relations Act, 1979, is a United States domestic law that provides for the supply of defensive arms to Taiwan and governs unofficial U.S. relations with the island.
- Under the 1979 communiqué establishing U.S.–China diplomatic relations, the United States recognised the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and acknowledged the Chinese position that there is but one China.
- The term "Thucydides trap" was popularised by Graham Allison to describe the risk of war when a rising power threatens to displace an established one.
- The WTO Appellate Body has been unable to hear appeals since December 2019 because appointments to it have been blocked, leaving it without the minimum number of members.
- India's unofficial ties with Taiwan are conducted through the India Taipei Association in Taipei and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in New Delhi, both established in 1995.
- The Taiwan Strait separates the island of Taiwan from the Fujian province of mainland China.

Mains: "The United States and China are moving from open confrontation to managed rivalry." In the light of the Trump–Xi summit of September 2026, examine whether this shift strengthens or weakens India's strategic position. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — what managed rivalry means · Body — gains for India · Body — losses for India · Conclusion

28 Sep After the Xi–Trump Washington Summit, a Managed US–China Rivalry Leaves India Exposed on Tariffs and Strategy

The 2025 tariff war and China's rare-earth curbs show that coercion hurts both sides → the Busan truce of October 2025 and Mr. Trump's May 2026 Beijing visit set up the vocabulary of 'constructive strategic stability' → Mr. Xi's September state visit extends the truce to January 10, 2027 and opens an AI channel → the SRIA, signed on September 18, authorises 100% tariffs on buyers of Russian energy → with China shielded by the truce, India becomes the likelier target and its 'bulwark' premise weakens

- The term 'Thucydides Trap' was coined by Graham Allison and refers to the risk of war when a rising power challenges an established power, drawing on the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta.
- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprises India, the United States, Japan and Australia; it was revived at the officials' level in November 2017 in Manila and held its first leaders' summit, virtually, in March 2021.
- India is not a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which has 21 member economies.
- Section 232 of the U.S. Trade Expansion Act, 1962 permits import restrictions on national-security grounds, and Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act, 1974 permits action against unfair foreign trade practices.
- The Supply Chain Resilience Initiative was launched in 2021 by the trade ministers of India, Japan and Australia.
- India's four foundational defence agreements with the United States are GSOMIA (2002), LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018) and BECA (2020).

Mains: "The emerging US–China 'managed rivalry' challenges the long-held assumption that India's value to Washington lies in balancing China." Critically examine this statement in the light of the September 2026 Washington summit, and suggest how India can preserve its strategic autonomy. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why the assumption is weakening · Body — why it has not collapsed · Body — preserving autonomy · Conclusion

30 Sep Jaishankar Says US and China Are in "Competitive Mode", Urges De-Risking and Diversification

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

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprises India, the United States, Japan and Australia; it was revived in 2017 after a first meeting in 2007.
- Articles 53, 77 and 107 of the UN Charter contain the "enemy state" clauses relating to the Second World War.
- The People's Republic of China was proclaimed in 1949; the Republic of China, now in Taiwan, was the wartime ally of the United States.

Mains: "The rest of us are coming to terms with a very different America." In this context, evaluate de-risking and diversification as India's response to US–China rivalry. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Directive — Evaluate · Introduction — Jaishankar reads the Trump–Xi meeting as competition with limited convergence · De-risking works because rivalry keeps both powers in need of partners · It has limits when the two converge over India's head · India must also claim its history and institutions · Conclusion — diversify partners, close the US deal, keep choices open

12. UN reform and India's UNSC bid (5)

Lens: National interest and global commons · Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — Important international institutions, their structure and mandate

Story so far — At the 81st UNGA India co-chaired the first 'Partners for Multilateralism' summit, where Jaishankar warned of a '4F' crisis, as Tajikistan contested India's Council bid. France and the UK back veto restraint and Japan seeks deletion of the Charter's 'enemy state' clauses. Commentators call the UN 'overweight and weak'; India targets the 2028-29 seat, and Russia backs its permanent-seat claim while ruling out Germany and Japan.

22 Sep India Joins EU–Brazil–Kenya–Canada 'Partners for Multilateralism' Meeting as Jaishankar Arrives for UNGA

UN Security Council structure frozen since the 1965 expansion → great-power vetoes and unilateral wars in Ukraine and Iran paralyse collective action → 2025 records the most state-based armed conflicts since 1946 and nearly \$3 trillion in military spending → Carney's Davos "middle powers" speech in January → EU, Brazil, Kenya and Canada launch P4M and India attends its meeting at the UNGA

- Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, amendments come into force when adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members including all permanent members of the Security Council.
- The UN Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965; the number of permanent members remained five.
- Article 27(3) of the UN Charter requires the concurring votes of the permanent members for Security Council decisions on non-procedural matters, which is the basis of the veto.
- The G-4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support each other's bids for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
- The Ezulwini Consensus is the African Union's common position on UN reform, seeking two permanent and additional non-permanent Security Council seats for Africa.
- Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council.
- The founders of the Partners for Multilateralism (P4M) initiative are the European Union, Brazil, Kenya and Canada.

Mains: "Middle powers cannot rewrite the UN Charter, but they can decide whether it is used." In the context of the new 'Partners for Multilateralism' initiative, discuss the prospects of UN reform and evaluate India's approach of multi-alignment in reforming global governance. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why reform is needed and why it stalls · Body — India's multi-alignment · Body — realistic gains · Conclusion

23 Sep Jaishankar Co-Chairs First P4M Summit, Warns of '4F' Crisis as Tajikistan Contests India's UNSC Bid

Great-power rivalry leaves the 15-member Security Council deeply polarised → wars in Ukraine and West Asia create a fuel, food, fertiliser and finance shock that falls hardest on developing countries → the EU, Brazil, Canada and Kenya launch a 'non-superpower' partnership for multilateralism → India joins as co-sponsor and co-chairs the first P4M Summit at the 81st UNGA → the same week India lobbies the Visegrad Group, CELAC and others for a 2028-29 Council seat that Tajikistan now contests

- Under Article 23 of the UN Charter, the Security Council has 15 members: five permanent and ten non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, with retiring members not eligible for immediate re-election.
- Election of a non-permanent member of the Security Council requires a two-thirds majority of General Assembly members present and voting.
- Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, an amendment comes into force when adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all permanent members of the Security Council.
- The Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965.
- The Visegrad Group, formed in 1991, comprises the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.
- The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), founded in 2011, has 33 member states and does not include the United States or Canada.
- The G4 countries seeking permanent membership of the Security Council are Brazil, Germany, India and Japan.

Mains: "Reformed multilateralism" has become the central theme of India's diplomacy at the United Nations. In the light of new middle-power groupings such as the Partners for Multilateralism, examine whether such coalitions can remedy the deficits of the UN Security Council. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the deficits · Body — what coalitions can do · Body — limits · Conclusion

25 Sep U.K. Joins France on Veto Restraint as Japan Seeks Deletion of Charter's 'Enemy State' Clauses

The victors of the Second World War write the veto and the "enemy state" clauses into the 1945 Charter → vetoes paralyse the Council on Syria after Ghouta in 2013 → France proposes a code of conduct in 2013 and, with Mexico, a veto-restraint declaration in 2015, while the UNGA adopts the 2022 Liechtenstein veto initiative → the U.K. joins France and support reaches 128 states in September 2026, as Japan asks for deletion of the enemy-state clauses → both efforts stop at Article 108, which requires ratification by all five permanent members

- Under Article 23 of the UN Charter, the Security Council has fifteen members, of whom ten non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms and are not eligible for immediate re-election.
- Under Article 27(3) of the UN Charter, decisions of the Security Council on non-procedural matters require nine affirmative votes including the concurring votes of the permanent members; the word "veto" does not appear in the Charter.
- Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, an amendment comes into force when adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members of the Security Council.
- Article 53(2) of the UN Charter defines an "enemy state" as any state which during the Second World War was an enemy of any signatory of the Charter.

- General Assembly resolution 76/262 of 2022, known as the veto initiative, requires the Assembly to meet within ten working days of a veto being cast in the Security Council.
- The ACT (Accountability, Coherence and Transparency) group's code of conduct asks all members of the Security Council, permanent and non-permanent, not to vote against credible draft resolutions to prevent or end genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.
- The G4 group seeking permanent membership of the UN Security Council consists of India, Brazil, Germany and Japan.

Mains: "The veto is not a privilege but a responsibility." Discuss the recent initiatives to regulate the use of the veto in the UN Security Council and assess why structural reform of the Council has proved so difficult. What should be India's approach? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the three tracks · Body — why structural reform stalls · Body — India's approach · Conclusion

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

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

- Under Article 23 of the UN Charter, the Security Council has 15 members, of which ten non-permanent members are elected for two-year terms and are not eligible for immediate re-election.
- Article 27(3) of the UN Charter requires the concurring votes of the permanent members for decisions on non-procedural matters, which is the legal basis of the veto.
- An amendment to the UN Charter under Article 108 requires adoption by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including all permanent members of the Security Council.
- Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council.
- The G4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support one another's bids for permanent membership of the Security Council.
- The Ezulwini Consensus of the African Union seeks two permanent seats with veto and five non-permanent seats for Africa in the Security Council.
- Non-permanent members of the Security Council are elected by the General Assembly by a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.

Mains: "The Security Council was designed to work when the major powers could agree." In the light of this statement, discuss why reform of the United Nations Security Council has stalled, and evaluate India's strategy of pursuing an elected seat alongside its claim to permanent membership. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why reform has stalled · Body — India's dual strategy · Body — risks · Conclusion

28 Sep Russia Backs India's Claim to a Permanent UNSC Seat but Rules Out Germany and Japan

The 1945 Charter fixes five permanent members and makes amendment subject to their consent → the only expansion, in 1965, adds elected seats, not permanent ones → the G4, Uniting for Consensus and the African Union harden rival models from 2004-05 → talks move to the consensus-bound IGN from 2009 and stall → Russia, at war and at odds with the West, endorses India and Brazil while barring Germany and Japan, splitting the G4

- The G4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support each other's bids for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
- The Uniting for Consensus group, led by Italy and including Pakistan, opposes the creation of new permanent seats on the Security Council.
- The African Union's Ezulwini Consensus of 2005 seeks two permanent seats with veto power and five non-permanent seats for Africa on the Security Council.
- The UN Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965; all the added seats were non-permanent.
- Security Council reform is discussed in the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN), an informal process of the UN General Assembly that operates by consensus.
- Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, an amendment comes into force when adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members of the Security Council.

Mains: "Support from individual permanent members has not brought India closer to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council." Analyse the structural and political obstacles to Security Council reform, and suggest a realistic strategy for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — structural obstacles · Body — political obstacles · Body — strategy · Conclusion

13. UAPA and counter-terror strategy (5)

Lens: Liberty and order. GS3 — Terrorism and internal security; GS2 — Due process

Story so far — The Centre designated the Pakistan-based Shahzad Bhatti Network a terrorist organisation, and the ED raided four States over its alleged role in the Ranchi RSS office attack. Courts pushed back elsewhere: the NIA lost a drone-training case to the 180-day default-bail clock, and a Shopian court reopened a seminary declared unlawful under UAPA. Amit Shah unveiled PRAHAAR's seven pillars of counter-terror policy.

17 Sep Pakistan-Based Shahzad Bhatti Network Banned Under UAPA, as CBI Books a US-Linked FCRA Case

- The Shahzad Bhatti Network (SBN) is the 46th group designated a terrorist organisation under UAPA; the CBI's FCRA case involves an estimated ₹92.55 crore allegedly routed into India via foreign debit cards from November 2025 to April 2026, withdrawn across states including Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Assam.

Mains: "Distinguishing between genuine national-security threats and legitimate foreign-funded civil-society activity is one of the most difficult judgment calls in India's regulatory architecture for external interference." Discuss with reference to the recent UAPA designation of the Shahzad Bhatti Network and the FCRA case against The Timothy Initiative.

18 Sep Banned Outfit Pursued Through Money-Laundering Law: ED Raids in Four States in the Ranchi RSS Office Attack Case

- Under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, terrorist organisations are listed in the First Schedule by Central Government notification; the 2019 amendment enabled designation of individuals as terrorists.
- The Enforcement Directorate operates under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, and enforces the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 and the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.
- The National Investigation Agency functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs and investigates scheduled offences under the NIA Act, 2008.
- Under PMLA, offences are investigated only where a scheduled offence exists; the Adjudicating Authority confirms attachments and the Appellate Tribunal hears appeals.
- The Financial Action Task Force, headquartered in Paris, sets international standards on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism; its lists are commonly referred to as the grey list and the black list.

Mains: "Disrupting terror financing has become more consequential than prosecuting individual terrorist acts." Examine India's institutional architecture for countering terror financing, and assess whether its powers are adequately balanced by safeguards.

Approach: Introduction — state the shift in approach · Body 1 — map the institutional architecture · Body 2 — explain why the financial route is effective · Body 3 — situate it internationally · Body 4 — address the safeguards question honestly · Body 5 — state the limits of domestic enforcement · Conclusion — effectiveness and legitimacy together

19 Sep NIA Loses a Cross-Border Drone-Training Case to the 180-Day Clock, Not to the Evidence

Seven foreign nationals enter on tourist visas → travel into the North-East without the mandatory permits and cross from Mizoram into Myanmar → NIA books them under UAPA Section 18 and runs the investigation to the full 180 days → the chargesheet filed on the last day carries only immigration offences → the court reads it as incomplete for the terror case → default bail under Section 187(3) BNSS, with the same reasoning open to six co-accused

- Default bail arises under Section 187(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 — the successor to Section 167(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 — when the investigation is not completed within the prescribed 60 or 90 days.
- Section 43D(2)(b) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 allows the 90-day period to be extended up to 180 days, but only on a report of the Public Prosecutor showing the progress of the investigation and specific reasons for continued detention.
- Section 18 of the UAPA punishes conspiracy, attempt, abetment, advocacy, incitement or facilitation of a terrorist act.
- The National Investigation Agency was constituted under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008; it investigates "Scheduled Offences" listed in the Schedule to the Act and cases are tried by Special Courts designated under Section 11.
- The Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 consolidated and replaced four earlier statutes — the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000; registration and visa-condition matters are handled by the Foreigners Regional Registration Office.
- A Protected Area Permit is required by foreigners for notified areas of the North-East under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958; the relaxation for Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland was withdrawn in December 2024.
- India shares about 1,643 km of boundary with Myanmar across four States — Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram; the Free Movement Regime along it was discontinued in 2024 in favour of a regulated border-pass system.

Mains: “The right to default bail is a safeguard against indefinite detention, but in terror investigations it is increasingly defeated by the filing of incomplete chargesheets. Examine, with reference to the statutory scheme under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, whether the balance between investigative need and personal liberty has been correctly struck.” (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Open with the scheme, in three sentences and no adjectives · Make the investigative case honestly before criticising it · Then show precisely how the safeguard is circumvented · Locate the argument in Article 21 rather than in sympathy · Conclude with a fix that is administrative, not rhetorical

25 Sep Shopian Court Orders Reopening of Seminary Declared Unlawful Under UAPA, Citing Excessive Use of Power

Jamaat-e-Islami (J&K) declared an unlawful association under UAPA in 2019 and the ban extended in 2024 → the administration pursues institutions linked to it, taking over 58 Falah-e-Aam Trust schools → days later Siraj-ul-Uloom is declared an unlawful entity for alleged covert links, and 1,200 students lose their school → the seminary challenges the order, arguing that its trust is separate and its properties are decaying → the Shopian court finds the prima facie material insufficient and the power excessive, and orders a supervised reopening pending trial

- Under Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, the power to declare an association unlawful by notification in the Official Gazette lies with the Central Government.
- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal that adjudicates whether there is sufficient cause for declaring an association unlawful consists of one judge of a High Court.
- A declaration of an association as unlawful under UAPA, once confirmed, remains in force for five years from the date the notification becomes effective.
- Under Section 8(8) of UAPA, a person aggrieved by the notification of a place as used for an unlawful association may apply to the Court of the District Judge within thirty days.
- Jamaat-e-Islami (Jammu and Kashmir) was declared an unlawful association under UAPA on February 28, 2019, and the ban was extended for five years in 2024.
- Article 30 of the Constitution gives all minorities, whether based on religion or language, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- The Constitution (Sixteenth Amendment) Act, 1963 added the sovereignty and integrity of India as a ground for reasonable restrictions on the freedoms of speech, assembly and association under Article 19.

Mains: “Anti-terror laws must be exercised with precision if they are to retain public legitimacy.” Examine this statement in the context of action taken under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 against educational institutions in Jammu and Kashmir. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework · Body — the case for firm action · Body — why precision matters · Conclusion

29 Sep Amit Shah Unveils PRAHAAR’s Seven Pillars and an Extradition Portal at a National Counter-Terror Conference

Terror threats shift from large attacks to cross-border modules that combine weapons, explosives and narcotics → operations spread across State police, central agencies and foreign jurisdictions, and gaps in coordination cause delays → the MHA unveils PRAHAAR in February 2026 as the first national counter-terrorism policy → the September conference pushes it down to the thana level with DGPs and ATS chiefs → an extradition portal and fugitive-tracking teams extend the effort to fugitives abroad, such as gangsters now wanted by the FBI

- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019 empowered the Union government to designate individuals as terrorists.
- The National Investigation Agency (Amendment) Act, 2019 enabled the NIA to investigate scheduled offences committed outside India against Indian citizens or affecting the interests of India.
- An Interpol Red Notice is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition; it is not an international arrest warrant.
- The Central Bureau of Investigation functions as the National Central Bureau for Interpol in India.
- The Multi Agency Centre for sharing counter-terrorism intelligence functions under the Intelligence Bureau.
- India became a full member of the Financial Action Task Force in 2010.
- The principle of dual criminality in extradition requires the conduct to be an offence in both the requesting and the requested country.

Mains: India has adopted PRAHAAR as its first comprehensive national counter-terrorism policy. Examine how far a written strategy can overcome the challenges of inter-agency coordination, federal policing and crime-terror convergence in India’s counter-terror effort. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — what a written strategy adds · Body — structural challenges · Body — making it work · Conclusion

14. Language, schooling and federalism (4)

Lens: Centre and States · Tradition and social justice. GS2 — Official languages; Centre-State relations; Governor's role

Story so far — The Supreme Court urged Tamil Nadu to drop its opposition to Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, saying Chennai and New Delhi should not alienate each other over language, and gave it three months to identify land; the State's Governor meanwhile queried a private universities Bill. Karnataka made Tulu an additional administrative language in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, with ₹82 lakh a year for translation and training.

18 Sep Two Supreme Court Orders in One Day on Language, Schooling and Federalism

- Education is in the Concurrent List (Entry 25, List III); it was shifted from the State List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
- The three-language formula was first articulated in the National Policy on Education, 1968, and is continued in the National Education Policy, 2020.
- Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas are co-educational residential schools, one per district, run by the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education.
- Article 343 makes Hindi in Devanagari script the official language of the Union; Article 345 lets a State adopt any language in use in that State as its official language; the Eighth Schedule currently lists 22 languages.
- Article 350A directs States to provide instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage to children of linguistic minority groups.

Mains: "Judicial persuasion, rather than judicial command, is the appropriate method when a constitutional court confronts a genuine Centre-State disagreement over education policy." Discuss with reference to recent orders on Navodaya Vidyalayas and the three-language policy.

Approach: Introduction — locate education in the Concurrent List · Body 1 — set out the two orders precisely · Body 2 — explain why persuasion is the fitting instrument · Body 3 — state the cost of this approach · Body 4 — identify the underlying fiscal problem · Conclusion — centre the student

19 Sep Governor Withholds Assent on a State Universities Bill While Tamil Nadu Refuses Land for Navodaya Schools

State legislates → Governor withholds or queries → State refuses a central scheme on language grounds → Supreme Court directs → federal friction moves from politics to the docket

- Article 200 — assent to Bills: the Governor may assent, withhold assent, return a Bill other than a Money Bill for reconsideration, or reserve it for the consideration of the President; on reconsideration and repassage the Governor shall not withhold assent.
- Article 201 governs Bills reserved for the consideration of the President.
- Education was transferred from the State List to the Concurrent List by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act.
- Article 350A — endeavour to provide instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage to children of linguistic minority groups.
- Article 351 casts a duty on the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language.
- The Tamil Nadu Private Universities Act, 2019 required a minimum of 100 acres of contiguous land for a private university; the 2026 Amendment Bill proposes 12, 18 and 25 acres by area category.

Mains: "Disputes between the Union and the States are increasingly resolved in the courtroom rather than in the institutions designed for intergovernmental consultation. Critically examine with recent examples."

Approach: Name the constitutional provisions on both sides · Use two contrasting examples from the same day · Explain why litigation is the path of least resistance · Set out the costs of judicialisation honestly · Conclude with a reform that is modest and plausible

21 Sep Karnataka Cabinet Grants Tulu Additional Official Language Status in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi

Tulu recognised by the Census as a distinct but non-scheduled language → decades-long demand for official and Eighth Schedule status → 2023 committee aborted by elections → 2026 committee studies Andhra's Urdu model → Cabinet decision on September 18 → Official Language Act amendment still required

- Under Article 345, the Legislature of a State may by law adopt one or more languages in use in the State, or Hindi, as its official language; an executive order alone is insufficient.
- Under Article 347, the President may, on a demand being made, direct that a language spoken by a substantial proportion of a State's population be officially recognised in the State or any part of it.
- Article 350A requires States to provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage to children of linguistic minority groups; Article 350B provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President.

- The Eighth Schedule contains 22 languages; the 92nd Amendment, 2003 added Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali, and the 71st Amendment, 1992 added Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali.
- Inclusion in the Eighth Schedule does not by itself make a language the official language of any State.
- Tulu is a Dravidian language returned separately in the Census but is not included in the Eighth Schedule.
- Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have declared Urdu as an additional official language by amending their State official language laws.

Mains: “The recognition of regional languages as additional official languages of a State strengthens democratic participation but complicates administration.” Discuss with reference to Article 345 and recent State practice. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — Constitutional framework · Body — The participation argument · Body — The administrative cost · Conclusion

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

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

- Article 345 empowers the legislature of a State to adopt, by law, one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi for its official purposes.
- Under Article 347, the President may, on a demand being made, direct that a language spoken by a substantial proportion of a State's population be officially recognised throughout the State or any part of it.
- Article 350A, inserted by the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1956, provides for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage for children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
- Article 350B provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President.
- Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were added to the Eighth Schedule by the 71st Amendment Act, 1992; Tulu is not included in the Eighth Schedule.
- The three-language formula was recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66) chaired by D S Kothari and adopted in the National Policy on Education, 1968.
- The States Reorganisation Commission, whose report led to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, was chaired by Fazl Ali.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional scheme · Body — how it has worked · Body — language in schools · Conclusion

15. Manipur's shifting ethnic conflict (4)

Lens: Liberty and order · Centre and States. GS3 — Security challenges in border areas; GS2 — Federal response to internal disturbance

Story so far — Killings of Kuki-Zo civilians in Naga-majority areas show Manipur's conflict has outgrown the Meitei-Kuki frame. Arson continues and GST revenue has fallen by over ₹1,200 crore. The Supreme Court sought a report on 25 unnatural deaths in relief camps. AFSPA was extended six months as Kamjong killings mounted, and Naga-Kuki clashes have crossed 50 deaths since February, sustained by rivalry over drug routes.

17 Sep Manipur — Militants Burn Down Farmers' Houses as Conflict-Linked Economic Loss Mounts

- Manipur's ethnic conflict, which erupted in May 2023, has resulted in a GST revenue decline of over ₹1,200 crore for the state from 2023 to 2026; the conflict has claimed at least 306 lives, with 49 people still missing and thousands displaced.

Mains: “Prolonged internal conflict imposes not only humanitarian but also compounding fiscal costs on a state, by simultaneously shrinking its revenue base and raising its expenditure needs.” Discuss with reference to Manipur's GST revenue decline since 2023, and examine the implications for Centre-state fiscal support during protracted internal-security crises.

18 Sep Manipur: Supreme Court Seeks Report on Unnatural Deaths in Relief Camps as a New Kuki-Naga Fault Line Opens

- The Sixth Schedule provides for Autonomous District Councils in tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram; Manipur's hill areas are administered under State legislation, not the Sixth Schedule.

- Article 371C makes special provision for the Hill Areas of Manipur, including a committee of the Legislative Assembly for hill areas and a special responsibility of the Governor.
- The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998 are not legally binding; India has no dedicated domestic legislation for internally displaced persons.
- Under Article 356, a Proclamation of President's Rule must be laid before Parliament and ceases to operate after two months unless approved by both Houses; S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994) held it subject to judicial review.
- The National Investigation Agency was established under the NIA Act, 2008; the 2019 amendment extended its jurisdiction to offences including human trafficking, cyber terrorism and manufacture or sale of arms, and allowed investigation of scheduled offences committed outside India.

Mains: "In a prolonged internal displacement crisis, the state's failure is measured less by the violence it could not prevent than by the conditions it maintained afterwards." Critically examine with reference to the situation in Manipur.

Approach: Introduction — separate the phases · Body 1 — establish the scale and character of camp deaths · Body 2 — analyse the evidentiary and classification failures · Body 3 — explain the shift in the fault line · Body 4 — examine the political economy of the impasse · Body 5 — set out what the state must do · Conclusion — legitimacy is rebuilt through conditions, not statements

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

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

- Under Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Governor of a State, the Administrator of a Union Territory or the Central Government may declare an area to be a disturbed area.
- Section 6 of AFSPA, 1958 bars prosecution or legal proceedings against persons acting under the Act except with the previous sanction of the Central Government.
- In Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India (1998), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of AFSPA while requiring periodic review of disturbed-area declarations.
- In the EEVFAM case (2016), the Supreme Court held that there is no absolute immunity for armed forces personnel using excessive force in areas declared disturbed under AFSPA.
- The Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005) recommended repeal of AFSPA and incorporation of necessary provisions in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.
- Manipur, formerly a Union Territory, attained Statehood in 1972.
- The Assam Rifles is the force responsible for guarding the India-Myanmar border.

Mains: "AFSPA has outlived its original purpose, yet the security situation in the Northeast keeps justifying its extension." Critically examine this statement in the context of the recent extension of the Act in Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, and suggest a roadmap for its eventual withdrawal. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for continuation · Body — the case against · Body — a roadmap · Conclusion

29 Sep Naga-Kuki Clashes in Manipur Cross 50 Deaths Since February as Drug-Route Rivalry Sustains Violence

The Meitei-Kuki conflict from May 2023 separates communities and cuts the old Moreh-Imphal trafficking chain → President's Rule ends and a new government takes office in February 2026 → a local Naga-Kuki dispute in Ukhrul escalates through abductions and retaliatory killings, with Myanmar-based groups involved → drug routes shift to Kamjong and armed groups compete over access and money in mixed hill villages → the UNC blockade and electoral stakes harden positions while security forces can only manage incidents

- Article 371C, inserted by the Constitution (Twenty-seventh Amendment) Act, 1971, provides for a committee of the Manipur Legislative Assembly consisting of members elected from the Hill Areas.
- Under Article 371C, the Governor of Manipur must report annually, or whenever required, to the President on the administration of the Hill Areas.
- The Sixth Schedule applies to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, and not to Manipur.
- The district councils in Manipur's hill areas were created under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971, an Act of Parliament.
- The Golden Triangle refers to the area where the borders of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand meet.
- Article 355 imposes a duty on the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance.
- The Narcotics Control Bureau was established in 1986 as the nodal drug law enforcement agency under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

Mains: The conflict in Manipur has shifted from a valley–hill divide to clashes among hill communities. Examine the role of territorial overlap, cross-border drug trafficking and political representation in sustaining this violence, and suggest measures for durable peace. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — territorial overlap · Body — the drug economy and cross-border links · Body — representation and politics · Conclusion

16. UPI merchant fee (MDR) (4)

Lens: Market and State · Innovation and safeguards. GS3 — Banking and digital payments; GS2 — Regulatory bodies

Story so far — From October 15, merchant UPI payments above ₹2,000 carry a 0.4% fee capped at ₹300; person-to-person payments stay free. The move turned political, with Congress alleging US pressure and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch also objecting. Most of the banks' share flows to Yes Bank, and merchants can dodge the fee by splitting bills. The Supreme Court refused a stay but asked the Centre to explain the charge's legal character.

17 Sep UPI Merchant Fee Turns Political — 'Prostration Before Trump' vs 'RSS Affiliate Also Objects'

- The proposed UPI MDR is 0.4% on P2M transactions above ₹2,000, capped at ₹300, effective October 15; P2P transactions and payments to small merchants remain exempt; NPCI data shows only about one-fifth of UPI transaction value would attract the MDR; Yes Bank is identified as the biggest beneficiary bank under the proposed mechanism, followed by Axis, ICICI and HDFC.

Mains: "The controversy around the UPI Merchant Discount Rate reveals as much about the political economy of banking regulation as it does about digital-payments policy itself." Discuss, distinguishing between the political critiques of the MDR and what the underlying transaction data actually shows.

18 Sep UPI Merchant Fee: The Final Framework, and Who Actually Pays and Gains

MDR of 0.4% applies only to P2M above ₹2,000 → that is 2.5% of UPI volume but ₹5.99 lakh crore of August's ₹29.8 lakh crore value → maximum ₹2,400 crore a month for the ecosystem → split 40-30-20-10 across payer bank, payee bank, app and PSP → because Yes Bank is payer in over 50% and payee in about 55% of transactions, most of the 70% bank share concentrates in one bank.

- UPI is operated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), an umbrella organisation incorporated as a Section 8 not-for-profit company, promoted by the RBI and the Indian Banks' Association.
- Payment systems in India are regulated by the RBI under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007; zero MDR on UPI and RuPay debit card transactions was implemented via Section 10A of that Act and Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act, 1961.
- Under the framework effective from October 15, 2026: MDR of 0.4% applies to person-to-merchant transactions above ₹2,000, capped at ₹300 for transactions of ₹75,000 and above; a flat ₹5 applies in specified essential sectors; 0.02% capped at ₹300 applies to capital market transactions; all person-to-person transactions remain free.
- Small merchants receiving up to ₹1 lakh per month through UPI QR codes, classified under Person-to-Person-Merchant (P2PM), are exempt from MDR.
- NPCI's November 2020 directive capping any third-party application provider's share of UPI volume at 30% has not been enforced.
- NPCI's other products include RuPay, IMPS, NACH, AePS, BHIM, NETC FASTag and Bharat BillPay.

Mains: "The reintroduction of a Merchant Discount Rate on high-value UPI transactions raises a question India has avoided since 2020: who should pay for a digital public utility once it becomes indispensable?" Critically examine the design of the new framework and its distributional consequences.

Approach: Introduction — frame it as a financing question · Body 1 — set out the design precisely · Body 2 — establish scale with the data · Body 3 — make the competition-policy argument · Body 4 — assess the consumer-protection safeguard honestly · Body 5 — separate the capital-market objection · Conclusion — propose the conditions for legitimacy

19 Sep UPI Begins to Charge — and Merchants Have Already Found the Workaround

Zero MDR made UPI universal → the system's cost had no payer → 0.4% MDR above ₹2,000 → merchants split bills below the threshold → NPCI declines a daily cap → the fee is avoidable by design

- The National Payments Corporation of India is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation for retail payments, promoted by the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association, and operating UPI, IMPS, RuPay, NACH, AePS and FASTag.
- Payment systems are regulated by the Reserve Bank under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act requires prescribed businesses to provide facility for accepting payment through prescribed electronic modes; Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act bars charges on such prescribed modes.
- Under the framework effective 15 October, MDR of 0.4% applies to person-to-merchant UPI payments above ₹2,000, capped at ₹300 for transactions of ₹75,000 or more.

- Per NPCI, all person-to-person UPI transactions and all RuPay debit card transactions remain free, and merchants receiving up to ₹1 lakh per month via UPI are exempt.
- Per NPCI, only 4% of person-to-merchant UPI transactions are above ₹2,000, and UPI handles 49% of the world's real-time instant payments.

Mains: "The reintroduction of a merchant discount rate on high-value UPI transactions raises the question of how a digital public infrastructure should be financed. Discuss."

Approach: Define the terms before taking a position · State the financing problem neutrally · Evaluate the chosen design on its own terms · Offer a specific alternative rather than a complaint · Conclude on the constitutional-scale question

29 Sep Supreme Court Refuses to Stay 0.4% UPI Charge, Asks the Centre What Its Legal Character Is

Section 269SU and Section 10A (2019) bar charges on prescribed digital modes, making UPI free for merchants → volumes explode while banks and apps bear the running cost of the rails → Finance Ministry notifies a 0.4% MDR on P2M payments above ₹2,000 on September 14, 2026 → a PIL attacks the charge as an expropriation without authority of law and Section 10A as excessive delegation → Supreme Court refuses a stay but demands, on affidavit, the legal character of the charge

- Article 265 of the Constitution provides that no tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law.
- The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 designates the Reserve Bank of India as the authority to regulate and supervise payment systems in India.
- The National Payments Corporation of India is a not-for-profit company promoted by the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association; it operates UPI and RuPay but is not a regulator.
- Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 bars banks and system providers from imposing charges for electronic payment modes prescribed under Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act, 1961 (now Section 187 of the Income-tax Act, 2025).
- The merchant discount rate is paid by the merchant receiving the payment, not by the customer making it.
- In the Shirur Mutt case (1954), the Supreme Court held that a fee, unlike a tax, is charged for a special service rendered and carries an element of quid pro quo.
- Under Article 110(2), a Bill is not deemed a Money Bill merely because it provides for fees for licences or fees for services rendered.

Mains: "If it is not a tax or a fee, what is it?" In the light of the Supreme Court's question on the 0.4% merchant discount rate on UPI payments, discuss the constitutional limits on the Executive's power to impose charges, and suggest a sustainable model for financing India's digital payments infrastructure. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — constitutional limits · Body — economics · Body — a sustainable model · Conclusion

17. Drought and the rabi season (4)

Lens: Short-term relief and long-term reform · Centre and States. GS3 — Agriculture and cropping patterns; disaster management

Story so far — With the monsoon ending 12.6% below normal and El Niño strengthening, the Centre advanced rabi planning and set a 373.93 mt foodgrain target. Maharashtra declared drought on September 26 in 265 of 358 talukas, began Trigger-1 relief and told banks not to recover farm loans. In Beed, Dhule and Nandurbar, sugarcane cutters left months early, indebted to labour contractors.

19 Sep Agriculture Ministry Advances Rabi Planning as El Niño Bites; Sugar and Onion Stock Limits Reworked

Deficient south-west monsoon and a strengthening El Niño → thin residual soil moisture and reservoir storage as the October sowing window opens → Centre pushes district-wise rabi assessment, short-duration varieties and seed-fertiliser logistics through the States → meanwhile a sugar and onion price rally forces stock limits, timed mill sales and buffer onion offloading at ₹35 a kg → prices stabilise, but wholesale food inflation at 7.05% and a month's delay in the kharif onion crop keep the risk alive

- Rabi crops are sown from October to December and harvested between March and June; the principal rabi crops are wheat, barley, gram, mustard, lentil and peas.
- El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, marked by anomalous warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific and a weakening of the easterly trade winds; it is historically associated with a below-normal Indian south-west monsoon.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole is the sea-surface temperature difference between the western and eastern tropical Indian Ocean; its positive phase is generally favourable to the Indian monsoon.
- Stock-holding limits on essential commodities are imposed under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955; sugar is additionally regulated under the Sugar (Control) Order, 1966, through which the Centre allocates monthly sale quotas to mills.

- Sugar stock limits are administered by the Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, while the Price Stabilisation Fund used for onion and pulses buffers is operated by the Department of Consumer Affairs.
- Sugarcane is paid a Fair and Remunerative Price fixed by the Centre under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices; States may additionally declare a State Advised Price.
- The Advance Authorisation Scheme permits duty-free import of inputs against an export obligation under the Foreign Trade Policy administered by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, while a Tariff Rate Quota permits a specified quantity of imports at a concessional rate of duty.

Mains: Price stabilisation measures for food commodities protect the consumer in the immediate term but can weaken the producer's incentive to plant in the following season. Examine this trade-off with reference to India's recent management of sugar and onion supplies, and discuss how pre-season rabi planning can reduce the need for such interventions. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — establish that the consumer-side case is real · Body — then state the producer-side cost with equal precision · Body — shift the answer to the supply side where the durable fix lies · Conclusion

22 Sep Maharashtra Readies a 100% Drought Declaration as Rain Stays Away for 20 Days in 83 Talukas

Monsoon breaks for over 20 days across 83 talukas in 20 districts → soya bean, cotton and sugarcane wither and rainfall deficits reach 40–50% in districts such as Latur and Solapur → tankers start plying and the State announces fee and power-bill waivers → Minister promises a 100% drought declaration by September-end while the formal crop-loss survey waits till after October 5 → declaration opens the path to SDRF relief and an NDRF memorandum to the Centre, as sugar output is forecast to fall about 20%

- The National Disaster Response Fund is constituted under Section 46, and the State Disaster Response Fund under Section 48, of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- Drought management at the Centre is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, not the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Manual for Drought Management uses a mandatory rainfall indicator as the first trigger and impact indicators on agriculture, remote sensing, soil moisture and hydrology as the second.
- The drought manual requires ground truthing in 10% of affected villages chosen at random before a declaration.
- Under the SDRF/NDRF norms, an agricultural input subsidy is payable where crop loss exceeds 33%, up to a ceiling of 2 hectares per farmer.
- Under the drought manual, a kharif drought is to be declared not later than October 31.
- A taluka is an administrative sub-division of a district, used in States such as Maharashtra for revenue and development administration.

Mains: “In India, drought is declared by rule but experienced by the season.” With reference to the current dry spell in Maharashtra, examine the process of drought declaration and relief under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Manual for Drought Management, and suggest reforms to make drought response faster and more farmer-centred. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the process · Body — the gaps · Body — reforms · Conclusion

24 Sep Maharashtra Must Wait Till October 5 for Drought Assessment as Fadnavis Warns of ‘Worse Than 1972’

A ‘Super El Niño’ weakens the southwest monsoon, leaving a national deficit of about 15% by September 22 → in rain-fed Maharashtra, with under 20% irrigation, sowing slips to July 15 and 40–60-day dry spells wither the kharif crop on 147 lakh hectares → small dams fall to 43% and Marathwada’s storage to 46%, and the Opposition demands a drought declaration → NDRF rules allow kharif assessment only from October 5, so the State runs panchanamas and prepares a proposal → the CM calls it worse than 1972 and promises a Government Resolution and State-funded relief before Central money arrives

- Under the Manual for Drought Management (updated 2020), drought is declared by the State Government through a notification, normally by 31 October for kharif and 31 March for rabi, and the notification is valid for up to six months unless withdrawn earlier.
- The Moisture Adequacy Index is the ratio of actual evapotranspiration to potential evapotranspiration, expressed as a percentage.
- The National Disaster Response Fund and the State Disaster Response Fund are constituted under Sections 46 and 48 respectively of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare is the nodal Central ministry for drought management, unlike most other natural disasters, for which the Ministry of Home Affairs is nodal.
- In IMD’s classification, seasonal rainfall within 19% of the long period average either way is ‘normal’, 20% to 59% below is ‘deficient’, and 60% to 99% below is ‘large deficient’.

- The Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, 1977, which grew out of relief works during the 1972 drought, is regarded as the forerunner of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.
- Under the 2020 drought Manual, crop loss of 33% or more, established through field verification, qualifies an area for drought declaration, and loss above 50% is required for the 'severe' category.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — assessment and declaration · Body — financing · Body — adequacy · Conclusion

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

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

- El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation, marked by above-normal sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.
- Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, Antyodaya Anna Yojana households are entitled to 35 kg of foodgrain per family per month.
- Drought is declared by State governments, following the Centre's Manual for Drought Management.

Mains: Examine how El Niño threatens India's food security and farm incomes differently, and the role of buffer stocks in managing the risk. (10 marks, 150 words)

Approach: Directive — Examine · Introduction — the monsoon is 12% short, yet the target stays near a record · Supply is cushioned because central stocks and NFSA absorb a shortfall · Incomes are not cushioned, as Marathwada shows · Conclusion — stocks guard the plate; insurance and water guard the farmer

18. Food prices and import policy (4)

Lens: Short-term relief and long-term reform · Growth and equity. GS3 — Food security, buffer stocks and agricultural pricing

Story so far — The Centre halved duty on crude palm and soybean oil to 5% and scrapped it on crude sunflower oil. Wheat stocks are over twice the buffer norm even as the rice harvest falls, and op-eds split on keeping exports open. With the monsoon 11.9% short, an editorial urged duty-free pulses; pulse prices then rose up to 10% in a month as drought threatens rabi sowing.

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

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

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

Mains: "India's edible-oil policy swings between protecting the oilseed farmer and protecting the consumer." In the light of the recent cut in import duties on crude and refined edible oils, critically examine whether customs tariffs are the right instrument for managing this trade-off, and suggest a durable path to self-reliance in edible oils. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the consumer case · Body — the farmer case · Body — better instruments · Conclusion

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

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

- Buffer stocking norms for the Central Pool are fixed by the Central Government separately for April 1, July 1, October 1 and January 1 of each year.
- Under the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic), the Food Corporation of India sells surplus wheat and rice from the Central Pool in the open market, mainly through e-auctions, at reserve prices fixed by the government.
- Minimum support prices are announced on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.
- The National Food Security Act, 2013 provides for coverage of up to 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of the urban population under the Targeted Public Distribution System.
- The Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992 empowers the Central Government to prohibit, restrict or regulate the export and import of goods.
- A minimum export price is a floor price below which a commodity cannot be exported.
- The 'peace clause' on public stockholding for food security purposes was adopted at the WTO Ministerial Conference held in Bali in 2013.

Mains: "India's foodgrain stocks are far above buffer norms, yet its agricultural export policy remains reactive." Critically examine this statement in the context of a deficient monsoon, and suggest a rule-based framework for managing food stocks and exports. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why stocks overshoot · Body — the reactive pattern · Body — a rule-based framework · Conclusion

28 Sep Monsoon 11.9% Below Normal, El Niño Strengthening: Editorial Urges Duty-Free Pulses After Edible Oil Duty Cut

El Niño warms the Pacific and weakens monsoon circulation from August → all-India rain falls 11.9% below average and 23 of 36 subdivisions record deficits above 10% → Maharashtra declares drought in about three-fourths of its tehsils and Karnataka seeks Central aid → low reservoir and groundwater levels and a warm winter threaten the rabi crop → the Centre cuts edible-oil duties and the editorial calls for duty-free pulses to head off price spikes

- For all-India seasonal rainfall, IMD classifies rainfall below 90% of the Long Period Average as deficient.
- IMD divides India into 36 meteorological subdivisions for rainfall monitoring.
- El Niño refers to the anomalous warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- A positive Indian Ocean Dipole is associated with warmer sea surface temperatures in the western Indian Ocean than in the eastern Indian Ocean.
- The Central Government can reduce the effective rate of customs duty by issuing exemption notifications under Section 25 of the Customs Act, 1962.
- Stock limits on traders of essential commodities are imposed under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, a bound tariff is the maximum rate a member has committed not to exceed, while the applied tariff is the rate actually charged.

Mains: "Trade policy is an instrument of food security as much as production policy." In the context of a deficient monsoon and a strengthening El Niño, discuss how India should use import duties and other trade tools to protect both consumers and farmers. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why the rabi crop matters · Body — trade tools · Body — balancing farmers · Conclusion

29 Sep Pulse Prices Jump Up to 10% in a Month as Drought Threatens Rabi Sowing

El Niño weakens the monsoon and August–September turn dry after a hopeful June → kharif pulses and coarse grains wilt and soil moisture for rabi collapses → Maharashtra declares 265 talukas and Karnataka large areas drought-hit → traders price in a smaller chana crop, costlier imports from Australia and Russia, and festive demand → pulse prices rise up to 10% in a month → the Centre asks States to plan rabi by water availability and push pulses and oilseeds

- Under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the National Disaster Response Fund is constituted under Section 46 and the State Disaster Response Fund under Section 48.
- Drought is declared by the State government, based on indicators set out in the Manual for Drought Management issued by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

- The Minimum Support Price is announced by the Union government on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and does not have statutory backing.
- PM-AASHA (2018) comprises the Price Support Scheme, the Price Deficiency Payment Scheme and the Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme.
- The Price Stabilisation Fund, which finances a buffer stock of pulses, is administered by the Department of Consumer Affairs.
- The National Commission on Farmers (2004–06) was chaired by M.S. Swaminathan and recommended that MSP be at least 50% more than the weighted average cost of production.
- Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, the Gram Sabha is the authority that initiates the process of determining individual and community forest rights.

Mains: “India’s recurring pulse inflation is less a failure of production than a failure to align water, prices and procurement.” Discuss in the context of the 2026 drought and the Centre’s call to shift water-stressed areas to pulses and oilseeds. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the water dimension · Body — the price and procurement dimension · Body — the livelihood dimension · Conclusion

19. India–EU FTA and CBAM (4)

Lens: National interest and global commons · Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — Bilateral agreements; GS3 — Trade and carbon border measures

Story so far — India secured a 2.8 million tonne EU steel quota, but the carbon border tax (CBAM) still applies. A draft copyright chapter may force amendments to India’s Copyright Act and threatens safe harbours for ISPs, students and libraries. The FTA will be signed in Brussels on December 16 without member-state ratification, and India joined as a third party when a WTO panel took up Russia’s challenge to CBAM.

18 Sep India Secures 2.8 Million Tonne Steel Quota From the EU — but CBAM Still Applies

- CBAM applies to imports into the EU of iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen, mirroring the carbon cost faced by EU producers under the EU Emissions Trading System.
- A tariff-rate quota permits a specified quantity of imports at a lower duty, with above-quota imports facing a higher rate.
- India’s Carbon Credit Trading Scheme was notified under the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022, and establishes a domestic compliance carbon market administered through the Bureau of Energy Efficiency.
- An EU trade agreement requires negotiation by the European Commission, a Council decision on signature and conclusion, and the consent of the European Parliament.
- India’s principal steel-sector policy instruments include the National Steel Policy, 2017 and the Production Linked Incentive scheme for specialty steel.

Mains: “Securing a larger export quota does not address the competitiveness problem created by a border carbon price.” Examine this distinction with reference to India’s steel exports to the European Union, and evaluate India’s policy options.

Approach: Introduction — separate the two instruments at the outset · Body 1 — set out what India actually secured · Body 2 — explain why CBAM still binds · Body 3 — identify the compliance-infrastructure gap · Body 4 — evaluate the CCTS as leverage · Body 5 — state the multilateral argument fairly · Conclusion — decarbonisation is the only durable answer

21 Sep Draft India-EU FTA Copyright Chapter Threatens Safe Harbours for ISPs, Students and Libraries

India-EU FTA talks near conclusion → EU secures a detailed IP chapter modelled on its own copyright law → WCT kept for enforcement but dropped from National Treatment → India’s Section 52 and 65A(2) exceptions become challengeable → Parliament may be obliged to amend the Copyright Act to fit a trade treaty

- The Copyright Act, 1957 is administered by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade; Section 52 lists acts that do not constitute infringement.
- Section 65A of the Copyright Act, inserted by the 2012 amendment, deals with protection of technological protection measures; Section 65B deals with rights management information.
- The WIPO Copyright Treaty was adopted in 1996 and India acceded to it in 2018, along with the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty.
- The three-step test for copyright exceptions originates in Article 9(2) of the Berne Convention and is also found in Article 13 of the TRIPS Agreement.
- National treatment requires a treaty party to give nationals of other parties the same protection it gives its own nationals.
- Rule 75 of the Copyright Rules, 2013 provides the notice-and-takedown procedure for intermediaries storing infringing copies transiently.

Mains: Trade agreements increasingly shape domestic intellectual property law. With reference to the copyright provisions in the draft India-EU Free Trade Agreement, discuss how India can protect its policy space in education, research and the digital economy. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — what the draft does · Body — who is affected · Body — balancing view · Conclusion

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

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

- Under Article 3(1)(e) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the common commercial policy is an area of exclusive EU competence.
- Under Article 218 of the TFEU, the Council of the EU signs and concludes international agreements, and trade agreements require the consent of the European Parliament.
- In Opinion 2/15 (2017) on the EU-Singapore FTA, the Court of Justice of the EU held that portfolio investment and investor-state dispute settlement are competences shared with member states, so agreements containing them are 'mixed' agreements needing member-state ratification.
- The European Council consists of the heads of state or government of the member states together with its President and the President of the European Commission; it is distinct from the Council of the European Union, which is composed of national ministers.
- Article XXIV of GATT permits free trade areas and customs unions as an exception to the most-favoured-nation principle, provided duties are eliminated on substantially all trade between the parties.
- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism covers imports of iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

Mains: "The India-EU Free Trade Agreement owes its speed as much to what it leaves out as to what it includes." Discuss with reference to the EU's treaty procedure, India's protection of sensitive sectors and the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — what it leaves out · Body — what remains unresolved · Body — India's wider strategy · Conclusion

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

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

- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism covers iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.
- CBAM ran in a transitional, reporting-only phase from October 2023, and its definitive phase requiring purchase of CBAM certificates began on January 1, 2026.
- Article III of GATT deals with national treatment, while Article XX sets out general exceptions, including measures relating to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources.
- Under Article 10 of the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding, a member having a substantial interest in a matter before a panel may participate as a third party.
- The WTO Appellate Body has been non-functional since December 2019 because of a block on the appointment of its members.
- The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities is enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992.
- India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023 was notified under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for CBAM as a climate measure · Body — the case that it is a trade barrier · Body — India's response · Conclusion

20. Pakistan: frictions and contacts (4)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — India and its neighbourhood

Story so far — A Pakistan Navy corvette collided with an Indian warship in the Arabian Sea, and India protested under the 1991 advance-notice agreement. Pakistan signed drone contracts with a Trump-linked US firm, revived a boundary commission with China and struck Afghanistan's Kunar and Paktika after three months of calm. Yet India sent its SCO coordinator to Islamabad, its first such visit in nearly two years.

17 Sep Pakistan Navy Corvette Collides with Indian Navy Warship in the Arabian Sea

- The incident occurred in the North Arabian Sea; the 1991 India-Pakistan Agreement on Advance Notice of Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troop Movements is the specific bilateral CBM India says was contravened; a precedent incident occurred in 2011 between PNS Babur and INS Godavari.

Mains: "Naval incidents between adversarial neighbours often say as much about the strategic environment surrounding them as about the specific encounter itself." Discuss this claim with reference to the recent India-Pakistan naval collision in the Arabian Sea, and evaluate the role of bilateral confidence-building measures in managing such incidents.

18 Sep Pakistan's External Alignments: A Trump-Linked Drone Deal and a Revived Boundary Commission With China

- The China-Pakistan boundary agreement of 1963 transferred the Shaksgam Valley in the Trans-Karakoram Tract to Chinese administration; India does not recognise it, and the agreement itself provides for renegotiation after the settlement of the Kashmir dispute.
- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor connects Kashgar in Xinjiang to Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea and passes through Gilgit-Baltistan; it is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative.
- India has not joined the Belt and Road Initiative, citing sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns over CPEC.
- Gwadar port lies on the Makran coast of Balochistan, near the mouth of the Persian Gulf; Chabahar port, which India has been developing, lies on Iran's Sistan-Balochistan coast.

Mains: "India's strategic partnerships do not give it a veto over its partners' relationships with its adversaries." Discuss with reference to recent developments in Pakistan's defence and boundary arrangements, and examine how India should respond.

Approach: Introduction — state the structural reality · Body 1 — set out the defence procurement development · Body 2 — analyse the boundary commission · Body 3 — explain the logic of India's protest · Body 4 — set out India's realistic levers · Conclusion — capability over exclusivity

22 Sep Pakistan Strikes Kunar and Paktika, Ending Three Months of Relative Calm Along the Durand Line

Taliban return to power in Kabul in August 2021 → TTP attacks inside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rise and Islamabad accuses Kabul of harbouring them → conflict escalates from February 2026, with UNAMA recording 399 civilian casualties from Pakistani strikes between April and June → a TTP splinter kills around 23 at Kohat on September 18 → Pakistan strikes Kunar and Paktika on September 21 and the Taliban threaten a response, citing Article 51

- The Durand Line was demarcated in 1893 between British India and Afghanistan under an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan.
- Article 51 of the UN Charter recognises the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.
- Article 2(4) of the UN Charter requires members to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.
- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established by the UN Security Council in 2002.
- The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed in 2007 as an umbrella of militant groups opposed to the Pakistani state.
- India opposes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor because it passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, territory India claims as its own.
- The Salma Dam in Herat province, built with Indian assistance, is officially named the Afghan-India Friendship Dam.

Mains: "The Taliban's return to power in Kabul was expected to secure Pakistan's western frontier; instead it has become its most active front." Analyse the causes of the Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict and its implications for India's security and regional interests. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — causes · Body — legal dimension · Body — implications for India · Conclusion

29 Sep India Joins SCO Coordinators' Meeting in Islamabad, Its First in Pakistan in Nearly Two Years

Pahalgam attack in April 2025 → Operation Sindoor and military confrontation in May 2025 → India freezes bilateral dialogue on the principle that terror and talks cannot go together → Pakistan takes the SCO Heads of State chair for 2026-27 and hosts the first coordinators' meeting → India sends its SCO coordinator to Islamabad to stay inside the multilateral process, while building anti-terror consensus in IBSA

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was founded in 2001 in Shanghai; India and Pakistan became full members in 2017.
- The SCO has two permanent bodies: the Secretariat in Beijing and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in Tashkent.
- The Council of Heads of State is the highest decision-making body of the SCO, while the Council of National Coordinators coordinates its current activities.
- The official languages of the SCO are Russian and Chinese.
- IBSA is a trilateral forum of India, Brazil and South Africa launched by the Brasilia Declaration of 2003.
- The UN Security Council's 1267 sanctions committee lists individuals and entities associated with Al Qaeda and ISIL (Daesh).
- Kamdesh district lies in Nuristan province of eastern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan.

Mains: "Multilateral forums allow India to engage adversaries without legitimising them." Examine this statement in the context of India's participation in SCO meetings hosted by Pakistan. What are the limits of this approach? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why multilateral engagement works for India · Body — the limits · Body — complementary platforms · Conclusion

21. Recruitment exams and paper leaks (4)

Lens: Independence and accountability · Rule of law and discretion. GS2 — Constitutional bodies (Public Service Commissions); governance

Story so far — Karnataka's PSC chairman was suspended and the High Court ordered a fresh SIT probe, calling a PSC a 'constitutional sentinel'; Jharkhand's commission is also under investigation. After the NEET-UG 2026 leak, the Supreme Court sought an NTA reform report and debate began on bringing JEE Advanced under the anti-paper-leak law. Rajasthan re-held its 2021 sub-inspector exam four years after a leak.

19 Sep Two State Public Service Commissions Under Investigation in One Week — Karnataka and Jharkhand

Recruitment examination → allegations of manipulation → appointments cancelled → candidates who may be innocent lose jobs → court stays terminations and puts a retired judge over the investigation

- Article 315 — provision for a Union Public Service Commission and a Public Service Commission for each State.
- Article 316 — appointment and term of office of members; the chairman and members of a State Public Service Commission are appointed by the Governor.
- Article 317 — removal and suspension of a member of a Public Service Commission; removal is by the President, on a reference to and report by the Supreme Court, on the ground of misbehaviour.
- Article 320 sets out the functions of Public Service Commissions; Article 323 requires the annual report to be presented to the Governor in the case of a State Commission.
- Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment under the State.

Mains: "The constitutional insulation given to Public Service Commissions protects them from political interference but leaves internal corruption difficult to address. Critically examine."

Approach: Set out the scheme precisely before evaluating it · Defend the insulation before criticising it · Then state the gap in one sentence · Propose remedies at three levels · Conclude by separating the institution from the incumbent

19 Sep Should the Anti-Paper-Leak Act Cover JEE Advanced? Supreme Court Seeks NTA Reform Report

NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and cancellation → Jantar Mantar protests and loss of confidence in the NTA → penalties under the anti-unfair-means law raised to 5-10 years and ₹50 lakh → the Supreme Court pushes institutionalisation of the NTA and a Nilekani panel on technology reform → the question turns to whether IIT-conducted examinations should also be brought inside the statute

- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 makes offences cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable, with investigation by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or Assistant Commissioner of Police.
- The Act applies to examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, the National Testing Agency, the Staff Selection Commission, the Railway Recruitment Boards, the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection, and central ministries and departments with their attached and subordinate offices, plus any other authority notified by the Centre.
- JEE Main is conducted by the National Testing Agency; JEE Advanced is conducted by the IITs on a rotational basis under the guidance of the Joint Admission Board, and GATE, JAM and CEED are conducted by the IITs and the Indian Institute of Science.
- The National Testing Agency was established in November 2017 as an autonomous testing organisation registered as a society under the Ministry of Education, and conducts NEET-UG, JEE Main, UGC-NET and CUET.
- The Indian Institutes of Technology are declared institutions of national importance under the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961, with the IIT Council as the apex coordinating body.

- Under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026, as reported, a person or student using unfair means may face imprisonment of five to ten years and a fine of up to ₹50 lakh.
- The Department of Personnel and Training, which the Supreme Court directed to file an affidavit on the progress of NTA reforms, is part of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, held by the Prime Minister.

Mains: "Extending a criminal statute on examination malpractice to autonomous institutions of national importance strengthens deterrence but raises questions of proportionality and institutional autonomy." Examine, with reference to the architecture of examination governance in India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — make the case for extension · Body — make the case against, at its strongest · Body — shift to the institutional reform that actually matters · Conclusion

21 Sep Rajasthan Re-holds 2021 Sub-Inspector Exam Four Years After Paper Leak as Exam Integrity Turns Political

Scarce public jobs attract lakhs of applicants → organised paper-leak networks target high-stakes exams → cancellations delay careers by years → retests under biometric and facial checks → exam fairness becomes a campaign theme for ruling and opposition parties alike

- Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
- Article 320 lays down the functions of the UPSC and State Public Service Commissions, including conducting examinations for appointments to the services.
- Under Article 317, a member of a State Public Service Commission is appointed by the Governor but can be removed only by the President, after an inquiry by the Supreme Court in cases of misbehaviour.
- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 covers examinations conducted by the UPSC, SSC, RRBs, IBPS, NTA and central ministries and departments.
- Offences under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 are cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable; organised paper-leak crime attracts five to ten years' imprisonment and a fine of at least ₹1 crore.
- The concept of "exit" and "voice" as responses to declining quality is associated with the economist Albert O. Hirschman's 1970 book Exit, Voice, and Loyalty.
- The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a household-based survey of children's learning outcomes facilitated by the NGO Pratham.

Mains: "Private exit from failing public services weakens the democratic pressure to reform them." Discuss with examples from India, and examine whether recent controversies over examination paper leaks could change this pattern. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — How exit weakens voice · Body — Why welfare politics favours visible goods · Body — Paper leaks as a possible exception, and its limits · Conclusion

22 Sep Karnataka High Court Orders De Novo SIT Probe Into KPSC Scam, Calls PSC 'Constitutional Sentinel'

KPSC chairman appointed in 2019 and retained across a change of government → aspirants allege withheld marks, tampered sheets, rigged interviews and leaked papers → KPSC's own complaint goes to local police and then the CID, which petitioners call an eyewash → students, candidates and an MLA seek a CBI probe → High Court under Article 226 orders a de novo, court-monitored SIT with a 100-day deadline

- Under Article 316, the chairman and members of a State Public Service Commission are appointed by the Governor and hold office for six years or until the age of 62, whichever is earlier.
- Under Article 317, a chairman or member of a State Public Service Commission can be removed for misbehaviour only by the President after an inquiry by the Supreme Court on a reference.
- Article 317(2) allows the Governor to suspend a chairman or member of a State Public Service Commission while a reference to the Supreme Court is pending.
- Article 322 provides that the expenses of a State Public Service Commission are charged on the Consolidated Fund of the State.
- Article 323(2) requires a State Public Service Commission to present an annual report to the Governor, which is laid before the State Legislature with a memorandum on cases where the Commission's advice was not accepted.
- Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 applies to examinations conducted by bodies such as the UPSC, SSC, railway recruitment boards and the National Testing Agency.

Mains: "Public Service Commissions are constitutional sentinels at the gateway to public employment." In the light of recent recruitment scandals, examine the constitutional safeguards for State Public Service Commissions and suggest reforms to secure their integrity. (15 marks, 250 words)

22. Spurious drugs and regulator reform (4)

Lens: Market and State · Independence and accountability. GS2 — Health; regulatory bodies

Story so far — Police traced counterfeit cancer and antibiotic injections, revialled at a Bengaluru farmhouse, through a wholesaler into more than 90 hospitals, and Delhi seized 481 fake Abhayrab rabies vaccine units supplied from Kanpur. The CDSCO proposes centralising sterile-drug licensing while easing other approvals, and the NHRC recommends a national drug registration certificate with QR track-and-trace.

19 Sep Counterfeit Cancer and Antibiotic Injections Traced From a Bengaluru Farmhouse to Wholesaler Krupa Healthcare

Cancer drugs priced beyond reach → a discount market grows around desperate buyers → expired stock is revialled at a rented farmhouse → a wholesaler with medical representatives pushes it at 50% off → it enters 90-plus hospitals → a labourer reports dumped waste and the chain becomes visible

- The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and the Drugs Rules, 1945 are the parent legislation for the manufacture, sale, distribution and import of drugs and cosmetics in India.
- Section 17B of the Act defines a spurious drug; Section 17 defines a misbranded drug; Section 17A defines an adulterated drug; Section 18 prohibits their manufacture, sale, stocking and distribution.
- Section 5 of the Act constitutes the Drugs Technical Advisory Board to advise on technical matters; Section 7 constitutes the Drugs Consultative Committee to advise on uniformity of administration across India.
- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation functions under the Directorate General of Health Services in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and is headed by the Drugs Controller General of India.
- Licensing and enforcement for manufacture, sale and distribution of drugs rest largely with State Drugs Control Departments, while approval of new drugs, clinical trials and imports is a central function.
- The All India Drug Action Network is a network of non-profit organisations working to increase access to and improve the rational use of essential medicines; the Drug Action Forum, Karnataka is one of its constituents.
- Following the 2008 amendment, manufacture or sale of spurious or adulterated drugs likely to cause death or grievous hurt is punishable with imprisonment of not less than ten years extending to imprisonment for life, and States may constitute special courts for trial of such offences.

Mains: "A regulatory statute is only as strong as the inspectorate that enforces it." In the light of recent cases of spurious and substandard drugs entering the treatment chain, examine the structural weaknesses in India's drug regulatory architecture and suggest reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — locate the weaknesses structurally, not anecdotally · Body — bring in the demand side · Body — the accountability and disclosure question · Conclusion

19 Sep Dr Reddy's to Sell Takeda's Qdenga in India While the Drug Regulator Centralises and Liberalises at the Same Time

Dengue cases rise eleven-fold and all four serotypes co-circulate → CDSCO clears Qdenga for ages 4-60 in July 2026 → a foreign innovator ties up with a domestic distributor for reach → the same regulator faces sterile-injectable contamination and an HC ruling on State powers → it proposes to centralise sterile licensing while easing BA-BE and import approvals

- Dengue is caused by four serotypes of a flavivirus transmitted principally by Aedes aegypti; infection with one serotype confers lifelong immunity only to that serotype.
- Qdenga is Takeda's dengue vaccine; it received marketing authorisation from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation in July 2026 for the age group 4 to 60 years.
- Under the Seventh Schedule, 'public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries' is Entry 6 of the State List, while 'drugs and poisons' is Entry 19 of the Concurrent List.
- Under the Drugs Rules, the Drugs Controller General of India acts as Central Licence Approving Authority for specified categories including vaccines, sera, large-volume parenterals, recombinant DNA-derived products, cell and gene therapy products and xenografts; other products are licensed by State licensing authorities.
- Bioavailability and bioequivalence studies are the evidentiary basis for approval of a generic drug and demonstrate that it behaves in the body in the same way as the reference product.
- The New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 govern, among other things, the import of new or investigational drugs for clinical trials, bioavailability and bioequivalence studies, and tests or analysis; Rules 67 to 70 deal with such imports.
- The Drugs Consultative Committee, constituted under Section 7 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, advises on securing uniformity throughout India in the administration of the Act; proposals to amend the Drugs Rules, 1945, such as the labelling rule for cough syrups, are placed before it.

Mains: "Risk-proportionate regulation, not uniform stringency, is the correct organising principle for a pharmaceutical regulator." Discuss with reference to recent proposals of India's drug regulatory bodies, and examine the Centre-State implications of expanding central licensing. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — set the two proposals side by side · Body — the federalism analysis · Body — the condition on which the reform succeeds · Conclusion

23 Sep Delhi Seizes 481 Counterfeit Abhayrab Rabies Vaccine Units, Traces Supply to Kanpur Agency

Rabies vaccine is needed urgently after dog bites and is in steady demand across public and private channels → gaps between licensed supply chains and wholesale markets let unreleased, fake batches enter trade → the DCGI alerts all States on August 27 about a misbranded batch → Delhi's drug controller raids a Bhagirath Palace firm and seizes 481 units, which the manufacturer confirms are counterfeit → Uttar Pradesh's drug department traces the source to a Kanpur agency, showing that inter-State coordination is the only way to follow the chain

- Rabies is caused by a virus of the genus *Lyssavirus* and is transmitted to humans mainly through the bites of infected dogs.
- India's National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination by 2030 was launched on World Rabies Day, September 28, 2021.
- The global "Zero by 30" plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies was launched jointly by the WHO, FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control.
- Section 17B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 defines a "spurious drug".
- The Central Research Institute, Kasauli serves as the Central Drugs Laboratory for testing and lot release of vaccines and sera in India.
- Licences to manufacture vaccines are granted by State licensing authorities with the approval of the Drugs Controller General of India acting as the Central Licence Approving Authority.
- The Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023 are framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

Mains: The recent seizure of counterfeit rabies vaccine in Delhi exposes weaknesses in India's pharmaceutical supply chain. Examine the gaps in the regulation of drug and vaccine quality under India's Centre-State framework, and suggest measures to protect patients, in the context of the goal of eliminating dog-mediated rabies by 2030. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the regulatory framework · Body — gaps · Body — measures and rabies elimination · Conclusion

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

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

- Sections 17, 17A and 17B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 define misbranded, adulterated and spurious drugs respectively.
- The Drugs Consultative Committee, constituted under Section 7 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, consists of representatives of the Central Government and of each State Government and advises on securing uniformity in the administration of the Act.
- The Drugs Technical Advisory Board is constituted under Section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 to advise on technical matters arising out of the administration of the Act.
- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation is headed by the Drugs Controller General of India and functions under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Schedule M of the Drugs Rules, 1945 prescribes Good Manufacturing Practices for pharmaceutical products, and Schedule H2 lists drug formulations that must carry a barcode or QR code on their packaging.
- 'Drugs and poisons' is an entry in the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- The National Human Rights Commission is a statutory body under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, and its recommendations after an inquiry are not binding on the government.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — institutional gaps · Body — what has been done · Body — measures · Conclusion

23. Trinamool split and symbol freeze (3)

Lens: Independence and accountability. GS2 — Political parties; Election Symbols Order and anti-defection law

Story so far — Rival Trinamool factions led by Mamata Banerjee and Ritabrata Banerjee both claim the party. Ahead of the Nandigram and Rejinagar bypolls, the Election Commission froze the name and symbol under Paragraph 15, giving each faction a new name and free symbol. Separately, 20 Lok Sabha MPs who left the Trinamool for the NCPI have sought four more weeks to answer the Speaker's disqualification notices.

18 Sep EC Freezes Trinamool's Name and Symbol for Both Factions Ahead of Bypolls

- The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 is issued by the Election Commission under powers traceable to Article 324; Paragraph 15 governs disputes between rival sections of a recognised party.
- *Sadiq Ali v. Election Commission of India* (1972) upheld the 'test of majority' among a party's legislative and organisational wings for deciding such disputes.
- A reserved symbol is allotted exclusively to a recognised national or State party; a free symbol is drawn from the common pool available to unrecognised parties and independents.
- Recognition as a national or State party depends on vote-share and seat thresholds specified in the Symbols Order, and carries entitlements such as a reserved symbol, free broadcast time and a larger number of star campaigners.

Mains: "The Election Commission's power to adjudicate rival claims to a party symbol places an administrative body at the centre of what is essentially a political contest." Examine the adequacy of the existing framework under the Election Symbols Order, 1968, and suggest reforms.

Approach: Introduction — state the dual role · Body 1 — explain the existing test and its origins · Body 2 — identify the weaknesses · Body 3 — address the timing problem specifically · Body 4 — propose reforms · Conclusion — process is the only defence

19 Sep Election Commission Freezes 'All India Trinamool Congress' and Its Symbol, Gives Both Factions New Ones

Rival claims to one party → EC cannot verify a clear majority before the poll → interim freeze under Paragraph 15 → both factions get temporary names and free symbols → final ownership decided later

- The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 is issued by the Election Commission; Paragraph 15 governs disputes among rival sections of a recognised political party.
- Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of elections in the Election Commission of India.
- In the 1969 Congress split the Commission allotted 'a cow with calf' to Congress (R) — Requisition — while Congress (O) — Organisation — retained the 'pair of bullocks carrying a yoke'.
- The 'hand' symbol was allotted to the Indira-led breakaway party recognised as Congress-I after the 1978 split, when the 'cow and calf' symbol was frozen.
- A frozen name and symbol are restored or finally allotted only when the Commission decides the claim; the interim allotment is from the Commission's list of free symbols.
- Both Trinamool factions are recognised political parties in West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura.

Mains: "The power of the Election Commission to decide disputes between rival factions of a political party is an administrative power with electoral consequences. Discuss the safeguards needed when such a power is exercised on the eve of an election."

Approach: Establish the source of the power first · Explain why an interim freeze is the least-bad option · Then name the three costs the freeze imposes · Propose safeguards that are actually implementable · Close on the difference between neutrality and fairness

23 Sep 20 MPs Who Left Trinamool for the NCPI Seek Four More Weeks on Disqualification Notices

The 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' defections of the late 1960s → the Tenth Schedule under the 52nd Amendment (1985) makes the presiding officer the judge of defection → the 91st Amendment (2003) removes the 'split' exception and leaves only a two-thirds merger → the Trinamool Congress splits, and the ECI freezes its name and symbol on September 17, 2026 → 20 MPs aligned with the NCPI face disqualification petitions before Speaker Om Birla and seek four more weeks

- The Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) was added to the Constitution by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985.
- Under Paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule, questions of disqualification of a member are decided by the Speaker or Chairman of the House.
- The 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 deleted the 'split' exception in Paragraph 3 of the Tenth Schedule and capped the Council of Ministers at 15% of the strength of the House.
- Under Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule, a merger protects members from disqualification only if at least two-thirds of the members of the legislature party have agreed to it.

- In *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* (1992), the Supreme Court upheld the Tenth Schedule but held that the presiding officer's decision is subject to judicial review.
- In *Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur* (2020), the Supreme Court said disqualification petitions should ordinarily be decided within three months.
- Paragraph 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the Election Commission to decide disputes between rival groups of a recognised political party.

Mains: “The Tenth Schedule has moved the contest over defection from the floor of the House to the Speaker's office and the Election Commission.” Critically examine this statement in the light of recent developments, and suggest reforms to the anti-defection law. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the Speaker's role · Body — the Election Commission's role · Body — reforms · Conclusion

24. Political party finance and disclosure (3)

Lens: Independence and accountability · Rule of law and discretion. GS2 — Electoral reforms; Representation of People's Act

Story so far — The ED froze six Trinamool accounts while examining advances, including ₹5.22 crore, paid to a charter-flight operator for services not yet flown. Former Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa urged the ECI to scrutinise 'shell' registered unrecognised parties through court-monitored probes, CAG audits and a spending cap. The Meenakshi Natarajan case asks whether the 2018 amendment to the Form 26 affidavit exceeds Section 33A of the RP Act.

25 Sep ED Examines TMC's ₹5.22 Crore Advance for Charter Flights Not Yet Flown, Freezes Six Party Accounts

Party spending on campaign aviation lies largely outside candidate expenditure limits → large deposits and advances to a charter operator → ED account analysis alleges layering into a GIFT City related entity → PMLA freeze of six party accounts worth about ₹440 crore → party challenges, probe continues

- Section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 defines the offence of money laundering; proceeds of crime must be derived from a scheduled offence listed in the Act.
- Under Section 5 of the PMLA, provisional attachment of property can last up to 180 days and must be confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority.
- In *Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India* (2022), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of key PMLA provisions including the twin bail conditions under Section 45.
- The Enforcement Directorate functions under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, and enforces the PMLA, FEMA and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.
- Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 requires candidates to maintain election expenditure accounts; Explanation 1 excludes travel expenditure by party leaders for propagating the party programme.
- Income of registered political parties is exempt from income tax under Section 13A of the Income-tax Act, 1961, subject to maintenance of accounts and audit.
- The Supreme Court struck down the Electoral Bond Scheme in *Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India* (2024).

Mains: “The absence of a ceiling on political party expenditure has made criminal investigation the default instrument of regulating party finance in India.” Critically examine, with reference to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — The legal vacuum · Body — The PMLA as a substitute regulator · Body — The counter-view · Conclusion

25 Sep Ashok Lavasa Seeks Court-Monitored Probe, CAG Audits and Spending Cap for 'Shell' Political Parties

The Constitution is silent on political parties, and the RPA lets the ECI register but not generally deregister them → registration brings eligibility for donations under Section 29B and tax exemption under Section 13A → thousands of RUPPs register, most never file accounts, some receive large donations → electoral bonds (2018) add anonymity until struck down in 2024 → ADR, a BBC investigation and CHRI research expose the scale, and the ECI 'delists' 334 RUPPs in August 2025 without deregistering them → Lavasa calls for a court-monitored probe, CAG audits, spending caps and a digital disclosure portal

- Political parties are registered with the Election Commission of India under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- Under Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, a political party must report to the Election Commission contributions exceeding ₹20,000 received from any person or company in a financial year.
- Under Section 29B of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, a political party may not accept contributions from a government company.

- Section 13A of the Income-tax Act, 1961 exempts specified income of registered political parties, subject to conditions including audited accounts and no cash donation above ₹2,000.
- In *Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India* (2024), a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court struck down the Electoral Bond Scheme as violating voters' right to information under Article 19(1)(a).
- Paragraph 16A of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the Election Commission to suspend or withdraw the recognition of a recognised party for failure to observe the Model Code of Conduct.
- In *Indian National Congress v. Institute of Social Welfare* (2002), the Supreme Court held that the Election Commission has no general power to deregister a registered political party.

Mains: "Political parties are the principal actors of Indian democracy, yet they remain its least regulated institutions." Examine this statement with reference to the finances of registered unrecognised political parties and the electoral bonds judgment. Suggest reforms to make political finance transparent. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the regulatory gaps · Body — the evidence · Body — reforms · Conclusion

28 Sep Meenakshi Natarajan Case Asks Whether Form 26's 2018 Amendment Exceeds Section 33A of the RP Act

Voters have no statutory right to know candidates' records → ADR (2002) and PUCL (2003) make disclosure part of the voter's right to information, and Section 33A is inserted in 2002 → Form 26 under Rule 4A implements the section → a 2018 amendment widens Paragraph 5 to all pending criminal cases → a Returning Officer rejects a Rajya Sabha nomination for non-disclosure of a complaint where no charge had been framed → Ponnuswami bars a pre-poll remedy and the rule-versus-statute question is left for an election petition

- Section 33A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, inserted in 2002, requires candidates to disclose pending cases for offences punishable with two years or more in which charges have been framed.
- Form 26, the affidavit filed with a nomination paper, is prescribed under Rule 4A of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.
- In *PUCL v. Union of India* (2003), the Supreme Court struck down Section 33B of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which had limited candidates' disclosure to what the Act specified.
- Section 125A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 penalises filing a false affidavit or concealing information in the nomination.
- Article 329(b) provides that no election to Parliament or a State Legislature shall be called in question except by an election petition presented as provided by law.
- Under Section 100(1)(c) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, improper rejection of a nomination is a ground on which a High Court may declare an election void.
- In *N.P. Ponnuswami v. Returning Officer* (1952), the Supreme Court held that the rejection of a nomination paper cannot be challenged in court during the election process.

Mains: Disclosure of candidates' criminal antecedents strengthens voter choice, but the means of enforcing it must remain within the parent statute. Discuss with reference to Section 33A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the limits of delegated legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — evolution of disclosure · Body — the delegated-legislation problem · Body — remedies · Conclusion

25. Rare earths and critical minerals (3)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership · Market and State. GS3 — Mineral resources, supply chains and industrial policy

Story so far — China controls about two-thirds of rare-earth mining and around 90% of magnet manufacturing, and has imposed export controls since April 2025. India has answered with a ₹73 billion magnet incentive, a recycling initiative and alternative suppliers, but NCAER economists warn its magnet market is invisible in official statistics. The Mines Secretary criticised miners 'squatting' on blocks as a lithium-nickel processing scheme nears launch.

18 Sep China's Rare-Earth Grip and India's ₹73 Billion Answer

China designates rare earths strategic in the 1990s → Western producers exit a pollution-intensive sector → China ends up with two-thirds of mining, up to 90% of processing and about 90% of magnet manufacturing → export controls announced in April 2025 and widened to twelve elements by December → India's EV, electronics, defence and renewable supply chains face availability risk, not just a price rise → India responds with a ₹73 billion magnet incentive, ₹15 billion recycling initiative and alternative suppliers — all of which take years to mature.

- Rare earth elements comprise seventeen metals: the fifteen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium; they are not geologically scarce, but their separation is technically difficult and environmentally intensive.
- Indian Rare Earths Limited operates under the Department of Atomic Energy; monazite, a thorium-bearing mineral, is India's principal rare-earth source and is a prescribed substance under atomic energy legislation.

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 empowered the Central Government to auction specified critical and strategic minerals; the National Critical Mineral Mission covers exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing and recovery from end-of-life products.
- Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) is a joint venture of NALCO, HCL and MECL created to acquire strategic mineral assets abroad.
- Permanent magnets used in electric vehicle traction motors and wind turbines typically rely on neodymium, praseodymium and dysprosium.

Mains: "Supply-chain dependence on a single country for critical minerals is a strategic vulnerability that cannot be resolved by trade policy alone." Critically examine India's exposure in rare earth elements and evaluate the adequacy of its policy response.

Approach: Introduction — quantify the dependence · Body 1 — locate the chokepoint accurately · Body 2 — explain why export controls differ from tariffs · Body 3 — assess India's response · Body 4 — argue the timeline problem · Body 5 — propose a fuller strategy · Conclusion — capacity, not diplomacy

21 Sep India's Permanent-Magnet Market Invisible in Statistics as Imports Dwarf ₹750-Crore Domestic Estimate, NCAER Economists Warn

Energy transition and electronics make NdFeB magnets essential → China dominates processing and magnet production → China imposes export controls on rare-earth magnets in April 2025 → India launches missions focused on minerals and exploration → NCAER economists show statistics cannot trace where magnets enter and move through the economy, so policy cannot target the real bottleneck

- Rare earth elements are a group of seventeen elements: the fifteen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium.
- Neodymium-Iron-Boron (NdFeB) magnets are the strongest commercially available permanent magnets and are used in electric-vehicle motors and wind turbines.
- Monazite, found in India's coastal beach sands, contains rare earths and thorium, and IREL (India) Limited under the Department of Atomic Energy processes it.
- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 lists 24 critical and strategic minerals in Part D of the First Schedule, for which the Central Government conducts auctions.
- Khanij Bidesh India Limited is a joint venture of NALCO, Hindustan Copper Limited and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Limited for acquiring critical mineral assets abroad.
- The Annual Survey of Industries is conducted by the National Statistics Office and covers factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948.

Mains: "India's vulnerability in critical minerals lies less in a shortage of resources than in the absence of a framework to locate where technological dependence accumulates in the value chain." Discuss with reference to rare-earth permanent magnets, and suggest measures to build domestic capability. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the measurement gap · Body — the value chain · Body — measures · Conclusion

23 Sep Mines Secretary Warns Against 'Squatting' on Mining Blocks as Lithium-Nickel Processing Scheme Nears Launch

The auction regime since 2015 makes miners bid high premiums for blocks → some lease-holders sit on blocks after clearances, treating them as speculative assets rather than producing → mineral land stays idle and output lags just as demand for battery and electronics minerals grows → India remains fully import-dependent for lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earths, with almost no processing capacity → the Centre pushes on three fronts: warnings on squatting, overseas sourcing even in unstable Mali, and a lithium-nickel processing scheme with mineral-specific parks in four States

- Under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015, auction became the sole method for granting mining leases and composite licences for minerals other than coal, lignite and atomic minerals, which are governed by separate provisions.
- Section 4A(4) of the MMDR Act, 1957 provides that a mining lease lapses if production does not start within two years of its execution or if mining is discontinued for two years, subject to extension by the State Government.
- The MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 added Part D to the First Schedule listing critical and strategic minerals, for which the Central Government conducts auctions.
- The MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 removed lithium from the list of atomic minerals, opening its exploration and mining to the private sector.
- Khanij Bidesh India Ltd is a joint venture of NALCO, Hindustan Copper Ltd and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd for acquiring critical mineral assets overseas.
- In Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India (2024), a nine-judge Constitution Bench held that royalty is not a tax and that States can tax mineral rights.
- India became a member of the Minerals Security Partnership, a U.S.-led initiative on critical mineral supply chains, in 2023.

Mains: "India's critical mineral strategy has focused on acquiring mines, but the real dependence lies in processing." Examine this statement in light of recent steps to promote lithium, nickel and rare earth processing. Also discuss how speculative holding of mining leases undermines the objectives of the auction regime. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the processing gap · Body — sourcing abroad · Body — squatting and the auction regime · Conclusion

26. Mines Act amendment and States (3)

Lens: Centre and States. GS2 — Fiscal federalism and Centre-State relations; GS3 — Mineral governance

Story so far — Section 9D of the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 bars States from taxing mineral rights or mineral-bearing land except on the Centre's terms, which critics call an intrusion into Entry 49 of the State List. Odisha legislators put 13 questions to their government, which has not counted the cost. Separately, the CAG found Odisha's District Mineral Foundations spent ₹2,578.73 crore under a category the rules never created.

17 Sep Mining Amendment Act, 2026 — a Fresh Centre-State Flashpoint

- MMDR Amendment Act, 2026's Section 9D restricts State taxation of mineral rights/mineral-bearing land; the Supreme Court's 2024 nine-judge Bench verdict in Mineral Area Development Authority vs Steel Authority of India recognised States' legislative power to tax mineral rights and held mineral-bearing land can fall within States' power to tax land under Entry 49.

Mains: "By restricting States' power to tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2026 narrows a constitutional entitlement the Supreme Court had just affirmed." Critically examine this claim and its implications for fiscal federalism.

25 Sep Odisha Has Not Counted What Section 9D of the Amended Mines Act Will Cost It

The Seventh Schedule splits mining between Union regulation (Entry 54, List I) and State taxation (Entries 49 and 50, List II) → the Supreme Court in July 2024 holds that royalty is not a tax and that States may tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands → States gain the prospect of new levies and old arrears, and industry faces uncertain costs → Parliament uses the limitation clause in Entry 50 through the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026, making State levies subject to Union approval under Section 9D → Odisha's Assembly asks what it has lost, and the government says it will count only after the Centre frames rules

- Entry 50 of the State List empowers States to levy taxes on mineral rights, subject to any limitations imposed by Parliament by law relating to mineral development.
- Entry 54 of the Union List covers regulation of mines and mineral development to the extent Parliament declares Union control expedient in the public interest; the MMDR Act, 1957 is such a declaration.
- In Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India (2024), a nine-judge bench held by 8:1 that royalty under the MMDR Act is not a tax.
- The same judgment held that States can tax mineral-bearing land under Entry 49 of the State List (taxes on lands and buildings).
- District Mineral Foundations were created by Section 9B of the MMDR Act through the 2015 amendment and are funded by contributions from mining leaseholders linked to royalty.
- The MMDR Amendment Act, 2015 made auction the method for granting mining leases for major minerals.
- Under the MMDR Act, royalty rates on major minerals are specified in the Second Schedule, and the Centre may revise them not more than once in three years.

Mains: "The Constitution allows Parliament to limit the States' power to tax mineral rights, but using that power immediately after the Supreme Court upheld the States' taxing power raises questions of cooperative federalism." Examine this statement in the light of the MMDR Amendment Act, 2026 and the concerns raised in Odisha. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional scheme · Body — the case for Section 9D · Body — the federal concerns · Conclusion

29 Sep CAG Finds Odisha's Mineral Foundations Spent ₹2,578.73 Crore Under a Category the Rules Never Created

Mining displaces and pollutes, but its revenue flows to governments, not to affected villages → the MMDR Amendment Act, 2015 creates District Mineral Foundations funded by miners, and PMKKKY sets priorities → Odisha's rules cap spending in indirectly affected areas at 40% → districts create an unrecognised "common affected areas" category and route ₹2,578.73 crore through it → the CAG flags ineligible use, even as Odisha's parties fight the Centre over the State's power to tax minerals

- Section 9B of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, inserted in 2015, provides for a District Mineral Foundation in every district affected by mining operations.
- Section 9C of the MMDR Act, 1957 provides for the National Mineral Exploration Trust.
- The Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana is implemented through District Mineral Foundations using funds contributed by mining lease holders.

- Articles 148 to 151 of the Constitution deal with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
- Under Article 151(2), the CAG's reports relating to a State's accounts are submitted to the Governor, who causes them to be laid before the State legislature.
- In *Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India* (2024), a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held by 8:1 that royalty is not a tax.
- The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 gives gram sabhas in Fifth Schedule areas a role in approving plans and in consultation before land acquisition.

Mains: District Mineral Foundations were created to share the benefits of mining with affected communities. In the light of recent audit findings, critically examine their functioning and suggest reforms to make them accountable to the people they are meant to serve. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — findings · Body — structural causes · Body — reforms · Conclusion

27. Electronics assembly and China dependence (3)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership · Market and State. GS3 — Industrial policy, PLI and Make in India

Story so far — Imports from China rose about 71% to \$149.5 billion while exports stagnated, as PLI-driven assembly relies on Chinese components. A ₹62,500 crore mobile scheme that rewards Indian brands led Nothing to spin off CMF as a majority-Indian company. At twelve, Make in India has not materially raised manufacturing's share of growth, jobs or exports, though domestic chips are now mandated for smart meters.

21 Sep Imports From China Rise 71% as Electronics Assembly Deepens India's Dependence on Chinese Components

Atmanirbhar Bharat and PLI reward output and sales → firms scale up final assembly of phones, laptops and telecom gear fastest → assembly requires imported Chinese components and machinery → imports from China rise 71% to \$149.5 billion while exports stagnate → the deficit becomes structural and is raised at the Modi-Xi meeting on September 12

- The Phased Manufacturing Programme for mobile phones was notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 2017 to raise domestic value addition through a graded increase in customs duty on components.
- The PLI scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing, notified in April 2020, gives incentives on incremental sales of goods manufactured in India over a base year.
- Under Press Note 3 of 2020, foreign direct investment from countries sharing a land border with India requires approval through the government route.
- Intermediate goods are goods used as inputs in the production of other goods, while capital goods are durable goods such as machinery used to produce other goods.
- Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan was announced in May 2020 as a policy of self-reliance built on economy, infrastructure, system, demography and demand.
- India holds the chairship of BRICS in 2026, and the grouping's members include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa along with newer members.

Mains: "India's manufacturing expansion remains embedded in China-centric supply chains, creating an 'assembly trap' of self-reliance." Critically examine this statement in the light of the composition of India's imports from China and the design of India's industrial policy instruments. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — evidence of the trap · Body — why it happened · Body — the counter-view · Conclusion

22 Sep Nothing to Spin Off CMF as Majority-Indian Company as ₹62,500 Crore Mobile Scheme Rewards Indian Brands

PLI and earlier schemes make India the world's second-largest phone maker by volume → value stays offshore because design and IP belong to foreign brands → government notifies a ₹62,500 crore scheme with a separate segment rewarding Indian-owned brands, Indian IP and R&D → foreign brands restructure to qualify, starting with Nothing spinning off CMF as a majority-Indian company → the test becomes whether R&D and IP actually move to India

- A Production Linked Incentive scheme pays incentives on incremental sales of domestically manufactured goods over a base year, rather than on the amount of investment.
- The first PLI scheme, notified in 2020, covered large-scale electronics manufacturing including mobile phones.
- Trademarks in India are governed by the Trade Marks Act, 1999, and industrial designs by the Designs Act, 2000.
- Press Note 3 of 2020 requires prior government approval for foreign direct investment from entities of countries sharing a land border with India.
- Domestic value addition refers to the share of a product's value that is created within the country, as distinct from the value of imported components.

- Foreign direct investment in India is regulated under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.

Mains: “India has become a leading assembler of mobile phones but not yet a maker of global phone brands.” In this context, examine how the design of industrial incentives can shift value addition towards R&D, design and intellectual property. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why assembly is not enough · Body — the new design · Body — risks and safeguards · Conclusion

25 Sep Make in India at Twelve: Manufacturing Near 15% of GVA, Domestic Chips Mandated for Smart Meters

The National Manufacturing Policy of 2011 sets a 25% GDP-share target → Make in India (2014) adds ease-of-business reforms and FDI opening, but private investment stays weak → PLI schemes (2020-21) pay firms for incremental output in chosen sectors → investment arrives but gathers in five sectors, while manufacturing's share stays near 15% and the global export share near 1.7% → the state now uses public procurement, such as design-in-India chips for 20 crore smart meters, to create demand directly

- The Make in India initiative was launched on September 25, 2014, and its nodal department is now the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
- The National Manufacturing Policy, 2011 set a target of raising the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25% and proposed National Investment and Manufacturing Zones.
- Gross Value Added equals the value of output minus intermediate consumption; GDP equals GVA plus product taxes minus product subsidies.
- Production-Linked Incentive schemes give firms incentives linked to incremental sales of goods manufactured in India over a base year.
- Under the Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order, a Class-I local supplier must have local content of at least 50%.
- The Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme aims to reduce AT&C losses of distribution utilities to 12-15% nationally, with the Power Finance Corporation and REC Ltd as nodal agencies.
- The India Semiconductor Mission functions under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as part of the Semicon India programme.

Mains: “Twelve years after its launch, Make in India has improved the composition of investment in some sectors but has not changed the place of manufacturing in India's economy.” Critically examine this statement with reference to growth, investment, exports and the Production-Linked Incentive schemes. Suggest measures to broaden manufacturing-led employment. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — where it has worked · Body — where it has not · Body — measures · Conclusion

28. Himalayan floods and glacier risk (3)

Lens: Development and environment. GS1 — Glaciers and geophysical phenomena; GS3 — Disaster management

Story so far — Nepal's August floods damaged at least 13 hydropower projects; an expert argued the Rasuwa disaster was a rock-ice avalanche, not a glacial lake outburst. A study flagged black carbon from brick kilns as a major driver of glacier melt. Uttarakhand began installing its first glacial-lake early-warning system at Vasundhara Tal, against 13 high-risk lakes on NDMA's list, as a Nepal-fed Gandak flood breached Bihar embankments.

18 Sep Melting Himalayan Glaciers Put 21.5% of India's GDP at Risk; Black Carbon From Brick Kilns Is a Third of the Problem

Brick kilns and other incomplete combustion emit black carbon → soot deposits on Himalayan snow and ice → albedo falls, adding roughly 40 W/m² of spring surface heating → glaciers lose mass about 65% faster than a decade ago → river flow rises temporarily towards peak water around mid-century → then declines permanently → irrigation, hydropower and urban water systems built for the higher flow face a structural shortfall.

- Black carbon is a short-lived climate pollutant produced by incomplete combustion; unlike CO₂ it has an atmospheric lifetime of days to weeks, so emission cuts yield near-term climate benefits.
- The Hindu Kush Himalayan region is described as the Third Pole and feeds ten major river systems including the Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow rivers.
- ICIMOD — the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development — is headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal, with eight regional member countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan.
- The GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment is an autonomous institute under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, headquartered at Kosi-Katarmal, Almora, Uttarakhand.

- Albedo is the proportion of incident solar radiation reflected by a surface; fresh snow has among the highest albedo values of natural surfaces.
- The Climate and Clean Air Coalition addresses short-lived climate pollutants — black carbon, methane, tropospheric ozone and hydrofluorocarbons.

Mains: "Reducing black carbon offers India a rare climate intervention whose benefits are regional, near-term and achievable without international agreement." Critically examine with reference to Himalayan glacier loss, and discuss the barriers to implementation.

Approach: Introduction — quantify the stake · Body 1 — explain the black carbon mechanism · Body 2 — argue why this differs from CO₂ mitigation · Body 3 — present the kiln evidence · Body 4 — set out the barriers honestly · Body 5 — bring in peak water and monitoring · Conclusion — act on the tractable part

23 Sep Rasuwa Disaster Was a Rock-Ice Avalanche, Not a GLOF, and Needs Seismic Warning Networks

Warming thins Himalayan glaciers and thaws permafrost on steep slopes → slopes lose the ice that binds and supports them and fail as rock-ice avalanches → avalanches pick up water and sediment and become long-running debris flows → valleys crowded with hydropower sites and workers take the blow, as at Chamoli (2021) and Rasuwa → lake-centred GLOF warning cannot see these cascades, strengthening the case for dense seismic networks and community-trusted warnings

- A glacial lake outburst flood is the sudden release of water from a lake dammed by a glacier or a moraine, the debris ridge deposited by a glacier.
- Permafrost is ground that remains at or below 0°C for at least two consecutive years.
- The National Disaster Management Authority, established under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, is chaired by the Prime Minister.
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 has seven global targets and four priorities for action and succeeded the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.
- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure was launched by India in 2019 and is headquartered in New Delhi.
- The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is headquartered in Kathmandu and has eight Hindu Kush Himalayan member countries, including India.
- The 2021 Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand originated from a rock-ice avalanche from Ronti Peak that became a debris flow.

Mains: "Hazard cascades in the Himalaya do not always begin with a glacial lake." In the light of recent disasters in Nepal and Uttarakhand, discuss the limits of lake-centred GLOF risk management and suggest an early warning and land-use approach suited to rock-ice avalanches and debris flows. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why lake-centred management falls short · Body — early warning architecture · Body — land use and hydropower · Conclusion

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

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

- The National Disaster Management Authority is chaired by the Prime Minister under the Disaster Management Act, 2005; a District Disaster Management Authority is chaired by the Collector or District Magistrate.
- Target G of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 concerns multi-hazard early-warning systems and disaster-risk information.
- The Gandak rises in Nepal, where it is known as the Narayani, and joins the Ganga near Patna; the Valmikinagar barrage on it was built under an India–Nepal agreement.

Mains: Explain why early-warning systems for glacial lake outburst floods often fail to protect Himalayan communities. (10 marks, 150 words)

Approach: Directive — Explain · Introduction — a GLOF leaves minutes, not hours · Body — coverage is thin: one lake wired out of five in the top category · Body — the chain from sensor to siren breaks at the last mile · Conclusion — scale sensors and drill villages together

29. India–Nepal reset (3)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — India and its neighbourhood (Neighbourhood First)

Story so far — After floods killed over 1,400 and left a \$5 billion reconstruction bill, Nepal's new Balen Shah government sent Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle to Delhi first. He declared anti-India 'jingoism' over and sought a revised trade treaty and overflight. With the China-funded Upper Trishuli project washed away, Nepal has turned to India for power, making transmission lines India's counter to China's Belt and Road.

19 Sep Jaishankar Meets Nepal's Finance Minister Wagle as Delhi and Kathmandu Prepare a Reset

August 26 floods on the Trishuli kill more than 1,400 → reconstruction bill tops \$5 billion → a new Kathmandu government needs finance and market access at once → the ruling RSP calls for a reset after years of boundary and economic friction → Wagle's first foreign trip is Delhi, before the AIIB board at Doha and the Bretton Woods meetings at Bangkok

- The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in 1950 and provides for national treatment for the nationals of each country in the territory of the other in matters of residence, property, trade and movement.
- The Treaty of Sugauli, 1816, concluded after the Anglo-Nepalese War, fixed the Kali river as the western boundary of Nepal; the Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura dispute concerns the identification of the source of that river.
- The Mahakali Treaty of 1996 governs the integrated development of the Mahakali river, including the Sarada Barrage, the Tanakpur Barrage and the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project.
- Article 125 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea recognises the right of access of land-locked states to and from the sea and freedom of transit, on terms to be agreed with transit states.
- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank commenced operations in 2016 and is headquartered in Beijing; China is the largest shareholder and India the second-largest.
- Nepal promulgated its present Constitution in 2015, establishing a federal democratic republic with seven provinces and a bicameral federal parliament comprising the House of Representatives and the National Assembly.
- Nepal is a member of SAARC, whose secretariat is at Kathmandu, and of BIMSTEC, whose secretariat is at Dhaka, as well as of the BBIN sub-regional grouping with Bangladesh, Bhutan and India.

Mains: "Every Indian attempt to reset relations with Nepal begins with assistance and ends at the same unresolved questions of boundary, transit and treaty revision." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent developments in India-Nepal relations. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — establish the pattern with evidence · Body — concede what has genuinely changed · Body — separate what India can settle from what it cannot · Conclusion

21 Sep Nepal's Finance Minister Declares Anti-India 'Jingoism' Over, Seeks New Trade Treaty and Overflight

Border map dispute and blockade memories feed anti-India nationalism → new RSP-backed Balen Shah government seeks a reset → devastating floods create a \$5 billion reconstruction need → Nepal asks India for aid, a new trade treaty and overflight → India's response will test Neighbourhood First

- The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in 1950.
- Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura were included in Nepal's new political map through a constitutional amendment in 2020.
- The Treaty of Sugauli, 1816 between the East India Company and Nepal made the Kali (Mahakali) river the western boundary of Nepal.
- Gautam Buddha International Airport is at Bhairahawa, near Lumbini, Nepal.
- Under the Chicago Convention, 1944, every state has complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory.
- India-Nepal trade is governed by a Treaty of Trade (revised 2009) separate from the Treaty of Transit.

Mains: "Geography makes India indispensable to Nepal, but politics often makes India unpopular there." In the context of the Nepal government's call for a 'reset', examine the steps India can take to rebuild trust. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — sources of mistrust · Body — what India can offer · Body — the China dimension · Conclusion

29 Sep Nepal Seeks Indian Power After China-Funded Upper Trishuli Collapse, Making Transmission India's Counter to BRI

China finances hydropower in Nepal through BRI sovereign loans → India refuses to buy power from China-funded plants, and is the only large buyer in the region → the August floods destroy the Upper Trishuli project and Nepal loses 300–400 MW → Kathmandu turns to India for supply → Bhutan's earnings from exports to India outpace Nepal's, showing that grid integration pays → transmission capacity becomes India's strategic lever from Nepal to Sri Lanka

- The Mahakali Treaty of 1996 between India and Nepal provides for the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project.
- The Central Electricity Authority is the designated authority for approvals under India's guidelines on cross-border trade of electricity.
- Chukha, Tala and Mangdechhu are hydroelectric projects in Bhutan built with Indian assistance.
- One Sun One World One Grid was proposed at the first assembly of the International Solar Alliance in 2018, and the Green Grids Initiative was launched at COP26 in 2021.
- BIMSTEC members signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection in 2018.
- Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic relations with China.

Mains: “In South Asia, India’s most effective answer to China’s Belt and Road Initiative is not building more, but buying more.” Discuss with reference to cross-border electricity trade with Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the logic of buying · Body — country cases · Body — limits · Conclusion

30. Loss and damage and COP31 (3)

Lens: National interest and global commons. GS3 — Climate change negotiations; GS2 — International institutions

Story so far — Nepal has recast its flood losses as a climate-justice claim on the UN Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, testing India's stand. COP31 in Antalya, under an untried Türkiye–Australia split presidency, leaves fossil-fuel transition and loss-and-damage finance off its priority list. The UN General Assembly's sea-level declaration guarantees island states' statehood and fixes their maritime zones.

22 Sep Nepal Recasts Flood Losses as a Climate-Justice Claim, Testing India’s Stand on Loss and Damage

Himalayan warming swells glacial lakes and intensifies cloudbursts → catastrophic flash floods in Nepal with a reconstruction bill near 10% of GDP → global funds such as the GCF prove slow, keeping a GLOF project in the pipeline for seven years → Nepal appeals to the Loss and Damage Fund and presses neighbours, invoking CBDR regionally → India must choose between liability, aid, or a regional insurance architecture

- The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage was agreed at COP27 at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022 and operationalised at COP28 in Dubai in 2023, with the World Bank as interim trustee.
- Article 8 of the Paris Agreement deals with loss and damage, and Decision 1/CP.21 records that it does not provide a basis for liability or compensation.
- The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage was established at COP19 in 2013.
- The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities appears in Article 3.1 of the UNFCCC, 1992.
- The Green Climate Fund was established at COP16 in Cancun in 2010 and is headquartered in Songdo, South Korea.
- ICIMOD, an intergovernmental knowledge centre on the Hindu Kush Himalaya, is headquartered in Kathmandu.
- A glacial lake outburst flood is a sudden release of water from a lake dammed by glacier ice or a moraine.

Mains: “Climate justice is no longer a demand made only of the Global North; it is increasingly being made of emerging economies by their smaller neighbours.” In the light of Nepal’s appeal for loss-and-damage support after recent floods, examine the dilemma this poses for India’s climate diplomacy and suggest a regional architecture that reconciles India’s negotiating position with its neighbourhood responsibilities. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the dilemma · Body — why global mechanisms fall short · Body — a regional architecture · Conclusion

28 Sep COP31’s Shared Australia–Türkiye Presidency Leaves Fossil-Fuel Transition and Loss-and-Damage Finance Off Its Priority List

UNFCCC (1992) and the Paris Agreement (2015) make each country set its own targets → the 2023 Global Stocktake calls for transitioning away from fossil fuels but sets no timeline → the EU tables a ‘fossil fuel roadmap’ at COP30 while developing countries press for adaptation finance → Australia and Türkiye, both fossil-dependent, split the COP31 presidency after neither yields → their agenda foregrounds electrification and oceans and leaves out fossil transition and loss-and-damage money

- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 1994; its Conference of the Parties is its supreme decision-making body.
- Article 3 of the UNFCCC enshrines the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.
- Under Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, each party must prepare, communicate and maintain successive Nationally Determined Contributions, updated every five years.
- Article 8 of the Paris Agreement deals with loss and damage, and Article 14 provides for a Global Stocktake every five years, the first of which concluded at COP28 in 2023.
- The New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance, agreed at COP29 in Baku, calls on developed countries to take the lead in mobilising at least \$300 billion a year for developing countries by 2035.
- The Fund for responding to Loss and Damage was agreed at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh and operationalised at COP28 in Dubai.
- India has announced a target of net-zero emissions by 2070, and its updated NDC of 2022 commits to reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030.

Mains: “COP31’s priorities reflect the energy interests of its hosts more than the needs of the most vulnerable.” Critically examine this statement in the light of the unresolved questions of the fossil-fuel transition and loss-and-damage finance. What position should India take at COP31? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for the statement · Body — the counter-view · Body — India’s position · Conclusion

28 Sep UN General Assembly's Declaration on Sea-Level Rise Guarantees Island States' Statehood and Fixes Their Maritime Zones

Warming expands ocean water and melts land ice → global mean sea level rises at 4–5 mm a year → UNCLOS measures maritime zones from coastal baselines, so a retreating coast could shrink zones and a submerged state could lose statehood → Pacific states and AOSIS press for legal certainty, followed by the ILC's study and the 2024 UN high-level meeting → the General Assembly adopts a consensus Declaration on September 24, 2026 freezing zones and affirming continuity of statehood

- Under UNCLOS, the territorial sea extends up to 12 nautical miles, the contiguous zone up to 24 nautical miles, and the Exclusive Economic Zone up to 200 nautical miles, all measured from the baseline.
- Under Article 5 of UNCLOS, the normal baseline is the low-water line along the coast as marked on large-scale charts officially recognised by the coastal state.
- Under Article 121(3) of UNCLOS, rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own have no Exclusive Economic Zone or continental shelf.
- The Montevideo Convention of 1933 lists a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states as the qualifications of a state.
- The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) is a coalition of low-lying coastal and small island countries that negotiates as a bloc in the UNFCCC climate talks.
- A declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly is not legally binding in itself, unlike a ratified treaty, but may be evidence of emerging customary international law.
- The International Court of Justice delivered an advisory opinion in July 2025 on the obligations of states in respect of climate change, at the request of the UN General Assembly.

Mains: "Sea-level rise challenges not just coastlines but the very foundations of international law." In the light of the UN General Assembly's Declaration on Sea-Level Rise (2026), discuss the legal questions raised by rising seas for statehood and maritime zones, and assess their significance for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal questions · Body — what the Declaration does and does not do · Body — significance for India · Conclusion

31. Ethanol blending and sugar (3)

Lens: Development and environment · Short-term relief and long-term reform. GS3 — Energy and agriculture; food versus fuel

Story so far — The E20 blend has cost consumers an estimated ₹88,234 crore over three years through lower mileage, and its emissions benefit is uncertain. Rising sugar prices revive the food-versus-fuel question, since maize, rice and cane all feed ethanol. In Uttar Pradesh, red rot in the dominant Co-0238 variety cut sugar output from 126.4 to 89.5 lakh tonnes, and a resistant Co-20016 has been cleared.

17 Sep What Lies Beyond India's E20 Push — the Hidden Cost of the Ethanol Blend

- E20 petrol is 80% gasoline, 20% anhydrous ethanol; India introduced E20 nationally from February 2023; Minister Gadkari's written Lok Sabha reply accepts E20 reduces fuel economy by 2–6% depending on vehicle vintage; the extra cost to Indian consumers from mileage loss is estimated at ₹88,234 crore over three years (2023–24 to 2025–26); India became a net maize importer last year, having previously been an exporter.

Mains: "India's E20 ethanol-blending programme illustrates how a policy can be well-intentioned on paper yet economically and environmentally ambiguous once its full costs are accounted for." Critically examine this claim, and evaluate the case for offering consumers a genuine choice between E10 and E20 fuel.

21 Sep Rising Sugar Prices Revive Food-Versus-Fuel Question in India's Ethanol Feedstock Mix

Crude import bill drives ethanol blending → E20 made mandatory and demand for feedstock rises → maize becomes the cheapest and most efficient source but is already used for feed and starch → sugar prices rise and FCI rice surplus runs out → food, feed, fuel and water compete for the same fields

- The National Policy on Biofuels, 2018 was amended in 2022 to advance the target of 20% ethanol blending in petrol to ethanol supply year 2025–26.
- Ethanol in India is produced from sugarcane-based feedstocks (juice and molasses), and from grains such as maize and surplus or damaged rice.
- The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; Bt cotton is the only GM crop commercially cultivated in India.
- The Fair and Remunerative Price of sugarcane is fixed by the Union government under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, on the recommendation of the CACP.
- The Food Corporation of India was established under the Food Corporations Act, 1964.

- Surplus FCI grain is sold in the open market through the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic).

Mains: With 20% ethanol blending now mandatory, the question is no longer whether India should blend but what it should blend from. Critically examine the trade-offs between food, feed, fuel and water in India's choice of ethanol feedstock.

Approach: Introduction · Body — economics of each feedstock · Body — the trade-offs · Body — the way forward · Conclusion

28 Sep Red-Rot-Resistant Co-20016 Cleared for Release as UP Sugar Output Falls from 126.4 to 89.5 Lakh Tonnes

ICAR-SBI releases high-yielding, high-sugar Co-0238 in 2009 → mills and farmers plant it on most of UP's cane area, making UP India's top sugar producer → monoculture lets the red-rot fungus evolve a new CF13 pathotype and the variety's resistance breaks down → UP's cane crushed falls by over a fifth and sugar output by nearly a third in six years → Co-20016, resistant to CF13, is identified in May and goes to the Central Varietal Release Committee in October

- Red rot of sugarcane is caused by the fungus *Colletotrichum falcatum*.
- The ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute is located at Coimbatore, and varieties developed there carry the prefix 'Co'.
- A ratoon crop is the crop that regrows from the stubble left after the harvest of the earlier crop.
- The Fair and Remunerative Price of sugarcane is fixed by the Central Government under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- The Fair and Remunerative Price of sugarcane is fixed on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices.
- The sugar season in India runs from October to September.
- New crop varieties are released for commercial cultivation by the Central Varietal Release Committee and notified under the Seeds Act, 1966.

Mains: "Genetic uniformity in high-yielding crop varieties trades short-term productivity for long-term vulnerability." Examine this statement with reference to the red rot crisis in Uttar Pradesh's sugarcane. Suggest measures to build resilience in India's crop improvement system. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how uniformity created vulnerability · Body — the new variety · Body — measures for resilience · Conclusion

32. El Niño, heat and water (3)

Lens: Development and environment. GS1 — Monsoon and climate; GS3 — Energy and disaster risk

Story so far — A strengthening El Niño left the monsoon deficient and pushed peak power demand to a record 269 GW in September, doubling exchange prices as hydro output fell. A Climate Impact Lab study projects about 15,800 extra heat deaths by February 2027, with coal stocks low. The monsoon ended about 12% short, leaving reservoirs at 70% of capacity, below the ten-year average.

19 Sep A Strengthening El Niño, a 15% Rainfall Deficit and a Record 269 GW September Power Peak

El Niño strengthens through the season → the south-west monsoon runs about 15% deficient and begins withdrawing from northwest India → higher temperatures and depleted soil moisture raise cooling and groundwater-pumping demand → reservoir inflows fall, so hydro generation drops just as demand peaks → peak demand touches a record 269 GW and supply shifts to thermal and high-variable-cost plants → exchange prices double and the high-price segment sits at its ₹20 ceiling in non-solar hours

- The El Niño-Southern Oscillation is a coupled ocean-atmosphere phenomenon of the tropical Pacific; in the El Niño phase the central and eastern Pacific warm, the trade winds weaken and the Walker Circulation shifts eastward, statistically suppressing the Indian south-west monsoon.
- The Southern Oscillation Index measures the atmospheric pressure difference between Tahiti and Darwin and is the atmospheric component of ENSO; La Niña is the phase opposite to El Niño.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole is defined by the sea-surface temperature difference between the western Arabian Sea and the eastern Indian Ocean near Indonesia; a positive phase is generally favourable to the Indian monsoon and can partly offset an El Niño.
- The India Meteorological Department expresses seasonal rainfall as a percentage of the Long Period Average: 96% to 104% is normal, 90% to 96% is below normal, and below 90% is deficient.
- The south-west monsoon normally sets in over Kerala around 1 June and begins withdrawing from west Rajasthan around mid-September; the retreating monsoon gives the north-east monsoon of October to December, the principal rainy season for Tamil Nadu.
- Live storage in India's major reservoirs is monitored by the Central Water Commission, and groundwater levels by the Central Ground Water Board; both function under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

- Power exchanges function under the Electricity Act, 2003 and are regulated by the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission; the High Price Day-Ahead Market is the segment of the integrated day-ahead market meant for higher variable-cost generators, including gas-based plants, imported-coal generation and battery energy storage systems.

Mains: “In a climate-stressed year the failure of the monsoon is registered as much in India’s power system as in its reservoirs.”

Explain the physical mechanism linking an El Niño-driven rainfall deficit to electricity demand and supply in India, and examine what this linkage implies for climate adaptation. (250 words, 15 marks)

Approach: Introduction · Body — carry the chain from the Pacific to the grid · Body — explain why the system strains at particular hours · Body — draw out the adaptation implications, including the uncomfortable ones · Conclusion

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

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

- The Oceanic Niño Index is the three-month running mean of sea surface temperature anomalies in the Niño 3.4 region of the east-central equatorial Pacific; a sustained value of +0.5°C or more indicates El Niño conditions and -0.5°C or less indicates La Niña.
- Heatwave is not among the notified disasters eligible for assistance from the State and National Disaster Response Funds; a State may use up to 10% of its SDRF allocation for local disasters that it notifies itself.
- Under IMD criteria, a heatwave requires a maximum temperature of at least 40°C in the plains, 37°C in coastal areas or 30°C in hilly regions together with a departure from normal of 4.5°C or more, or an actual maximum temperature of 45°C or more.
- Wet-bulb temperature combines the effect of heat and humidity; a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C sustained for several hours is widely cited as the theoretical upper limit of human survival.
- Ahmedabad’s Heat Action Plan of 2013 was the first such plan in South Asia and served as a model for the National Disaster Management Authority’s guidelines on heat action plans.
- The Central Electricity Authority is constituted under Section 70 of the Electricity Act, 2003, and Section 11 of the Act empowers the appropriate government to direct a generating company to operate its station in extraordinary circumstances.

Mains: “A heat-mortality estimate for a season India does not associate with heatwaves exposes the limits of a warning system built on summer thresholds.” In the light of projections of additional heat-related deaths linked to the 2026-27 El Niño, examine the adequacy of India’s institutional framework for managing extreme heat. Should heatwaves be notified as a disaster eligible for SDRF and NDRF assistance? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the hazard · Body — the framework and its gaps · Body — notification and the energy link · Conclusion

29 Sep Reservoirs at 70% of Capacity, Below the Ten-Year Average, as the Monsoon Ends 12% Short

El Niño and erratic systems weaken the southwest monsoon, leaving all-India rain 12% short by September 28 → the south receives 23% below-normal rain → reservoir storage falls to 70% nationally and 50% in the south, below the 76.62% decadal average → Maharashtra and Karnataka declare drought while cities like Gurugram keep drawing down groundwater → rabi irrigation, drinking water and hydropower enter the dry season with a thinner buffer

- The Central Water Commission, under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, publishes a weekly bulletin on live storage in major reservoirs of India.
- The India Meteorological Department uses a long period average of 87 cm, based on 1971-2020, for all-India southwest monsoon rainfall.
- For the country as a whole, IMD classifies southwest monsoon rainfall below 90% of the long period average as deficient.
- The Central Ground Water Authority was constituted under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- In groundwater assessment, a unit is classified as over-exploited when annual groundwater extraction exceeds the annual extractable groundwater resource.
- The Atal Bhujal Yojana is a World Bank-supported scheme for community-led groundwater management in seven States.
- A Western Disturbance is an extra-tropical storm originating in the Mediterranean region that brings rain and snow to north-western India, and is carried eastward by the subtropical westerly jet stream.

Mains: “India’s water stress is as much a problem of storage and management as of rainfall.” Discuss with reference to reservoir storage at the end of the 2026 southwest monsoon and the groundwater situation in rapidly growing cities. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the rainfall side · Body — the management side · Body — way forward · Conclusion

33. Scaling up solar power (3)

Lens: Development and environment · Growth and equity. GS3 — Infrastructure: energy; land and renewable energy

Story so far — Delhi doubled rooftop-solar support, and canal-top solar could add 131 GW without new land. In Morbi, farmers rejected compensation for transmission towers, putting land and grid at the centre of the 500 GW goal. On September 30 the Cabinet cleared Green Energy Corridor Phase III: ₹1.86 lakh crore to carry 135 GW by 2032-33, including ₹50,000 crore for 50 GWh of batteries, its first storage component.

22 Sep Delhi Doubles Rooftop-Solar Subsidy to ₹1.56 Lakh, Targets Free Systems for 2.3 Lakh Homes

Centre launches PM Surya Ghar in 2024 with capital subsidy capped at ₹78,000 for 3 kW → Delhi lags with under 30,000 connections because free power, group housing and upfront cost blunt the incentive → Delhi matches the central subsidy to ₹1.56 lakh and raises group-housing aid to ₹11,000 per kW → zero-upfront systems for households up to 400 units and a saving incentive for the 0-200 slab → target of 2.3 lakh free rooftop systems in the first phase

- PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana was approved by the Union Cabinet on February 29, 2024 with an outlay of ₹75,021 crore to install rooftop solar in one crore households.
- Under PM Surya Ghar, central financial assistance is capped at 3 kW, at ₹78,000 for a 3 kW system.
- Net metering bills a prosumer only for the difference between electricity drawn from and supplied to the grid.
- In the RESCO model, a renewable energy service company owns the rooftop system and sells power to the consumer, while in the CAPEX model the consumer owns the system.
- Tariffs for retail electricity supply are determined by State Electricity Regulatory Commissions under the Electricity Act, 2003.
- India's updated NDC of 2022 targets about 50% of cumulative installed electric power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.

Mains: *Rooftop solar has lagged in Indian cities despite generous capital subsidies. Using Delhi's launch of the State component of PM Surya Ghar as an example, examine the economic, institutional and behavioural barriers to distributed solar adoption, and suggest measures to overcome them. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — economic barriers · Body — institutional and behavioural barriers · Body — measures · Conclusion

23 Sep Canal-Top Solar Could Add 131 GW Without New Land, but Has Not Scaled Since 2012

Solar targets demand large, contiguous tracts of land → land acquisition becomes costly and contested, especially in dense agricultural States → Gujarat builds 1 MW over the Narmada Canal in 2012 and MNRE backs a 50 MW + 50 MW pilot in 2014 → high structural cost, awkward maintenance and poor grid access keep deployment small for a decade → PM-SSY's 5,000 MW floating solar push revives interest in land-neutral solar, with a 131 GW canal potential now mapped

- Canal-top solar photovoltaics mount panels on elevated structures spanning irrigation canals, requiring virtually no additional land and reducing evaporation from the canal.
- India's first canal-top solar project was commissioned in 2012 over the Narmada Canal in Mehsana district, Gujarat.
- The Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission, launched in 2010, is one of the eight national missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change, 2008.
- Bifacial solar modules generate electricity from light falling on both their front and rear surfaces.
- The Viability Gap Funding scheme for PPP infrastructure is administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and allows central support of up to 20% of total project cost.
- Component A of PM-KUSUM supports decentralised grid-connected renewable power plants of up to 2 MW on barren or fallow land.
- India's updated NDC (2022) commits to about 50% of cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.

Mains: *"Land, rather than technology or finance, has become the binding constraint on India's solar expansion." Discuss this statement and examine the potential and the limitations of land-neutral options such as canal-top and floating solar. Suggest measures to scale them. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the potential · Body — the limitations · Body — measures · Conclusion

28 Sep Morbi Farmers Reject 200%-and-30% Compensation for Transmission Towers as Agri-PV and Grid Stability Enter the 500 GW Debate

India commits to 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030 → large solar and wind parks in Gujarat and Rajasthan need long high-voltage lines across private farmland → right-of-way law lets lines pass without land acquisition, paying only compensation fixed by formula → farmers see land values fall and reject the MRC process, halting work in Morbi → economists propose agri-PV to give farmers a share of the gains, and industry asks for grid-stability rules to match the capacity

- Section 164 of the Electricity Act, 2003 empowers the appropriate government to confer on a licensee the powers of a telegraph authority under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 for placing electric lines.
- Under Section 10 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, the authority placing a line on private land acquires only a right of user and the owner retains title, subject to payment of compensation.
- Component A of PM-KUSUM provides for decentralised grid-connected renewable power plants of up to 2 MW on farmers' land.
- PM-KUSUM, launched in 2019, is implemented by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- Agri-photovoltaics refers to the use of the same land for solar power generation and crop cultivation, with panels raised high enough for farming beneath them.
- Grid inertia is provided by the rotating mass of synchronous generators and resists rapid changes in grid frequency.
- India announced a target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel electricity capacity by 2030 at COP26 in Glasgow.

Mains: "India's energy transition is constrained less by generation capacity than by land and grid." Discuss with reference to right-of-way conflicts over transmission lines and the potential of agri-photovoltaics. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the land constraint · Body — the grid constraint · Body — agri-PV as a solution · Conclusion

34. Women's safety in Delhi-NCR (3)

Lens: Liberty and order · Tradition and social justice. GS1 — Issues related to women; GS2 — Governance and justice delivery

Story so far — After a 17-year-old was gang-raped at Astha Kunj Park, the L-G ordered safety audits of Delhi's parks. NCRB data show under 2% of rape cases sent to trial end in conviction the same year, and many parks lack lights and cameras. The Supreme Court then took suo motu cognisance of sexual violence in Delhi-NCR and ordered police to audit lighting and CCTV within four weeks.

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

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

- Section 72 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, punishes the disclosure of the identity of a victim of rape and related offences with imprisonment of up to two years and a fine.
- Section 23 of the POCSO Act, 2012 prohibits the media from disclosing the identity of a child victim, including name, address, photograph, family details, school and neighbourhood.
- The Nirbhaya Fund, announced in the Union Budget 2013-14, is a non-lapsable fund administered by the Department of Economic Affairs; the Ministry of Women and Child Development is its nodal ministry.
- Safe City Projects under the Nirbhaya Fund were sanctioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs for eight cities: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai.
- Under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, the certificate of identity is issued by the District Magistrate, and the National Council for Transgender Persons is chaired by the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Under Article 239AA(3)(a), public order, police and land (Entries 1, 2 and 18 of the State List) lie outside the law-making power of the Legislative Assembly of Delhi.
- The Twelfth Schedule (Article 243W) lists parks, gardens and playgrounds, and public amenities including street lighting, among the functions that may be devolved to municipalities.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the surveillance-and-policing track · Body — the design-and-use track · Body — the governance fix · Conclusion

28 Sep NCRB Data Show Under 2% of Rape Cases Sent to Trial End in Conviction the Same Year as Delhi's Parks Lack Lights and Cameras

The 2012 Nirbhaya case leads to the Justice Verma Committee and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 → stricter punishment, statutory deadlines for investigation and trial, fast-track courts and the Nirbhaya Fund follow → reported rape cases stay near 30,000 a year while chargesheets pile into an already clogged trial system → by 2024 the trial pool reaches 2,06,777 with 90% pending and only 421 same-year convictions → a fresh crime in a Delhi park exposes that prevention, too, is failing at the level of a light bulb and a camera

- The National Crime Records Bureau was established in 1986 under the Ministry of Home Affairs and publishes the annual report "Crime in India".
- Section 63 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 defines rape, and Section 70 deals with gang rape.
- Section 72 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 makes the disclosure of the identity of a victim of a rape a punishable offence.
- Under Section 193 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, investigation in relation to rape must be completed within two months from the date on which the information was recorded.
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 was enacted following the recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee.
- The Nirbhaya Fund was created in the Union Budget of 2013-14, and the Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal ministry for appraising projects under it.
- "Police" and "public order" are subjects in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Mains: *"The problem of sexual violence in India is no longer one of inadequate law but of inadequate delivery." In the light of recent crime data, critically examine this statement and suggest measures to improve investigation, trial and prevention. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework · Body — where delivery fails · Body — measures · Conclusion

29 Sep Supreme Court Takes Suo Motu Cognisance of Delhi-NCR Sexual Violence, Orders Four-Week Safety Audit

The 2012 Nirbhaya case leads to tougher criminal law, the Nirbhaya Fund and safety audits → audits multiply but the gaps they find, such as dark lanes and broken cameras, are not fixed → students' complaints near Lady Shri Ram College go unheeded → a cluster of assaults in parks and on a bus crossing 47 km unchecked exposes the gap → the Supreme Court takes suo motu cognisance and fixes a four-week, measurable duty on the Delhi Police

- Under Article 32, the Supreme Court can issue directions, orders or writs for the enforcement of fundamental rights, and Article 142 empowers it to pass any decree or order necessary for doing complete justice.
- In Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi (1981), the Supreme Court held that the right to life under Article 21 includes the right to live with human dignity.
- Article 15(3) enables the State to make special provisions for women and children.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 requires every employer with ten or more employees to constitute an Internal Committee.
- The guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace were laid down by the Supreme Court in Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997).
- Renouncing practices derogatory to the dignity of women is a fundamental duty under Article 51A(e).
- In Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006), the Supreme Court directed the creation of State Security Commissions and Police Complaints Authorities.

Mains: *"Expressions of concern, devoid of accountability, fall short of answering the larger institutional question." In light of the Supreme Court's suo motu intervention on sexual violence in Delhi-NCR, discuss why legal reforms since 2013 have not made public spaces safe for women, and suggest measures to fix accountability. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — what changed after 2013 · Body — why it has not worked · Body — fixing accountability · Conclusion

35. Children's safety online (3)

Lens: Innovation and safeguards · Liberty and order. GS2 — Digital governance and child rights; GS3 — Cyber security

Story so far — The EU's proposed Kids Act would put under-15s behind parental gates on social media and AI chatbots, a likely global benchmark. Google followed Meta in reporting child sexual abuse material directly to the Home Ministry's I4C. The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to use the IT Rules to make 18 the minimum age for social media accounts.

21 Sep EU's Proposed Kids Act Would Put Under-15s Behind Parental Gates on Social Media and AI

Recommendation algorithms optimise for engagement → evidence of harm to children's well-being mounts → self-declared age limits of 13 prove unenforceable → EU proposes tiered age rules and mandatory age verification → platforms and other regulators, including India's, face a new global benchmark

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 defines a child as an individual who has not completed 18 years of age.
- Section 9 of the DPDP Act, 2023 requires verifiable parental consent for processing children's data and prohibits tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children.
- The EU's Digital Services Act, 2022 prohibits targeted advertising based on profiling to minors.
- Under the EU GDPR, the default age of digital consent is 16, which member states may lower to not below 13.

- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides safe harbour to intermediaries subject to due diligence.
- India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992.

Mains: “Protecting children online requires regulating platform design, not merely content.” Examine this statement in the light of the European Union’s proposed age-based rules, and suggest a suitable approach for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why design regulation · Body — India’s framework · Body — concerns · Conclusion

22 Sep Google Follows Meta in Reporting Child Sexual Abuse Material Directly to MHA’s I4C, Bypassing US Clearinghouse

U.S. law requires platforms to report CSAM to NCMEC’s CyberTipline → NCMEC forwards Indian cases to Indian authorities, causing delays → CSAM advertisements on Meta platforms prompt NCPDR and NHRC enquiries and summons to Meta India’s head → Meta agrees to report directly to Indian law enforcement → Google follows by proposing direct reporting to the MHA’s I4C

- Section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 punishes publishing, transmitting, browsing, downloading or exchanging material depicting children in sexually explicit acts.
- The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs and manages the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.
- Section 15 of the POCSO Act, 2012, as amended in 2019, punishes storage or possession of child pornographic material without deleting, destroying or reporting it.
- Under the IT Rules, 2021, a significant social media intermediary shall endeavour to deploy technology-based measures, including automated tools, to proactively identify child sexual abuse material.
- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights is a statutory body constituted under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.
- Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 exempts an intermediary from liability for third-party information only if it observes due diligence and does not initiate, select or modify the transmission.
- ‘Police’ and ‘public order’ are subjects in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Mains: “Child sexual abuse material online is a borderless crime policed through national systems.” In the light of Google and Meta agreeing to report such material directly to Indian authorities, examine the legal and institutional framework for tackling online child sexual abuse in India and suggest measures to strengthen it. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — legal framework · Body — institutional framework · Body — gaps and measures · Conclusion

29 Sep Supreme Court Asks Centre to Use IT Rules to Bar Under-18s From Opening Social Media Accounts

Platforms built under US norms set 13 as the minimum age and rely on self-declared birth dates → crores of Indian children open accounts that Indian contract law does not recognise → the DPDP Act, 2023 requires parental consent for under-18s but its operative provisions are not yet in force → an NGO’s PIL asks the Supreme Court to close the gap → the Bench asks the Centre to use the IT Rules, 2021 to impose an 18-year threshold, and the Solicitor-General agrees

- Under Section 11 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872, a person who has not attained the age of majority is not competent to contract.
- In *Mohori Bibee v. Dharmodas Ghose* (1903), the Privy Council held that an agreement with a minor is void ab initio.
- Under the Majority Act, 1875, a person attains majority on completing 18 years of age.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 defines a child as an individual who has not completed 18 years and requires verifiable parental consent before processing a child’s personal data.
- The DPDP Act, 2023 prohibits tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children.
- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 grants intermediaries safe harbour from liability for third-party content, subject to due diligence.
- In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015), the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the IT Act and read down Section 79 to require a court order or government notification for “actual knowledge”.

Mains: “The protection of children online cannot be left to self-declared age and platform terms of service.” In the light of the Supreme Court’s recent observations on minors’ social media accounts, examine the legal framework in India for regulating children’s access to digital platforms. Suggest a balanced approach. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the existing framework · Body — gaps and dilemmas · Body — a balanced approach · Conclusion

36. Census 2027 and demographic data (3)

Lens: Tradition and social justice · Centre and States. GS1 — Population and urbanisation; GS2 — Governance

Story so far — The Registrar-General will keep the 1981 'census town' definition for Census 2027, though the housing ministry calls it outdated. Caste will be recorded in an open column, but the Centre has not decided how to tabulate it. The Home Ministry's demography panel has sought 15 years of religion-wise data from States, which say they do not keep it.

17 Sep 'Census Town' Definition Is Outdated, Ministry Tells Its Own Panel

- A Census Town requires: minimum population 5,000; at least 75% of the male working population in non-agricultural pursuits; population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km.; this definition has been unchanged since the 1981 Census; the Ministry's draft report estimates real urbanisation could be as high as 63% against the official 2011 figure of 31%.

Mains: "India's official definition of a 'Census Town,' unchanged since 1981, systematically undercounts the country's real urbanisation." Discuss the governance consequences of this mismatch, and evaluate why reform has proved difficult despite the government's own acknowledgement of the problem.

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

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

- "Census" is listed as Entry 69 in the Union List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- The Census of India is conducted under the Census Act, 1948 by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, which functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Under the Census Act, 1948, individual census records are confidential and are not admissible as evidence in civil or criminal proceedings.
- The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948.
- Article 340 empowers the President to appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes; the Mandal Commission was appointed under it.
- In *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992), the Supreme Court upheld OBC reservation, introduced the creamy-layer exclusion and held that reservations should not ordinarily exceed 50%.
- Article 342A(3), inserted by the 105th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2021, allows each State to prepare and maintain its own list of socially and educationally backward classes.

Mains: "Counting caste is easy; classifying it is the real policy choice." In the light of the open-column method adopted for Census 2027, examine the administrative and constitutional challenges in collecting and using caste data. Suggest safeguards that would make the exercise credible. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — administrative challenges · Body — constitutional challenges · Body — safeguards · Conclusion

29 Sep Home Ministry's Demography Panel Seeks 15 Years of Religion-Wise Data, and States Say They Cannot Supply It

Concern over migration, conversion and 'demographic change' enters national policy talk → the Union Home Ministry sets up a High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes → the panel sends States 35 questions seeking 15 years of religion-wise data, from births to property deals to religious structures → State departments find they never recorded religion outside birth registration and some migrant data → a legal and federal question opens on whether, and on what authority, the State may build such a record

- "Census" is Entry 69 of the Union List of the Seventh Schedule, and the Census in India is conducted under the Census Act, 1948.
- The word "secular" was inserted into the Preamble of the Constitution by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976.
- In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court held that secularism is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- Article 15(1) prohibits the State from discriminating against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
- Article 30 gives all minorities, whether based on religion or language, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- Article 256 obliges every State to exercise its executive power so as to ensure compliance with laws made by Parliament, and the Union may give directions to a State for that purpose.
- The Fifth Schedule deals with the administration of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes, while the Sixth Schedule deals with tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Mains: “Indian secularism does not prevent the State from knowing the religion of its citizens, but it limits what the State may do with that knowledge.” Examine this statement in the light of recent attempts to collect religion-wise administrative data from States. What constitutional safeguards should govern such data collection? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — what the State may lawfully know · Body — where the limits lie · Body — federal and administrative dimension · Conclusion

37. New GDP and IIP base (3)

Lens: Independence and accountability. GS3 — Growth, development and measurement

Story so far — MoSPI's Sources and Methods manual for the new GDP series, with 2022-23 as base, shows double deflation in 28 of 30 manufacturing categories, splits multi-activity firms using MGT-7 data, and counts rooftop solar and government housing. On the new base, industrial output grew 8% in August, though consumer non-durables lag.

22 Sep MoSPI Sources and Methods Report: New GDP Series Uses Double Deflation in 28 of 30 Manufacturing Categories

The 2011-12 series is criticised for single deflation and weak informal-sector data → MoSPI sets up sub-committees under the Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics → new series with base year 2022-23 released in February, lowering past nominal GDP → critics say the revision flatters April-June 2026 growth of 7.8% → MoSPI publishes the full Sources and Methods manual in seven months, showing double deflation in 28 of 30 manufacturing categories and a smaller household sector

- GDP at market prices equals Gross Value Added at basic prices plus taxes on products minus subsidies on products.
- Under double deflation, the output and intermediate inputs of a sector are deflated separately by their own price indices to obtain real Gross Value Added.
- India's new national accounts series uses 2022-23 as the base year, replacing the earlier base year of 2011-12.
- The National Statistical Office was formed in 2019 by merging the Central Statistics Office and the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises and the Periodic Labour Force Survey are conducted by the National Statistical Office.
- The System of National Accounts 2008 is the international statistical standard for national accounts adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission.
- In India's national accounts, the household sector, which includes unincorporated enterprises, is used as a proxy for the informal sector.

Mains: “Better methods can produce more accurate numbers and yet less trust.” Discuss with reference to India's new GDP series with base year 2022-23 and the use of double deflation. What steps can strengthen the credibility of official statistics? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the methodological gains · Body — why trust is contested · Body — strengthening credibility · Conclusion

28 Sep New GDP Series Splits Multi-Activity Firms by MGT-7 Data and Counts Rooftop Solar and Government Housing

The 2011-12 series, launched in 2015, uses the MCA-21 corporate database but assigns each firm to one sector by its main activity → critics question deflators, informal-sector estimates and the gap between production and expenditure measures → MoSPI rebases to 2022-23 with double deflation, PPI and survey data → the Sources and Methods document adds activity-wise splitting through MGT-7/MGT-7A, SEBI savings data, new asset lives and rooftop solar → sector shares and savings estimates are redrawn

- The National Statistics Office was constituted in 2019 by merging the Central Statistics Office and the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- GDP at market prices equals GVA at basic prices plus product taxes minus product subsidies.
- Under double deflation, output and intermediate inputs are deflated separately by their own price indices to arrive at real value added.
- Forms MGT-7 and MGT-7A are annual returns filed by companies with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, MGT-7A being meant for one-person companies and small companies.
- The 2011-12 base-year series of national accounts was the first to use the MCA-21 database of company filings for the private corporate sector.
- Consumption of fixed capital (depreciation) is the difference between gross and net measures of domestic product.
- India compiles its national accounts following the United Nations System of National Accounts, 2008.

Mains: The 2022-23 base-year revision of India's national accounts changes not only the base year but how enterprises, assets and savings are measured. Discuss the significance of these methodological changes for economic policy-making. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the headline changes · Body — the lesser-known changes · Body — policy significance · Conclusion

29 Sep Industrial Output Grows 8% in August on the New 2022-23 Base, but Consumer Non-Durables Lag

GST rate cuts announced in early September 2025 → firms run down inventories in August 2025, depressing that month's output → MoSPI shifts the IIP to a 2022-23 base with new weights → August 2026 output grows 8% on a low base, led by capital goods, electrical equipment and vehicles → but non-durables grow only 2.1% and output falls month-on-month, raising doubts about mass consumption as the festival season, a weak monsoon and the oil shock arrive

- The Index of Industrial Production is compiled and released by the National Statistics Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The IIP is a fixed-base volume index that measures changes in the quantity of industrial production, not its value.
- The use-based classification of the IIP groups output into primary, capital, intermediate, infrastructure or construction, consumer durable and consumer non-durable goods.
- The Index of Eight Core Industries is compiled by the Office of the Economic Adviser in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- The eight core industries are coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity.
- The revised IIP series uses 2022-23 as its base year, with manufacturing carrying the largest weight in the index.
- A base effect arises when a year-on-year growth rate is raised or lowered by an unusually low or high value in the same period of the previous year.

Mains: "High-frequency indicators suggest strong industrial growth, but its composition points to an uneven recovery." Examine this statement with reference to the latest Index of Industrial Production data, and discuss what policy measures can broaden the base of consumption demand. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — strength · Body — unevenness · Body — policy · Conclusion

38. Defections and the Tenth Schedule (2)

Lens: Independence and accountability · Rule of law and discretion. GS2 — Parliament and State legislatures; anti-defection law

Story so far — The Telangana High Court set aside the Speaker's refusal and disqualified BRS MLA Danam Nagender, who had contested a Lok Sabha seat on a Congress ticket; the Supreme Court has upheld the disqualification. ADR counts 111 sitting MPs and MLAs who switched parties since 2022, led by Nagaland and West Bengal, raising the question of who should decide defection cases when Speakers decline to act.

19 Sep Telangana High Court Disqualifies a Legislator Under the Tenth Schedule After the Speaker Declined To

MLA elected on one party's ticket → contests another party's Lok Sabha seat → disqualification petition → Speaker dismisses → High Court reviews → seat declared vacant

- Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule — disqualification for voluntarily giving up membership of the political party on whose ticket the member was elected.
- Article 191(2) disqualifies a person for membership of a State legislature if disqualified under the Tenth Schedule; Article 102(2) is the parallel provision for Parliament.
- The Tenth Schedule was inserted by the Constitution (Fifty-second Amendment) Act; the Ninety-first Amendment deleted the 'split' exception, leaving merger by two-thirds as the only defence.
- Paragraph 6 makes the presiding officer's decision final, but that decision is subject to judicial review; the Speaker acts as a tribunal while deciding.
- Under the Tenth Schedule the exception that survives is a merger, which requires agreement of not less than two-thirds of the members of the legislature party.

Mains: "The Tenth Schedule has not failed in its drafting so much as in its adjudication. Critically examine, with reference to recent High Court intervention in disqualification proceedings."

Approach: State the provision and the exception in two lines · Argue that the text does its job · Locate the failure in the adjudication · Evaluate the reform options honestly · Conclude with the interest that is missing

25 Sep ADR Counts 111 Legislators Who Switched Parties Since 2022 as Supreme Court Upholds Telangana MLA's Disqualification

Frequent floor-crossing in the 1960s topples State governments → the 52nd Amendment (1985) adds the Tenth Schedule, with a split exception that is itself abused → the 91st Amendment (2003) deletes the split exception but keeps mergers and leaves Speakers to decide → Speakers delay or reject petitions, and 111 legislators switch parties between 2022 and 2026 → courts step in, and the Supreme Court now rules that condonation cannot cure voluntarily giving up membership

- The Tenth Schedule was added to the Constitution by the Fifty-second Amendment Act, 1985.
- Under paragraph 2(1)(b) of the Tenth Schedule, a member who votes or abstains contrary to the party's direction is not disqualified if the party condones the act within 15 days.
- Under paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule, disqualification does not apply on a merger of the original political party if at least two-thirds of the members of the legislature party agree to it.
- The Ninety-first Amendment Act, 2003 deleted the provision protecting a split by one-third of a legislature party and capped the size of the Council of Ministers at 15% of the strength of the House.
- A nominated member of a House is disqualified under the Tenth Schedule if he joins a political party after six months from taking his seat.
- In *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* (1992), the Supreme Court held that the Speaker deciding a disqualification petition acts as a tribunal and his decision is subject to judicial review.
- Article 361B bars a member disqualified under the Tenth Schedule from holding any remunerative political post until the end of his term or his re-election.

Mains: "The Tenth Schedule is strict in its text but weak in its enforcement." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent data on legislators switching parties and judicial pronouncements on the role of the Speaker. Suggest measures to make the anti-defection law effective. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the strict text · Body — the weak enforcement · Body — reforms · Conclusion

39. Uniform Civil Code and personal laws (2)

Lens: Tradition and social justice · Centre and States. GS2 — Directive Principles (Article 44); GS1 — Secularism and society

Story so far — Omar Abdullah argued a UCC must come through Parliament, not State by State, after Amit Shah said it would be implemented in all NDA-ruled States. The Constituent Assembly's 1948 debate on draft Article 35, now Article 44, was revisited as a Mizoram BJP MLA broke with an anti-UCC resolution. Assam then notified rules making registration of every Muslim marriage compulsory through government officials.

23 Sep Constituent Assembly's 1948 UCC Debate Revisited as Mizoram BJP MLA Breaks With Anti-UCC Resolution

Colonial codes cover crime and procedure but leave marriage and succession to personal law → on November 23, 1948 the Constituent Assembly places the UCC among the non-justiciable Directive Principles as draft Article 35 → Parliament reforms Hindu law in 1955–56 and offers the optional Special Marriage Act, 1954, while other personal laws remain largely uncoded → Mizoram's Assembly resolves against any UCC in February 2023 and Uttarakhand enacts a UCC in 2024 that exempts Scheduled Tribes → a Mizoram BJP MLA argues a UCC could protect Mizo women married to non-tribal men

- Article 44, in Part IV of the Constitution, directs the State to endeavour to secure a uniform civil code for citizens throughout the territory of India.
- Under Article 37, the Directive Principles of State Policy are not enforceable by any court but are fundamental in the governance of the country.
- Article 25(2)(b) permits the State to make laws providing for social welfare and reform, notwithstanding the freedom of religion.
- Under Article 371G, no Act of Parliament on the religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, or ownership and transfer of land applies to Mizoram unless its Legislative Assembly so decides by resolution.
- Article 371G was inserted by the 53rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1986.
- Goa continues to follow a common civil law derived from the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 provides for civil marriage between any two persons irrespective of their religion.

Mains: "The Constituent Assembly placed the uniform civil code among the Directive Principles as a matter of sequence rather than principle." Critically examine this statement with reference to the Assembly debate of November 23, 1948 and the constitutional position of tribal customary law. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the arguments in 1948 · Body — sequence in practice · Body — tribal customary law · Conclusion

25 Sep Assam Cabinet Notifies Rules Making Registration of Every Muslim Marriage Compulsory Through Government Officials

The 1935 colonial law leaves registration of Muslim marriages to licensed qazis → child marriages continue to be recorded in some cases, and the Supreme Court in *Seema v. Ashwani Kumar* (2006) asks all States to make marriage registration compulsory → Assam repeals the 1935 law and enacts a compulsory registration Act in 2024 with age limits of 18 and 21 → the Cabinet approves the 2026 Rules on September 24, moving registration to government officials with a 30-day objection window

- 'Marriage and divorce' is listed in Entry 5 of the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule.
- Article 44, which directs the State to endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code, is a Directive Principle of State Policy in Part IV and is not enforceable by any court.
- In *Seema v. Ashwani Kumar* (2006), the Supreme Court directed that marriages of all citizens, irrespective of religion, be compulsorily registered.
- Under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, a 'child' means a male below 21 years and a female below 18 years of age.
- A child marriage under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 is voidable at the option of the contracting party who was a child at the time of marriage.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 requires publication of a notice of intended marriage and allows objections to be filed within 30 days.
- Article 25(2)(b) permits the State to make laws providing for social welfare and reform notwithstanding the freedom of religion.

Mains: "Compulsory registration of marriages is a more effective instrument of gender justice than a Uniform Civil Code." Discuss with reference to Assam's new rules on the compulsory registration of Muslim marriages and relevant judicial pronouncements. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why registration works · Body — limits and risks · Body — the Uniform Civil Code comparison · Conclusion

40. Delhi student-housing safety (2)

Lens: Rule of law and discretion · Growth and equity. GS2 — Governance and urban local regulation; GS1 — Urbanisation

Story so far — An illegally extended PG building in Satya Niketan collapsed on September 6, killing seven, including Delhi University students. The Delhi High Court called it 'not an ordinary mishap', and the Centre cited land mapping and a compensation scheme. The Vidhi Centre says arrests and suspensions fade after each disaster, from Rajinder Nagar to Satya Niketan, and proposes a 'mixed-use educational building' category for PGs and coaching centres.

17 Sep Delhi HC: Satya Niketan Building Collapse 'Not an Ordinary Mishap'

- The Satya Niketan PG collapse occurred September 6, 2026; the Delhi High Court is hearing a plea for an independent probe, to be taken up together with a related pending petition on September 25; the court's oral observation explicitly rejected the 'ordinary mishap' framing in favour of language implying 'callous and criminal conduct.'

Mains: "By characterising the Satya Niketan collapse as 'not an ordinary mishap,' the Delhi High Court reframed a building-safety tragedy as a case of regulatory and administrative accountability." Discuss the implications of this reframing for how the state should respond to such incidents.

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

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

- The Delhi Development Authority was constituted under the Delhi Development Act, 1957; it prepares the Master Plan of Delhi and the Lieutenant-Governor is its Chairman.
- The National Building Code of India is published by the Bureau of Indian Standards; its Part 4 deals with fire and life safety, and it is a model code that becomes binding when adopted by local authorities.
- The Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution, added by the Seventy-fourth Amendment, 1992, lists urban planning, regulation of land use and construction of buildings, and fire services among municipal functions.
- Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the Forty-second Amendment, 1976, and is Entry 25 of List III.
- The Ministry of Education's Guidelines for Registration and Regulation of Coaching Centres, 2024 are advisory to States and Union Territories and bar coaching centres from enrolling students below 16 years of age.

- Under the National Building Code, buildings are classified by occupancy, with Group A covering residential buildings and Group B covering educational buildings.
- Under Article 239AA(3)(a), land (Entry 18 of the State List) is outside the law-making power of the Legislative Assembly of Delhi.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the classification gap · Body — the enforcement gap · Body — a framework · Conclusion

41. NSA detentions in Noida (2)

Lens: Liberty and order · Rule of law and discretion. GS2 — Fundamental rights and preventive detention; GS3 — Internal security laws

Story so far — UP Police invoked the National Security Act against Satyam Verma, a 64-year-old former journalist, over the Noida workers' protest, and the Allahabad High Court sought responses on his habeas corpus plea. In another NSA case from the same district, the High Court quashed DU student Akriti Chaudhary's detention and censured the District Magistrate, but the Supreme Court stayed the strictures and ₹5 lakh salary penalty.

17 Sep Journalist's NSA Detention — Allahabad High Court Seeks Centre and UP Government's Response

- Satyam Verma's NSA detention order was passed May 12; the habeas corpus petition alleges CCTV and call-detail evidence places him in Lucknow, not at the scene, at the time of the alleged violence; he was not named in any of the 11 FIRs relied upon; the case's next hearing is October 7.

Mains: "Preventive detention orders can fail not only because the underlying suspicion is too generalised, but because the factual premise relied upon may itself be inaccurate." Discuss with reference to the pending habeas corpus challenge to journalist Satyam Verma's NSA detention, and propose procedural safeguards that would catch such failures before, not after, a detention order is executed.

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

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

- Under Article 22(3), the safeguards in Article 22(1) and (2) do not apply to a person arrested or detained under a law providing for preventive detention.
- Article 22(4) bars preventive detention beyond three months unless an Advisory Board reports that there is sufficient cause for continued detention.
- The maximum period of detention under the National Security Act, 1980 is twelve months from the date of detention.
- Under the National Security Act, 1980, a detention order made by a District Magistrate lapses after twelve days unless approved by the State Government in the meantime.
- An Advisory Board under the National Security Act consists of three persons who are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as, judges of a High Court.
- In *A K Roy v Union of India* (1982), a Constitution Bench upheld the validity of the National Security Act, 1980.
- In *Nilabati Behera v State of Orissa* (1993), the Supreme Court held that the State is strictly liable to pay compensation for violation of Article 21 and cannot plead sovereign immunity.

Mains: Preventive detention is meant to be an exceptional power, yet its use against protesters and journalists repeatedly draws judicial censure. Examine the safeguards under Article 22 and the National Security Act, 1980, and discuss whether officers who pass unlawful detention orders should be held personally liable. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — constitutional and statutory safeguards · Body — judicial review · Body — liability · Conclusion

42. EPFO wage ceiling raised (2)

Lens: Growth and equity. GS3 — Inclusive growth and employment; GS2 — Social security schemes

Story so far — The EPFO wage ceiling for mandatory coverage rose from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 a month, the first revision since 2014, bringing over 51 lakh more workers under cover at an extra annual cost of about ₹11,339 crore. The minimum pension stays at ₹1,000. Separately, the Rural Development Minister ordered random inspections of work under the new rural jobs scheme, VB-G RAM G.

18 Sep EPFO Wage Ceiling Raised to ₹25,000, and Random Checks Ordered in the New Rural Jobs Scheme

- The EPF wage ceiling has been raised from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 per month; the EPFO is a statutory body under the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- Under the 1952 Act, employer and employee each contribute 12% of basic wages and dearness allowance; of the employer's share, 8.33% goes to the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 and 3.67% to the provident fund.
- The Act administers three schemes: the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme, 1952; the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995; and the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme, 1976.
- The EPFO is governed by a tripartite Central Board of Trustees comprising representatives of government, employers and employees, chaired by the Union Labour Minister.
- The Viksit Bharat Gramin Rozgar & Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 came into effect in July 2026, replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005.

Mains: "India's social security architecture expands primarily by raising thresholds and renaming schemes, while the binding constraint remains verification and enforcement." Critically examine with reference to the revision of the EPF wage ceiling and the transition from MGNREGA to the new rural employment law.

Approach: Introduction — state the coverage problem · Body 1 — explain the ceiling revision and its real significance · Body 2 — set out the incentive risk · Body 3 — put the guarantee question first for the rural scheme · Body 4 — analyse the monitoring design problem · Body 5 — recommend structural fixes · Conclusion — entitlements are only as good as their verification

19 Sep EPFO Wage Ceiling Raised From ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 After Twelve Years

Ceiling frozen at ₹15,000 for 12 years → wage inflation pushes workers above it → they fall outside mandatory cover → ceiling raised to ₹25,000 → 51 lakh brought in, but the pension floor stays at ₹1,000

- The parent statute is the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, administered by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation under the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- The Act carries three schemes — the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme, the Employees' Pension Scheme and the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme.
- Employee contribution is 12% of basic wages, all of which goes to the provident fund; of the employer's 12%, 8.33% goes to the Employees' Pension Scheme subject to the wage ceiling and 3.67% to the provident fund.
- The EDLI contribution is 0.5% of wages, payable by the employer.
- The statutory wage ceiling for mandatory coverage was ₹6,500 from June 2001, raised to ₹15,000 in September 2014, and now to ₹25,000; this is the ninth revision since the scheme began.
- The EPS minimum pension of ₹1,000 per month was fixed in September 2014 and has not since been revised.
- Article 41 — right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases, including old age; Article 43 — living wage for workers. Both are Directive Principles of State Policy.

Mains: "Widening the coverage of a social security scheme without revising its benefit floor addresses inclusion but not adequacy. Critically examine with reference to India's formal-sector pension architecture."

Approach: Open with the architecture, not the announcement · Make the inclusion case with the official numbers · Then make the adequacy case with equal specificity · Name the structural fix rather than asking for more money · Close on the population the debate leaves out

43. India–China ties after BRICS (2)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS2 — India and its neighbourhood; bilateral relations

Story so far — At the Delhi BRICS summit Modi told Xi that ties must rest on 'mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity', and Beijing called it their most important consensus. Both capitals then recalibrated regional diplomacy, Xi in Egypt and Jaishankar in Bhutan. Leaked ICBC files showed a Chinese state bank's Mumbai branch froze \$185 million of loans during the 2017 Doklam standoff.

17 Sep China and India Both Recalibrate West Asia and Neighbourhood Diplomacy Post-BRICS

- Xi Jinping's Egypt visit (September 1-2, 2026) set out a four-point formula for West Asian regional security; Rajnath Singh's Colombo visit was the first by an Indian Defence Minister in nearly four decades; Bangladesh was the only South Asian country invited to the BRICS Summit besides India.

Mains: "Both China's West Asia diplomacy and India's neighbourhood outreach, in the aftermath of the BRICS Summit, reveal a shared great-power strategy: using regional-architecture rhetoric to build influence even without binding commitments." Discuss, and evaluate whether India is making optimal use of its own regional diplomatic opportunities.

21 Sep Leaked ICBC Files Show a Chinese State Bank in Mumbai Froze \$185 Million During Doklam

China's state owns and the Party directs its big banks → ICBC opens in Mumbai in 2011 as a commercial bridge → the 2017 Doklam standoff turns a bank branch into a political outpost → loans frozen and Party cadres report to the embassy → India learns in 2026 how a foreign state bank behaves in a crisis

- Doklam plateau lies at the tri-junction of India, Bhutan and China, near the Chumbi valley.
- The Siliguri corridor, often called the 'Chicken's Neck', connects India's Northeastern States with the rest of the country.
- Press Note 3 (2020) requires prior government approval for FDI from countries sharing a land border with India.
- Foreign banks require an RBI licence under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to operate branches in India.
- The India-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship was signed in 1949 and revised in 2007.
- The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists coordinated the Panama Papers (2016) and Pandora Papers (2021) investigations.

Mains: "In an era of weaponised interdependence, a foreign state-owned bank can become an instrument of strategy." Discuss with reference to recent revelations on the conduct of a Chinese bank's India branch during the Doklam standoff. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how state capital behaves · Body — India's existing safeguards · Body — the balance · Conclusion

44. Fertiliser supply squeeze (2)

Lens: Short-term relief and long-term reform · Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS3 — Agricultural inputs and subsidies

Story so far — Landed sulphur prices have roughly trebled in a year, to about \$1,070 a tonne, after strikes on Russian and Gulf refineries and export bans by Russia and China, straining DAP and SSP output. Fertiliser production then fell 12.4% in August, its sixth straight monthly decline, as gas and sulphur shortages bite.

21 Sep Sulphur Import Prices Treble in a Year, Threatening India's DAP and SSP Fertiliser Supply

Clean-fuel rules make refineries the main sulphur source → Ukraine and Iran strike Russian and Gulf refineries and gas plants → Russia and China ban exports while EV nickel processing absorbs acid → landed sulphur price reaches about \$1,070 a tonne → Indian DAP, SSP and complex fertiliser output comes under strain

- The Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme, in force since 1 April 2010, covers phosphatic and potassic fertilisers and fixes subsidy per kilogram of N, P, K and S; urea is outside it.
- The Fertiliser (Control) Order, 1985 is issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) has a nutrient grade of 18:46:0 (N:P₂O₅:K₂O).
- Single super phosphate supplies both phosphorus and sulphur to the soil.
- Most of the world's sulphur is recovered as a by-product of petroleum refining and natural gas processing rather than mined directly.
- Rock phosphate must be treated with sulphuric acid to produce water-soluble phosphorus usable by plants.
- The fertiliser subsidy is administered by the Department of Fertilizers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Mains: "India's fertiliser security is increasingly determined by conflicts far from its fields." Examine this statement in the light of the recent sulphur price shock and suggest measures to make India's phosphatic fertiliser supply chain more resilient.

Approach: Introduction · Body — the causes · Body — the consequences for India · Body — the remedies · Conclusion

22 Sep Fertiliser Output Shrinks 12.4% in August, Sixth Straight Fall, as Gas and Sulphur Shortages Bite

West Asia conflict and strikes on Russian and Gulf energy infrastructure knock out refining capacity → sulphur rises from about \$200 to over \$1,000 a tonne and gas supply tightens with LNG spreads at 5–10 times normal → phosphatic and complex fertiliser manufacture is constrained and imports rise → fertiliser output falls for the sixth straight month, by 12.4% in August → rabi sowing approaches with pressure on DAP availability and on the subsidy bill

- The Index of Core Industries is compiled and released by the Office of the Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- The Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers has been in force since April 1, 2010; urea is outside it and sold at a statutorily fixed maximum retail price.
- The Fertiliser (Control) Order, 1985 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Natural gas is the principal feedstock for ammonia and hence for urea production in India.
- Sulphuric acid is used to convert rock phosphate into phosphoric acid and water-soluble phosphatic fertilisers such as single super phosphate and DAP.

- Di-ammonium phosphate contains 18% nitrogen and 46% phosphorus pentoxide.

Mains: “India’s fertiliser security is a function of its energy security.” In the light of the continued contraction in fertiliser production and the global shortage of sulphur and gas, examine the vulnerabilities of India’s fertiliser sector and suggest measures to secure supplies for the rabi season and beyond. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why the sector is exposed · Body — consequences · Body — measures · Conclusion

45. India–New Zealand FTA (2)

Lens: Growth and equity · National interest and global commons. GS2 — Bilateral agreements; GS3 — Trade and agriculture

Story so far — The India–New Zealand FTA, signed on April 27, enters into force on October 20 with zero duty on all Indian exports. India kept dairy and sensitive farm produce out of the concessions and fenced apples, kiwis and honey with quotas. The two sides aim to double bilateral trade in four to five years.

22 Sep India–New Zealand FTA Enters Force on October 20, Keeping Dairy Out and Quota-Fencing Apples, Kiwis, Honey

India exits RCEP in 2019, with fears of dairy and farm imports from Australia and New Zealand → shifts to bilateral FTAs that exclude dairy, as with Australia → negotiations with New Zealand conclude, the pact is signed on April 27 and New Zealand’s Parliament ratifies it on September 16 → India keeps dairy, onions, chickpeas and sugar out and admits apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey only through quotas, price floors and seasonal windows → agreement enters into force on October 20

- The WTO Agreement on Agriculture, in force since 1995, rests on three pillars: market access, domestic support and export competition.
- A tariff rate quota allows a specified quantity of imports at a lower tariff, with a higher tariff applied beyond that quantity.
- Rules of origin determine whether a good qualifies as originating in a partner country and therefore for preferential tariffs under a trade agreement.
- India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations in November 2019.
- Operation Flood, launched in 1970 by the National Dairy Development Board, made India the world’s largest milk producer.
- GATT Article XXIV permits free trade areas as an exception to most-favoured-nation treatment, provided they cover substantially all trade between the parties.

Mains: India’s recent trade agreements open some agricultural markets while keeping dairy and staple crops protected. With reference to the India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, examine the instruments used to balance market access with farmer protection, and assess whether this approach serves India’s long-term agricultural interests. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the instruments · Body — why this balance · Body — assessment · Conclusion

22 Sep India–New Zealand FTA Enters into Force on October 20 with Zero Duty for All Indian Exports

India walks out of RCEP in 2019, fearing a flood of imports and dairy competition → shifts to bilateral deals with safeguards built in → negotiates with New Zealand in about nine months, with dairy kept out and investment and visas written in → signed on April 27, New Zealand’s parliament passes the law on September 16 → entry into force on October 20 amid rising global tariffs

- Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade permits free trade areas and customs unions as an exception to the most-favoured-nation obligation, provided duties are eliminated on substantially all trade between the parties.
- A tariff rate quota allows a specified quantity of a product to be imported at a lower duty, with a higher duty applying to quantities beyond the quota.
- Rules of origin determine whether a good qualifies as originating in an FTA partner and is therefore eligible for preferential duty; India’s procedural rules for this are the CAROTAR, 2020, framed under the Customs Act, 1962.
- A bilateral safeguard mechanism in an FTA allows a party to temporarily raise or suspend preferential duties when a surge in imports under the agreement causes or threatens serious injury to domestic industry.
- India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations in November 2019; New Zealand is a member of RCEP.
- The temporary movement of professionals to supply services is classified as Mode 4 under the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services.
- In India, trade remedy investigations, including safeguard investigations, are conducted by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Mains: “India’s recent free trade agreements trade tariff concessions for investment and mobility commitments while ring-fencing sensitive sectors.” Examine this statement with reference to the India–New Zealand FTA. How far can such agreements help India diversify its trade in an environment of rising protectionism? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the template · Body — limits · Body — diversification value · Conclusion

46. Investment treaties and arbitration (2)

Lens: Market and State · National interest and global commons. GS2 — Bilateral agreements; GS3 — Investment models

Story so far — The Indian Council of Arbitration's chief urged that India's new trade and investment treaties, including recent BITs with the UAE and Israel, be written to strengthen commercial arbitration at home. The Finance Ministry has since sent a revised model Bilateral Investment Treaty to the Cabinet, keeping taxation outside investor–State arbitration.

23 Sep Indian Council of Arbitration Chief Urges India to Write Commercial Arbitration Into New Trade Treaties

Investor-state awards such as *White Industries* (2011) and the retrospective tax disputes make India wary of ISDS → the 2015 Model BIT narrows investor protection and demands exhaustion of local remedies, and FTAs mostly leave ISDS out → foreign investors, who mostly deal with Indian state agencies through contracts, still want a neutral forum outside Indian courts → the Indian Council of Arbitration argues that treaty text can point them to commercial arbitration seated in India → India’s treaty policy becomes a tool to build an arbitration hub and attract capital

- The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 is based on the UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration, 1985.
- Part II of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 provides for enforcement of foreign awards under the New York Convention of 1958, which India applies only to commercial disputes and on the basis of reciprocity.
- In *BALCO v. Kaiser Aluminium* (2012), the Supreme Court held that Part I of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act does not apply to arbitrations seated outside India.
- Section 29A, inserted in the Arbitration and Conciliation Act by the 2015 amendment, prescribes time limits for making arbitral awards.
- The 2019 amendment to the Arbitration and Conciliation Act provides for an Arbitration Council of India to grade arbitral institutions and promote arbitration.
- India’s 2015 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty requires a foreign investor to pursue domestic remedies, generally for at least five years, before initiating international arbitration against India.
- The New Delhi International Arbitration Centre, set up by an Act of 2019, was renamed the India International Arbitration Centre in 2022.

Mains: “India has moved away from investor-state dispute settlement in its recent treaties, but investors still need a credible way to resolve disputes.” In this context, discuss how India’s bilateral investment treaties and free trade agreements can be used to strengthen commercial arbitration in India. What domestic reforms are necessary for India to become a global arbitration hub? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why India retreated from ISDS · Body — treaty-level proposals · Body — domestic reforms · Conclusion

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

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

- Under investor–State dispute settlement, a private foreign investor can directly bring a claim against the host State before an international arbitral tribunal, unlike WTO dispute settlement where only member governments can bring cases.
- India’s Model Bilateral Investment Treaty text was approved by the Union Cabinet in December 2015 and requires a foreign investor to pursue domestic remedies for at least five years before initiating international arbitration.
- The 2015 Model BIT uses an enterprise-based definition of investment and does not contain a most-favoured-nation clause.
- India is not a party to the ICSID Convention, the World Bank treaty that established the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.
- The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 withdrew tax demands raised under the 2012 retrospective amendment on indirect transfers of Indian assets made before 28 May 2012.
- The India–UAE Bilateral Investment Treaty signed in 2024 reduced the period for pursuing local remedies before arbitration from five years to three years.

- A sunset clause in a bilateral investment treaty continues to protect investments made before the treaty's termination for a specified number of years after termination.

Mains: "India's investment treaty policy has swung from investor protection to regulatory sovereignty and is now seeking a balance." Discuss with reference to the proposed revision of the Model Bilateral Investment Treaty. Should taxation and the exhaustion of local remedies remain red lines? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the swing · Body — the case for balance · Body — the red lines · Conclusion

47. Campus suicides and caste equity (2)

Lens: Tradition and social justice · Growth and equity. GS2 — Education and vulnerable sections; GS1 — Caste

Story so far — The suicide of IIT Bombay student Sahil Wakode sharpened the fight over the UGC's stayed caste-equity regulations. The Supreme Court's National Task Force on student mental health, chaired by former judge S. Ravindra Bhat, linked campus suicides to competition, caste and faculty mismatch in its interim report; the final report is due by November.

21 Sep IIT Bombay Student's Death Sharpens the Fight Over UGC's Stayed Caste-Equity Regulations

Caste discrimination on campuses documented after the Rohith Vemula (2016) and Payal Tadvi (2019) deaths → 2012 UGC equity rules found weak → UGC's 2026 caste-equity regulations → upper-caste groups protest, Supreme Court stays them → IIT Bombay student's death revives the demand → Centre opens talks with opponents of the rules

- Article 17 abolishes untouchability and makes the enforcement of any disability arising out of it an offence punishable in accordance with law.
- Article 46, a Directive Principle, directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- Article 15(5), inserted by the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2005, permits special provisions for SCs, STs and socially and educationally backward classes in admission to educational institutions, including private unaided ones, except minority institutions.
- Section 18A of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, inserted in 2018, bars the grant of anticipatory bail and dispenses with a preliminary inquiry before registering an FIR.
- Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 deals with abetment of suicide, corresponding to Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code.
- Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 creates a presumption of severe stress for a person attempting suicide and bars trial and punishment for the attempt.
- The UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2012 required institutions to establish equal opportunity cells and appoint anti-discrimination officers.

Mains: "Legal safeguards against caste discrimination in higher education have failed less for want of law than for want of credible institutional mechanisms." Examine in the context of recent developments. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — The legal architecture · Body — Why mechanisms fail · Body — The fair-process concern · Conclusion

22 Sep Supreme Court's Task Force Links Campus Suicides to Competition, Caste and Faculty Mismatch

Reservation widens access so that about 60% of students are SC, ST or OBC → faculty and campus culture remain dominated by socially advantaged groups → competition, grade pressure and a "vibe check" isolate students, with 34% feeling like outsiders → over 13,600 disadvantaged students drop out of premier institutions in 2018-23 and suicides recur → Supreme Court's NTF interim report names institutional causes as new deaths at IIT Bombay spark protests

- Article 15(5), inserted by the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2005, allows special provisions for admission of backward classes, SCs and STs to educational institutions, including private unaided ones, other than minority institutions.
- Article 46 directs the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections, in particular SCs and STs.
- The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019 treats the university or institution as the unit for reservation in teaching posts.
- Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 presumes that a person who attempts suicide is suffering from severe stress and shall not be tried and punished.
- Abetment of suicide is an offence under Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
- Tele MANAS, the national tele-mental health programme, can be reached on the toll-free number 14416.
- Institutes of National Importance are declared by an Act of Parliament.

Mains: “Access to elite higher education has widened faster than inclusion within it.” Discuss in the light of the National Task Force’s interim report on student mental health and suicides. Suggest measures to make campuses more inclusive. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the evidence of exclusion · Body — constitutional and legal framework · Body — measures · Conclusion

48. Right to Information under pressure (2)

Lens: Independence and accountability. GS2 — Transparency and accountability; RTI

Story so far — The Central Information Commission told UPSC and DoPT to resume publishing paper-wise Civil Services marks, finding no record of any decision to stop in 2018. Tamil Nadu withdrew, within a week, an order that had used Section 24(4) of the RTI Act to exempt its Law and Order Department as an intelligence and security organisation.

25 Sep CIC Tells UPSC and DoPT to Resume Publishing Paper-Wise Civil Services Marks Stopped Since 2018

Until CSE 2017, paper-wise marks of recommended candidates are published → from 2018 only aggregate marks are released, with no recorded reason → an RTI applicant seeks 10 years of paper-wise and optional-wise marks up to 2023 → UPSC says it passes detailed marks to DoPT and LBSNAA, DoPT says only UPSC holds them → given a final opportunity, DoPT produces no file noting or policy decision → CIC recommends restoring publication for “transparency and fairness”

- Under Section 19 of the RTI Act, 2005, a second appeal against a decision on an information request lies to the Central or State Information Commission within 90 days.
- Section 4(1)(b) of the RTI Act, 2005 requires every public authority to proactively publish specified categories of information about its functions, rules and decision-making.
- The Central Information Commission consists of the Chief Information Commissioner and not more than 10 Information Commissioners, appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee headed by the Prime Minister.
- The RTI (Amendment) Act, 2019 empowered the Central government to prescribe the term of office, salaries and service conditions of Information Commissioners.
- Articles 315 to 323 in Part XIV of the Constitution deal with the Union and State Public Service Commissions.
- A member of the UPSC holds office for six years or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier, and may be removed on the ground of misbehaviour only after an inquiry by the Supreme Court.
- In *CBSE v. Aditya Bandopadhyay* (2011), the Supreme Court held that evaluated answer books are information under the RTI Act and are not held by an examining body in a fiduciary capacity.

Mains: “Transparency in public recruitment is not only a matter of individual rights but a condition of institutional legitimacy.” In the light of the Central Information Commission’s recent recommendation on the publication of Civil Services marks, discuss how the balance between disclosure and confidentiality should be struck by recruitment bodies. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for disclosure · Body — the case for confidentiality · Body — striking the balance · Conclusion

28 Sep Tamil Nadu Withdraws Within a Week Its Order Exempting the Law and Order Department From the RTI Act

The RTI Act, 2005 lets governments exclude intelligence and security organisations under Section 24 → the exemption is meant for agencies like the State intelligence wing, with a proviso keeping corruption and human-rights information open → Tamil Nadu notifies an entire secretariat department that handles custodial deaths, police firing and preventive detention → allies, activists and a former DGP object that accountability records are being hidden → the order is revoked within six days

- Under Section 24(1) of the RTI Act, 2005, the Act does not apply to the Central intelligence and security organisations specified in the Second Schedule.
- Section 24(4) of the RTI Act, 2005 empowers a State government to exclude from the Act intelligence and security organisations established by it, by notification in the Official Gazette.
- Information relating to allegations of corruption and human-rights violations is not excluded even for organisations exempted under Section 24 of the RTI Act.
- For allegations of human-rights violations in an exempt organisation, information is provided only with the approval of the Information Commission, within 45 days of the request.
- Section 8(2) of the RTI Act allows access to exempt information if the public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to protected interests.
- A Public Information Officer who refuses information without reasonable cause may be penalised ₹250 a day, up to a total of ₹25,000.
- The Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974 and the National Security Act, 1980 are preventive-detention laws.

Mains: The exemption provisions of the Right to Information Act, 2005 are meant to protect security, not to shield accountability. Examine with reference to Section 24 of the Act and recent attempts by governments to widen its use. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the design of the Act · Body — why the order was problematic · Body — the wider pattern · Conclusion

49. Inter-State river water disputes (2)

Lens: Centre and States. GS2 — Inter-State relations and dispute resolution

Story so far — Six States signed an MoU for the Kishau dam on the Tons after an eight-year deadlock, the tenth long-pending water dispute the Centre says it has resolved. The Supreme Court gave Karnataka a week to answer Tamil Nadu's 20 tmc ft Cauvery shortfall plea amid drought. Amit Shah will chair an Odisha–Chhattisgarh meeting as the Mahanadi dispute shifts to direct talks.

25 Sep Supreme Court Gives Karnataka a Week to Answer Tamil Nadu's 20-tmc ft Cauvery Shortfall Plea

The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's 2007 award fixes normal-year shares but offers only a bare proportional-reduction rule for distress years → the Supreme Court's February 2018 judgment trims Tamil Nadu's share and orders a permanent scheme → the Centre sets up the CWMA and CWRC to supervise monthly releases → a weak monsoon leaves Karnataka's reservoirs short and its districts declared drought-prone → Tamil Nadu claims a 20 tmc ft deficit hurting its kharif crop and returns to the Supreme Court while Karnataka prepares to appeal the CWRC's 4,000-cusec order

- Article 262 of the Constitution empowers Parliament to provide by law for the adjudication of disputes relating to the waters of inter-State rivers and to exclude the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and other courts over such disputes.
- Entry 17 of the State List covers water, including irrigation and canals, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List, which relates to the regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys.
- Under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, a published award of a Water Disputes Tribunal has the same force as an order or decree of the Supreme Court.
- The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal gave its final award in February 2007, and the Supreme Court modified it in February 2018, increasing Karnataka's share and reducing the release at Biligundlu to 177.25 tmc ft.
- The Cauvery Water Management Authority and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee were constituted in 2018 under a scheme framed under Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.
- The Cauvery basin is shared by Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry.
- A cusec is a unit of flow equal to one cubic foot of water per second, while a tmc ft, used for river allocations, equals one thousand million cubic feet.

Mains: "Institutional mechanisms for sharing inter-State river waters in India function adequately in normal years but break down in years of distress." Examine this statement in the light of the Cauvery dispute after the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment, and suggest reforms to make distress-year sharing less contentious. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the institutional design · Body — why distress years break the system · Body — reforms · Conclusion

29 Sep Amit Shah to Chair Odisha–Chhattisgarh Meeting on Mahanadi Dispute as States Shift to Direct Talks

The Mahanadi rises in Chhattisgarh and flows into Odisha, whose Hirakud dam and delta depend on its flow → Chhattisgarh builds more than 500 anicuts and 30 barrages upstream after 2010 → Odisha protests and seeks a tribunal, which the Centre constitutes under the 1956 Act → years of adjudication without a settlement → with the same party in power in both States, Odisha asks the tribunal to allow direct talks → the Jal Shakti Minister meets the States on July 30 and the Home Minister will chair talks on October 1

- Under Article 262 of the Constitution, Parliament may by law provide for adjudication of inter-State river water disputes and exclude the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and other courts over them.
- Water is an entry in the State List (Entry 17), subject to Entry 56 of the Union List, which covers regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys.
- The Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 empowers the Central government to constitute a tribunal when a State requests it and the dispute cannot be settled by negotiation.
- The River Boards Act, 1956 provides for advisory boards for inter-State rivers but no board has been constituted under it.
- The Mahanadi river rises in Chhattisgarh and flows through Odisha into the Bay of Bengal; the Hirakud dam is built on it in Odisha.
- The Central Water Commission is the apex technical body on water resources and functions under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- Zonal Councils are statutory bodies set up under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, and the Union Home Minister is the chairman of each Zonal Council.

Mains: “Inter-State river water disputes in India are better resolved through negotiation than adjudication.” Critically examine this statement with reference to the Mahanadi water dispute. Suggest institutional reforms for faster resolution. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework · Body — merits of negotiation · Body — limits of negotiation · Conclusion

50. Western Ghats eco-sensitive area (2)

Lens: Development and environment · Centre and States. GS3 — Conservation and environmental impact assessment

Story so far — After the Gadgil and Kasturirangan panels and successive lapsed drafts, the latest draft notification proposes 20,668 sq km of eco-sensitive area in ten Karnataka districts. Karnataka held a special legislative session and plans an all-party delegation to the Prime Minister against it. Kerala has asked the Centre to limit its ESA to 8,590.69 sq km of forest only.

21 Sep Karnataka Opens Special Session, Plans All-Party Delegation to PM Against Western Ghats ESA Draft

Gadgil panel's wide zoning rejected by States → Kasturirangan panel narrows ESA to fragile pockets → successive draft notifications lapse without a final one → latest draft proposes 20,668 sq km in 10 Karnataka districts with feedback due 27 September → State calls special session and plans all-party delegation to the PM

- Ecologically sensitive areas are notified by the Union government under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, read with Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986.
- The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (2011) was chaired by Madhav Gadgil; the High-Level Working Group (2013) on the Western Ghats was chaired by K. Kasturirangan.
- The Kasturirangan group divided the Western Ghats into a cultural landscape and a natural landscape and recommended about 37% of the range for ESA notification.
- The Western Ghats pass through six States: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012.
- Eco-sensitive zones around national parks and sanctuaries, governed by the 2011 MoEFCC guidelines, are a separate category from the Western Ghats ESA.
- Drought is declared by the State government following the central Manual for Drought Management, in which field ground-truthing of crop loss is part of the process.
- Relief for notified disasters, including drought, is met from the State Disaster Response Fund and supplemented by the National Disaster Response Fund under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Mains: “A decade after the Kasturirangan report, the Western Ghats remain governed by successive draft notifications rather than a final one.” Examine why the ecologically sensitive area framework has failed to settle the conflict between conservation and livelihoods, and suggest a workable way forward.

Approach: Introduction · Body — the two panels and the legal instrument · Body — why it has not been settled · Body — a way forward · Conclusion

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

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

- Section 3(2)(v) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Central Government to restrict the areas in which any industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to safeguards.
- Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 sets out the factors the Central Government must consider before prohibiting or restricting industries and processes in an area, and requires a draft notification inviting objections.
- The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel was chaired by Madhav Gadgil and the High-Level Working Group on the Western Ghats was chaired by K. Kasturirangan.
- The Kasturirangan High-Level Working Group divided the Western Ghats into a cultural landscape and a natural landscape and proposed that about 37% of the Ghats be notified as an ecologically sensitive area.
- The Western Ghats pass through six States: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- The Western Ghats were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2012 as a serial natural site.
- The Forty-second Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 moved ‘forests’ and ‘protection of wild animals and birds’ from the State List to the Concurrent List.

Mains: “The Western Ghats ecologically sensitive area has been negotiated down State by State for over a decade without ever being finally notified.” Examine the reasons for this deadlock and suggest how conservation of the Western Ghats can be reconciled with the livelihoods of the people who live there. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal and scientific frame · Body — reasons for the deadlock · Body — way forward · Conclusion

51. Big dams in Arunachal (2)

Lens: Development and environment · Centre and States. GS3 — Infrastructure (energy) and environmental clearance

Story so far — Amid protests, the Arunachal Cabinet set up an empowered committee to push the pre-feasibility survey for the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project past local resistance. The Environment Ministry's expert committee then recommended clearance for the 1,605 MW Subansiri Upper project despite 1,35,733 trees marked for felling, subject to forest clearance.

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

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

- The Yarlung Tsangpo enters India in Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang, or Dihang, and is called the Brahmaputra after the Dibang and the Lohit join it near Sadiya in Assam; in Bangladesh it is known as the Jamuna.
- Under the EIA Notification, 2006, hydroelectric projects of 50 MW or more are Category A projects appraised at the Centre, while those of 25 MW to 50 MW are Category B projects appraised at the State level.
- The public hearing under the EIA Notification, 2006 is conducted by the State Pollution Control Board or the Union Territory Pollution Control Committee.
- Section 4(5) of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 provides that no member of a forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribe or other traditional forest dweller shall be evicted from forest land under occupation until the recognition and verification procedure is complete.
- In the Niyamgiri case (2013), the Supreme Court held that the gram sabha must decide whether a mining project affects the religious and cultural rights of the forest-dwelling community.
- The Dam Safety Act, 2021 establishes the National Committee on Dam Safety and the National Dam Safety Authority, and applies to specified dams more than 15 metres high, or between 10 and 15 metres high if they meet prescribed design conditions.
- India and China have no water-sharing treaty; they discuss trans-border rivers through an Expert Level Mechanism set up in 2006 and share flood-season hydrological data under memoranda of understanding.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the strategic case · Body — the rights case · Body — risks and trade-offs · Conclusion

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

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

- Under the EIA Notification, 2006, river valley projects with hydroelectric capacity of 50 MW or more are Category A projects appraised at the Central level by an Expert Appraisal Committee.
- The four stages of environmental clearance under the EIA Notification, 2006 are screening, scoping, public consultation and appraisal.
- Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, now titled the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, requires prior approval of the Central Government for diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.
- When non-forest land is not available for compensatory afforestation, plantation is required on degraded forest land of twice the area diverted.
- The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 established a National Compensatory Afforestation Fund and State Compensatory Afforestation Funds in the public accounts.

- The National Board for Wildlife is constituted under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and is chaired by the Prime Minister.
- The Subansiri, which rises in Tibet and flows through Arunachal Pradesh into Assam, is the largest tributary of the Brahmaputra.

Mains: “Large hydropower projects in the Eastern Himalaya are appraised one at a time, while their impacts accumulate across the river basin.” Critically examine this statement with reference to the Subansiri projects in Arunachal Pradesh, and suggest reforms to India’s environmental and forest clearance process. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the clearance chain · Body — the cumulative problem · Body — reforms · Conclusion

52. Gaps in wildlife protection law (2)

Lens: Development and environment · Rule of law and discretion. GS3 — Conservation; Wild Life (Protection) Act and CITES

Story so far — Five baby orangutans rescued in Odisha showed what CITES and the Wild Life (Protection) Act do and do not cover for exotic species. In Shimla, a woman died after a rhesus macaque attack; since the 2022 amendment delisted the species, State forest departments say they are no longer responsible, leaving a gap in handling such conflict.

18 Sep Five Orangutans Rescued in Odisha: What CITES and the Wild Life Act Do — and Do Not — Cover

- CITES came into force in 1975; India became a party in 1976. Its Secretariat is administered by the UN Environment Programme and based in Geneva.
- CITES Appendix I covers species threatened with extinction, with commercial international trade generally prohibited; Appendix II covers species that may become threatened without trade regulation; Appendix III covers species protected in at least one country that has asked other parties for assistance.
- All three orangutan species — Bornean, Sumatran and Tapanuli — are listed in CITES Appendix I; orangutans are native to Borneo and Sumatra.
- The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 added a Schedule covering CITES-listed species to harmonise Indian law with the Convention.
- CITES does not make repatriation of confiscated specimens to the country of origin mandatory; disposal options include return, placement in a rescue centre, or other measures decided by the confiscating state.
- India’s wildlife trade enforcement agency is the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Mains: “India’s wildlife protection framework was designed for Indian species; the growing trade in exotic animals has exposed the limits of that design.” Critically examine with reference to CITES obligations and the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022.

Approach: Introduction — state the mismatch · Body 1 — explain the CITES framework · Body 2 — set out what the 2022 amendment did · Body 3 — assess the amnesty scheme · Body 4 — analyse enforcement and routes · Body 5 — address demand and welfare · Conclusion — close the gap in both law and capacity

22 Sep Shimla Macaque-Attack Death Exposes the Gap Left When the 2022 Amendment Delisted Rhesus Monkeys

Rhesus macaque protected under Schedule II of the 1972 Act, with forest departments and central funds handling conflict → sterilisation from 2006 cuts Himachal’s estimated population by more than half → the 2022 Amendment rationalises schedules and drops the macaque → responsibility shifts informally to municipal bodies without money or trained staff → a fatal attack leaves the victim’s family outside the wildlife compensation policy

- The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 reduced the schedules of the Act to four, with Schedule IV covering specimens listed in the CITES appendices.
- The separate schedule for vermin was removed by the 2022 amendment, but Section 62 still allows the Central Government to declare a wild animal, other than a Schedule I animal, to be vermin for a specified area and period.
- Section 11 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 allows the Chief Wildlife Warden to permit the hunting of a wild animal that has become dangerous to human life.
- The 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976 placed forests and the protection of wild animals and birds in the Concurrent List as entries 17A and 17B.
- Article 51A(g) makes it a fundamental duty to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.
- The Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution includes “cattle pounds; prevention of cruelty to animals” among municipal functions.

Mains: “Removing a species from legal protection does not remove the conflict it causes; it only changes who is responsible.” Discuss with reference to the rhesus macaque after the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022, and suggest an institutional framework for managing conflict with abundant wildlife in urban areas. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal change · Body — the institutional gap · Body — a framework · Conclusion

53. Delhi-NCR winter air pollution (2)

Lens: Development and environment · Centre and States. GS3 — Environmental pollution and degradation

Story so far — Haryana raised a 'Parali Protection Force' with FIRs and challans against farm fires. The Centre and Delhi fixed a permanent winter calendar from November 1 to February 28, with non-BS-VI entry curbs, 50% work from home and construction bans. On September 30 the Supreme Court rejected a total Deepavali cracker ban, backing CSIR-NEERI's joined green crackers within time windows still to be fixed.

25 Sep Haryana Raises a 'Parali Protection Force' and Adds FIR, Challan and Red Entry for Farm Fires

Groundwater depletion leads Punjab and Haryana to pass subsoil water laws in 2009 that delay paddy transplanting → the paddy harvest shifts later into October-November, squeezing the window before wheat sowing → combine harvesters leave loose straw that is costly to remove, so farmers burn it → the smoke adds to Delhi-NCR's winter pollution, drawing NGT orders, the CAQM Act of 2021 and environmental compensation → Haryana answers with a Parali Protection Force, drones, FIRs, challans and red entries alongside a ₹1,200-per-acre machinery incentive

- The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas was established by an Act of Parliament in 2021, replacing the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority.
- The jurisdiction of the Commission for Air Quality Management extends to the NCR and adjoining areas of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- The Graded Response Action Plan for Delhi-NCR is implemented in four stages linked to the air quality index: Poor (201-300), Very Poor (301-400), Severe (401-450) and Severe Plus (above 450).
- The Happy Seeder is a tractor-mounted machine that sows wheat directly into paddy stubble without the need to remove or burn the residue.
- The PUSA bio-decomposer, developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, is a microbial formulation that decomposes crop residue in the field.
- The Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009 and the Haryana Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009 prohibit the transplanting of paddy before notified dates to conserve groundwater.
- Environmental compensation for stubble burning is levied on the basis of the size of the farmer's landholding, applying the polluter-pays principle.

Mains: "Stubble burning in north-west India is an agricultural problem that has been treated as an enforcement problem." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent State measures, and suggest a balanced strategy combining deterrence, technology and crop diversification. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why farmers burn · Body — the enforcement approach and its limits · Body — a balanced strategy · Conclusion

29 Sep Delhi Fixes a Winter Pollution Calendar: Non-BS-VI Entry Curbs, 50% Work From Home and Construction Bans

Delhi's winter smog recurs every year as cold, still air traps local and regional emissions → responses stay episodic, with GRAP curbs imposed only after air turns 'poor' or worse → the Delhi government notifies year-round-calendar restrictions on June 23 → the Union Environment Minister's meeting on September 28 formalises them as a permanent winter plan from November 1 → the debate shifts to whether a city can fix air that is shaped by a whole airshed

- The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas is a statutory body constituted under an Act of Parliament passed in 2021, and its jurisdiction extends to adjoining areas of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- The Graded Response Action Plan has four stages linked to Air Quality Index bands, beginning at 'poor' air quality (AQI 201-300) and ending at 'severe plus' (AQI above 450).
- India adopted Bharat Stage VI emission norms nationwide from April 1, 2020, skipping Bharat Stage V.
- The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act was enacted in 1981, and the Central Pollution Control Board and State Pollution Control Boards exercise powers under it.
- The National Clean Air Programme, launched in 2019, covers non-attainment cities, defined as cities that do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards over a five-year period.
- The National Air Quality Index reports on eight pollutants, including PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, ammonia and lead.
- An airshed is an area in which air and the pollutants in it tend to mix and move together due to topography and meteorology, irrespective of administrative boundaries.

Mains: "Delhi's air pollution is a regional problem that is managed through city-level and episodic responses." Examine this statement in the light of the Delhi government's permanent winter action plan and the Graded Response Action Plan. What institutional changes would an airshed approach require? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — episodic versus planned · Body — the regional problem · Body — institutional changes · Conclusion

54. Shift to cleaner vehicles (2)

Lens: Development and environment · Market and State. GS3 — Pollution control and energy transition

Story so far — Delhi's EV Policy 2.0 will register only electric three-wheelers from 2027. Alternative fuels overtook petrol in new car sales in August 2026, led by CNG and hybrids, not EVs. The Centre then notified CAFE-III fleet fuel norms for 2027-32, tightening the average about 16.7%; each EV counts as three vehicles, but hybrids and flex-fuel cars also earn credits, which critics say may slow electrification.

18 Sep Delhi's EV Roadmap: Electric-Only Registrations for Three-Wheelers From 2027, Goods Carriers and Two-Wheelers to Follow

- The Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament in 2021, replacing the earlier Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority.
- In vehicle classification, L5 refers to three-wheeled passenger or goods vehicles and N1 to goods-carrying vehicles with gross vehicle weight not exceeding 3.5 tonnes.
- The Graded Response Action Plan for Delhi-NCR prescribes stage-wise restrictions triggered by Air Quality Index thresholds, and is invoked by CAQM.
- India's national EV framework includes the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020, the FAME schemes, and Production Linked Incentive schemes for advanced chemistry cell batteries and for automobiles and auto components.
- The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 provide the principal statutory basis for air pollution control in India; vehicular emission standards are notified as Bharat Stage norms under the Central Motor Vehicles Rules.

Mains: "An electric-only registration mandate is a stronger instrument than a purchase subsidy, but it succeeds only if charging infrastructure and regional coordination precede it." Critically examine with reference to Delhi's electric mobility roadmap.

Approach: Introduction — establish the evidentiary basis · Body 1 — set out the instrument mix · Body 2 — argue why mandates beat subsidies here · Body 3 — identify charging as the precondition · Body 4 — assess equity · Body 5 — argue for the airshed level · Conclusion — sequence determines success

22 Sep Alternative Fuels Overtake Petrol in New Car Sales, but CNG and Hybrids Lead, Not EVs

Subsidy schemes and fuel-price pressure push buyers away from petrol and diesel → three-wheelers, with high daily use, switch to EVs first and reach 60.5% EV share → two-wheeler EV share climbs to 9.1% → car buyers move mainly to CNG and LPG while EV and hybrid shares grow slowly → CNG, hybrid and EV together overtake petrol in August 2026 car sales, masking the slow electrification of cars

- Vahan is the national vehicle registration database of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, and Sarathi is the corresponding database for driving licences.
- A hybrid electric vehicle combines an internal combustion engine with a battery and electric motor, while a battery electric vehicle runs only on grid-charged batteries.
- Compressed natural gas, used in CNG vehicles, is a fossil fuel consisting mainly of methane.
- Bharat Stage VI emission norms were implemented nationwide from April 1, 2020, skipping Bharat Stage V.
- Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency norms are framed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- PM E-DRIVE, which succeeded FAME-II, supports the purchase of electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, buses and trucks and the creation of public charging infrastructure.

Mains: The August 2026 "fuel crossover", in which alternative-fuel cars outsold petrol cars for the first time, conceals uneven progress across vehicle segments. Critically analyse the pattern of India's transition away from petrol and diesel, and suggest a segment-wise policy for accelerating electric mobility. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — segment picture · Body — why the pattern · Body — segment-wise policy · Conclusion

55. Expanding nuclear power (2)

Lens: Development and environment · Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS3 — Energy; nuclear technology

Story so far — NPCIL began fuel loading at RAPP-8, a 700 MWe indigenous PHWR, as Anil Kakodkar urged thorium-HALEU fuel in PHWRs because fast breeders have slipped by decades. France's EDF then pitched European Pressurised Reactors to the Power Ministry as India finalises draft rules under the SHANTI Act.

21 Sep Kakodkar Urges Thorium-HALEU Fuel in PHWRs as NPCIL Begins Fuel Loading at RAPP-8

India has large thorium but little uranium → Bhabha's three-stage plan routes thorium through fast breeders → fast breeders slip by decades while uranium demand rises worldwide → PHWR fleet expands in 700 MWe units → Kakodkar proposes feeding thorium into PHWRs now rather than waiting for stage two

- Thorium-232 is a fertile material that is converted into fissile uranium-233 on absorbing a neutron; uranium-235 is the only naturally occurring fissile isotope.
- A pressurised heavy water reactor uses natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as moderator and coolant, and forms the first stage of India's three-stage nuclear power programme.
- The three-stage programme was conceived by Homi J. Bhabha in the 1950s; its second stage is based on fast breeder reactors and its third on the thorium-uranium-233 cycle.
- High-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU) is uranium enriched to between 5% and 20% uranium-235.
- The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board was constituted in 1983 under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and must authorise initial fuel loading and first criticality of a power reactor.
- The Rajasthan Atomic Power Project is at Rawatbhata; the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station is in Gujarat; the Kaiga Generating Station is in Karnataka; and the Kudankulam project is in Tamil Nadu.
- First Approach to Criticality is the stage at which a reactor first sustains a controlled fission chain reaction.

Mains: "India's three-stage nuclear programme was designed around the country's thorium reserves, but its timetable has been set by the slow progress of fast breeder reactors." In the light of recent proposals to introduce thorium-based fuel in pressurised heavy water reactors, critically examine the options before India for achieving long-term nuclear fuel security.

Approach: Introduction · Body — why the sequence is under strain · Body — the options · Body — the institutional side · Conclusion

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

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

- The SHANTI Act, 2025 repealed the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, and consolidated the law on nuclear energy and nuclear liability into a single statute.
- Under the SHANTI Act, companies incorporated in India, including joint ventures of government entities and private companies, may be licensed to build, own or operate nuclear power plants, while companies incorporated outside India are not eligible.
- The SHANTI Act gives statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, which was earlier constituted by an executive order under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962.
- Section 17(b) of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 gave the operator a right of recourse against a supplier for nuclear damage caused by equipment or material with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services.
- Under nuclear liability law, liability for nuclear damage is channelled to the operator of the installation on a no-fault basis, meaning the victim need not prove negligence.
- The Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC) was adopted under the International Atomic Energy Agency, and India ratified it in 2016.
- The European Pressurised Reactor (EPR) is a pressurised water reactor design using ordinary (light) water as coolant and moderator, unlike India's indigenous Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors that use natural uranium and heavy water.

Mains: "By replacing the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, the SHANTI Act has removed the principal legal obstacle to foreign participation in India's nuclear power programme, but not the economic ones." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent negotiations with foreign reactor vendors. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal obstacle removed · Body — the economic obstacles that remain · Body — the counter-view · Conclusion

56. Prescription-drug misuse at chemists (2)

Lens: Rule of law and discretion. GS2 — Health; drug regulation

Story so far — The Health Ministry drafted mandatory CCTV at chemists, with recordings kept for three months, to curb unauthorised sale of Schedule H, H1 and X drugs, especially to children. The CDSCO warned against self-medication with antibiotics and painkillers, citing kidney damage, and stressed that they be sold only on prescription.

22 Sep Health Ministry Drafts Mandatory CCTV at Chemists to Stop Prescription-Drug Sales to Children

Prescription-only schedules exist on paper under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 → over-the-counter sale without prescription remains common and inspections are infrequent → the 2019 AIIMS survey records opioid and inhalant use among children → CCTV surveillance first proposed in 2021 and approved by the Drugs Consultative Committee earlier this year → draft notification mandates cameras and three-month storage while chemists cite cost, connectivity and privacy

- Schedules H, H1 and X are part of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- Schedule H drugs can be sold by retail only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner.
- Schedule H1 imposes additional record-keeping on chemists and covers certain antibiotics, anti-TB drugs and habit-forming medicines.
- Schedule X covers narcotic and psychotropic medicines subject to the strictest controls on sale and storage.
- The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act was enacted in 1985, and the Narcotics Control Bureau was constituted in 1986.
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is the nodal ministry for drug demand reduction and runs the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan.
- The Supreme Court declared privacy a fundamental right under Article 21 in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017).

Mains: *Examine the proposal to mandate CCTV surveillance at medical stores to curb the sale of prescription drugs to minors. Is it a proportionate response to the problem of prescription drug abuse among children? Suggest complementary measures. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for · Body — the case against · Body — proportionality and complements · Conclusion

23 Sep CDSCO Circular Warns Against Self-Medication With Antibiotics and Painkillers, Citing Risk of Kidney Damage

Antibiotics and painkillers are placed on prescription-only schedules under the Drugs Rules → weak enforcement at lakhs of retail pharmacies and costly doctor visits make over-the-counter purchase routine → patients use antibiotics for viral illnesses and painkillers for long periods → the public health costs show up as drug-resistant infections and drug-induced kidney harm → CDSCO issues a circular on September 21 reminding the public and sellers of the prescription rule

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation is headed by the Drugs Controller General of India and functions under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Drugs listed in Schedule H of the Drugs Rules, 1945 may be sold at retail only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner.
- Schedule H1 covers certain higher-generation antibiotics, anti-tuberculosis drugs and habit-forming drugs, and requires chemists to maintain a separate register of their sale.
- Antibiotics act against bacteria and are not effective against viral infections.
- The WHO AWaRe classification groups antibiotics into Access, Watch and Reserve categories.
- India's first National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance was launched in 2017.
- Under the "Medicines with the Red Line" campaign, a vertical red line on a medicine's pack indicates that it should not be used without a doctor's prescription.

Mains: *Antimicrobial resistance in India is driven as much by the ease of buying antibiotics as by the lack of new ones. Discuss the regulatory and health-system reasons behind the misuse of antibiotics in India, and suggest a One Health strategy to contain antimicrobial resistance. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — regulatory causes · Body — health-system and social causes · Body — a One Health strategy · Conclusion

57. Narcotics: networks and diversion (2)

Lens: *Rule of law and discretion · Centre and States. GS3 — Organised crime and drug trafficking*

Story so far — Amit Shah set December 31, 2029 as the deadline to 'uproot' the drug trade, asking States to move from seizures to dismantling networks and from cases to convictions. After a national drug-coordination (NCORD) meeting, the CDSCO is reviewing gaps that let codeine syrups and other narcotic medicines leak out of the licensed supply chain.

23 Sep Shah Sets December 31, 2029 Deadline to 'Uproot' Drug Trade, Shifting Focus From Seizures to Networks

India sits between the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle, with long land and sea borders → trafficking grows into a cross-border, increasingly synthetic and digitally mediated trade → enforcement measured by seizures leaves cartels and their money intact → the Centre builds coordination through NCB, NCORD and State ANTFs and a demand-side campaign → at the third ANTF conference, Shah sets a December 31, 2029 deadline and a shift from seizures to networks, finance and convictions

- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to endeavour to prohibit the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health.
- The Narcotics Control Bureau was constituted in 1986 under Section 4(3) of the NDPS Act, 1985 and functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Golden Crescent comprises Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan; the Golden Triangle comprises Myanmar, Laos and Thailand.
- Chapter VA of the NDPS Act, 1985 provides for the forfeiture of property derived from illicit drug trafficking, and NDPS offences are scheduled offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
- Section 64A of the NDPS Act grants immunity from prosecution to an addict charged with possessing a small quantity of drugs who volunteers for de-addiction treatment.
- The Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan is implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- India is a party to the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1954, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971, and the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.

Mains: "India's counter-narcotics strategy must move from seizures to networks, and from cases to convictions." Examine this shift in approach. What legal, institutional and social measures are needed to make the goal of a drug-free India by 2029 credible? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why the shift · Body — legal and institutional measures · Body — social measures · Conclusion

28 Sep CDSCO Told to Close Gaps That Let Narcotic Medicines Leak Into Drug Markets, as Hospitals Face National Quality Grading

Legally made medicines containing narcotic and psychotropic substances pass through a licensing system split between the Centre and States → weak tracking of sales lets them leak into addiction markets while traffickers turn to darknet, crypto and drones → the Home Ministry's NCORD shifts strategy from seizures to networks and sets a 2026–2029 vision → CDSCO is given a March 2027 deadline and the DCC is asked to find the gaps → a parallel push by NITI Aayog seeks to make hospital quality measurable and public

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India, functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and derives its powers from the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- The Drugs Consultative Committee, constituted under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, advises the Centre, the States and the Drugs Technical Advisory Board on securing uniformity in the administration of the Act.
- Under the Drugs Rules, drugs listed in Schedule H1 may be sold only on prescription, and the chemist must maintain a separate register recording the prescriber, patient, drug and quantity.
- The Narcotics Control Bureau was constituted under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers is a constituent board of the Quality Council of India, and hospital accreditation by it is voluntary.
- The Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010, applies only in those States and Union Territories that have adopted it, since hospitals are a State List subject.
- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health.

Mains: "The diversion of pharmaceutical drugs into illicit markets and the lack of public data on hospital outcomes both reflect a regulatory system that licenses but does not monitor." Examine this statement and suggest reforms to India's drug and hospital regulation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the drug side · Body — the hospital side · Body — reforms · Conclusion

58. Medical devices: price and safety (2)

Lens: Market and State. GS2 — Health; regulation of medical devices

Story so far — Device makers want pricing rules separate from drugs, since MRPs on pacemakers and valves run 10–30 times cost under the drug-centric DPCO. The Centre is also considering amending the Medical Devices Rules, 2017 so regulators can halt sale and order destruction of unsafe, substandard or spurious devices rather than only suspend licences.

21 Sep Device Makers Seek Trade-Margin Caps as MRPs Run 10-30 Times Above Cost on Pacemakers and Valves

Devices regulated as drugs and priced under DPCO → hospitals choose devices on margin, not patient welfare → MRPs 10-30 times cost, importers set high MRPs → stent and knee-implant caps of 2017 show price control can work → industry proposes margin caps at the first point of sale

- The Medical Devices Rules, 2017, framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, came into force on 1 January 2018 and classify devices into risk classes A, B, C and D.
- The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority was set up in 1997 and functions under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- Paragraph 19 of the DPCO, 2013 empowers the government to fix prices of any drug in extraordinary circumstances in public interest.
- The NPPA fixed ceiling prices of coronary stents in February 2017 after their inclusion in the National List of Essential Medicines.
- Under the DPCO, the MRP of a non-scheduled formulation may ordinarily be increased by no more than 10% in a year.

Mains: *Examine why mark-ups on medical devices in India remain far above their cost despite existing price-control mechanisms. Evaluate a trade-margin-based approach to device pricing and its implications for patients and domestic manufacturers.*

Approach: Introduction · Body — why mark-ups persist · Body — the trade-margin approach · Body — implications · Conclusion

22 Sep Centre Moves to Let Regulators Halt Sale and Order Destruction of Unsafe Medical Devices

Medical devices long regulated loosely as a subset of drugs → Medical Devices Rules, 2017 create a risk-based licensing regime under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 → Rule 30(1) lets authorities act only against the licence, not the product → unsafe devices can stay in circulation after a licence action, with non-uniform action across States → Centre proposes explicit stop-sale and supervised-destruction powers, now before the Drugs Consultative Committee

- The Medical Devices Rules, 2017, framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, came into force on 1 January 2018.
- The Medical Devices Rules, 2017 classify devices into Classes A, B, C and D in ascending order of risk.
- Manufacturing licences for Class A and Class B medical devices are issued by the State Licensing Authority, and for Class C and Class D devices by the Central Licensing Authority.
- The Drugs Consultative Committee is constituted under Section 7 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 to advise on uniformity of administration across India.
- The Drugs Technical Advisory Board is constituted under Section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India, functions under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Mains: *“India regulates medical devices through a law written for drugs in 1940.” In the context of the proposed amendment to Rule 30(1) of the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, examine the gaps in India’s medical device regulation and suggest reforms to protect patient safety. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the present framework · Body — the gaps · Body — reforms · Conclusion

59. Cancer drug affordability (2)

Lens: Market and State · Growth and equity. GS2 — Health and access to medicines; GS3 — IPR

Story so far — The Supreme Court called a tenfold markup on a cancer drug — MRP ₹27,000 against ₹2,700 to retailers — ‘broad daylight dacoity’ and faulted silent regulators. The Kerala High Court then held the Centre may use Section 100 of the Patents Act for unaffordable patented breast-cancer drugs and directed it to collect nationwide affordability data.

23 Sep Supreme Court Calls Tenfold Markup on Cancer Drug ‘Broad Daylight Dacoity’, Faults Silent Regulators

Drug prices are regulated only for listed essential medicines, while companies fix MRPs freely on the rest → trade margins grow to many times the cost as a sales incentive for retailers and hospitals → the 2016 Pant committee recommends a 35-50% cap on all medicines and implants, which is not adopted → patients, especially cancer patients and admitted patients who cannot shop around, pay the printed MRP → the Supreme Court calls a tenfold markup “dacoity” and asks why regulators are silent

- The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued by the Union government under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Medicines listed in the National List of Essential Medicines are “scheduled formulations” under the DPCO, 2013, and their ceiling prices are fixed by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority.

- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, set up in 1997, is an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- Under the DPCO, 2013, a manufacturer may not raise the MRP of a non-scheduled formulation by more than 10% in a period of twelve months.
- Paragraph 19 of the DPCO, 2013 allows the government to fix or revise the price of any drug in extraordinary circumstances in public interest; it was used in 2019 to rationalise trade margins on anti-cancer medicines.
- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to regard the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- “Drugs and poisons” is Entry 19 of the Concurrent List, while “public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries” is Entry 6 of the State List.

Mains: “The maximum retail price has become a tool to cheat the helpless consumer.” In the light of recent judicial observations on the pricing of cancer medicines, examine the adequacy of India’s drug price control framework and suggest reforms to protect patients from excessive trade margins. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the framework · Body — the gaps · Body — reforms · Conclusion

29 Sep Kerala High Court: Centre May Invoke Patents Act Section 100 for Unaffordable Cancer Drugs

Patented targeted cancer drugs enter India at prices most patients cannot pay → generic alternatives exist only for an older drug, palbociclib → patients and activists approach the Kerala High Court → the court reads “government use” under Section 100 broadly to include unaffordability and orders nationwide data collection → the decision to invoke Section 100 now rests with the Centre, with no deadline

- Section 100 of the Patents Act, 1970 empowers the Central Government to use a patented invention for the purposes of government without the consent of the patent holder.
- Under Section 84 of the Patents Act, 1970, a compulsory licence may be sought after three years from the grant of a patent, including on the ground that the patented invention is not available to the public at a reasonably affordable price.
- India’s first compulsory licence was granted in 2012 to Natco Pharma for Bayer’s cancer drug sorafenib tosylate.
- Section 3(d) of the Patents Act bars patents on new forms of known substances that do not result in enhanced efficacy; the Supreme Court applied it in the Novartis (Glivec) case in 2013.
- Article 31 of the TRIPS Agreement permits use of a patent without the authorisation of the right holder, including use by the government, subject to conditions such as adequate remuneration.
- The Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health was adopted in 2001.
- The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and is enforced by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority.

Mains: “The Patents Act, 1970 contains adequate flexibilities to secure affordable medicines, but they are rarely used.” Critically examine this statement in the light of the Kerala High Court’s ruling on Section 100 and India’s TRIPS obligations. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the flexibilities · Body — why rarely used · Body — way forward · Conclusion

60. Front-of-pack food warnings (2)

Lens: Market and State. GS2 — Health; food regulation

Story so far — FSSAI told the Supreme Court it would bring red-hexagon warnings for high sugar, salt and fat in a single phase, needing about four months for draft rules and then a year for industry to comply. The Supreme Court rejected that pace and reserved orders to set a ‘reasonable timeline’, while the Madras High Court kept a micro/nano-plastics warning.

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

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

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 repealed the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 and consolidated several food laws and orders into a single statute.

- Labelling of pre-packaged food in India, including the nutrition information table, is governed by the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020, framed by FSSAI under the FSS Act.
- Chile's food labelling law, enacted in 2012 and implemented from 2016, requires black octagonal 'high in' warning labels, whereas Nutri-Score and the Health Star Rating are summary rating systems that grade the whole product.
- The World Health Organization recommends that intake of free sugars be reduced to less than 10% of total energy intake, and that adults consume less than 5 g of salt a day.
- Article 47 of the Constitution, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improving public health as among its primary duties.
- The National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, is an institute of the Indian Council of Medical Research.

Mains: "Front-of-pack warning labels are a low-cost tool against non-communicable diseases, yet India has debated them for over a decade." Examine the design choices in FSSAI's proposed front-of-pack labelling and discuss the challenges in making it effective for Indian consumers. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — design choices · Body — challenges · Body — way forward · Conclusion

29 Sep Supreme Court Rejects FSSAI's Front-of-Pack Warning Timeline; Madras High Court Keeps the Micro/Nano-Plastics Warning

Rising consumption of packaged foods high in sugar, salt and fat adds to India's non-communicable disease burden → FSSAI begins a front-of-pack exercise in 2022 around a star rating, which stalls → a PIL seeks warning labels and the Supreme Court orders progress on September 10 → FSSAI proposes notification by July 1 next year plus a 365-day transition → the Bench calls the timeline unreasonable and reserves an order that will bind the regulator

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, and functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Section 23 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 deals with the packaging and labelling of food.
- The Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations were notified in 2020.
- HFSS foods are foods high in fat, salt and sugar.
- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improving public health among its primary duties.
- In Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996), the Supreme Court held that the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle are part of the law of the land.
- Microplastics are generally defined as plastic particles smaller than 5 millimetres in size.

Mains: Front-of-pack warning labels on packaged foods have been under consideration in India since 2022. Discuss why the regulatory process has been slow and examine the role of the judiciary in pushing food regulation. What design would best serve Indian consumers? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why it has been slow · Body — role of courts · Body — best design · Conclusion

61. FSSAI and misleading food claims (2)

Lens: Market and State. GS2 — Health; food safety regulation

Story so far — FSSAI filed three adjudication cases against Nestlé India over infant-formula claims on e-commerce listings, such as '5 HMOs', and a biotin finding. It has also drafted a rule barring non-dairy 'analogue' products from being sold under the name paneer, to stop consumers being misled.

19 Sep FSSAI Files Three Adjudication Cases Against Nestlé India Over Infant Formula Claims and Biotin Content

Infant formula sells increasingly through e-commerce → marketing claims migrate from the tin's label, which an FSSAI expert committee clears in advance, to product pages and promotional material that nobody clears in advance → FSSAI examines those listings for NAN Excella Pro Stage 1 and Lactogen Pro 1 → finds the "5 HMOs" and easy-to-digest whey protein claims outside Regulation 4(2) of the 2020 infant nutrition regulations → three cases filed for adjudication, with a separate substandard-biotin finding in a follow-up formula confirmed on referral analysis

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; it consists of a Chairperson and twenty-two members, with a Chief Executive Officer as its administrative head.
- The FSS Act, 2006 consolidated earlier food laws including the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 and the control orders relating to milk and milk products, meat food products, vegetable oil products and fruit products.

- Under the FSS Act, the penalty for substandard food may extend to ₹5 lakh under Section 51 and for a misleading advertisement to ₹10 lakh under Section 53; such penalties are imposed by an adjudicating officer not below the rank of Additional District Magistrate.
- An appeal against an order of the adjudicating officer under the FSS Act lies to the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal.
- The Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2020 govern infant formula and follow-up formula; Regulation 4(2) restricts promotional claims or material intended to increase the saleability of infant foods.
- Section 3 of the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 prohibits the advertisement and promotion of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods; the Act is administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- The WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1981, and the Codex Alimentarius Commission, established in 1963 as a joint FAO-WHO body, frames international food standards including those for infant formula.

Mains: *Regulatory approval of a product's label is not the same as regulatory control of its marketing. Discuss this proposition with reference to India's legal framework for infant nutrition products, and examine whether India's food safety enforcement architecture is adequate for a market in which promotion has shifted to digital platforms. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — set out the gap precisely · Body — explain why this market is treated differently from other food · Body — assess enforcement capacity honestly, including the counter-argument · Conclusion

25 Sep FSSAI Drafts Rule Barring Non-Dairy 'Analogue' Products From Being Sold Under the Name Paneer

Milk fat is costly while vegetable fat is cheap → firms make paneer-like products with vegetable oils and proteins, some licensed as dairy analogues → the product is sold loose or plated as "paneer", where the buyer cannot tell the difference → social media alarm over "fake paneer" turns a labelling gap into a public trust issue → FSSAI drafts a rule barring the word paneer for any product not derived from milk, open for comment for 60 days

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is established under Section 4 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 repealed the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, among other food laws and orders.
- Under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, the Food Authority consists of a Chairperson and 22 members, one-third of whom shall be women.
- The compositional standards for dairy products such as paneer are prescribed in the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011.
- The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 treats misbranded food and sub-standard food as separate contraventions from unsafe food, with unsafe food alone attracting imprisonment under Section 59.
- Every State appoints a Commissioner of Food Safety under Section 30 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 for efficient implementation of the Act.
- Appeals against orders of the Adjudicating Officer under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 lie to the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal.

Mains: *"Food fraud in India is less a problem of missing standards than of weak enforcement at the point of sale." Discuss with reference to FSSAI's draft amendment on analogue paneer, and suggest measures to strengthen the food safety enforcement machinery. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the standards already exist · Body — where enforcement fails · Body — measures · Conclusion

62. FCRA Amendment Bill (2)

Lens: Liberty and order · Independence and accountability. GS2 — Role of NGOs and civil society; parliamentary committees

Story so far — A Joint Parliamentary Committee is examining the FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026, which lets a new 'designated authority' take over assets built with foreign contribution when a licence lapses, with no deadline or prior hearing — raising an Article 300A question. Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court held that cancellation of CHRI's FCRA registration does not mean the organisation ceases to function.

18 Sep FCRA Amendment Bill Before a Joint Committee, While Courts Push Back on How the Existing Law Is Used

Certificate lapses or renewal refused → Designated Authority takes control of foreign contribution and assets → organisation cannot use its own corpus → no statutory appeal against refusal of renewal → the regulator's administrative decision, not a court, effectively ends the organisation.

- FCRA, 2010 is administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs; the designated FCRA bank account must be with the State Bank of India, New Delhi Main Branch, following the 2020 amendment.
- The 2020 amendment prohibits transfer of foreign contribution to any other person and caps administrative expenses at 20% of foreign contribution received.
- Election candidates, judges, government servants, members of legislature and correspondents/editors of registered newspapers are barred from accepting foreign contribution under FCRA.
- A Joint Parliamentary Committee is constituted by a motion adopted in one House and concurred in by the other; its members are drawn from both Houses, with Lok Sabha members typically twice the number from Rajya Sabha.
- Foreign contribution under FCRA is distinct from foreign investment, which is regulated under FEMA, 1999 administered by the Ministry of Finance and the RBI.

Mains: "The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 reduces the criminal penalty while sharply increasing the institutional consequence of losing FCRA status." Critically examine this shift, and discuss the balance between regulating foreign funding and protecting the freedom of association.

Approach: Introduction — name the shift precisely · Body 1 — set out the Bill's architecture · Body 2 — argue the proportionality problem · Body 3 — give the state's case fully · Body 4 — bring in the judicial counterweight · Conclusion — propose the minimum fix

19 Sep FCRA Amendment Bill Before the Joint Committee — Who Takes the Assets, and After Whose Hearing?

Licence lapses → assets vest provisionally in a designated authority → no deadline, no prior hearing → Article 300A challenge → constitutional question returns to the JPC

- FCRA was first enacted in 1976; the Act in force is the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 25 March 2026 and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee on 12 August 2026.
- Article 300A — no person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law; inserted by the Constitution (Forty-fourth Amendment) Act, which removed property from the list of Fundamental Rights.
- Under the existing framework, the 'prescribed authority' notified on 5 November 2018 is the Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary (Home) of the State or Union Territory concerned.
- Proceeds from the sale of vested assets are to be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Before 1976, foreign-funded organisations were governed by the Societies Registration Act, the Indian Trusts Act and the Companies Act, with no centralised monitoring mechanism.

Mains: "The regulation of foreign contributions to voluntary organisations must balance national security with the constitutional space for civil society. Critically examine the safeguards that a law providing for the vesting of foreign-funded assets should contain."

Approach: Open with the constitutional location of the problem · State the legitimate objective before the criticism · Name the four safeguards a fair vesting provision needs · Use the committee stage as evidence that the system works · Conclude on proportionality, not on preference

63. Ladakh's constitutional safeguards (2)

Lens: Centre and States · Liberty and order. GS2 — Special provisions and Union Territories

Story so far — The Centre has proposed a new Article 371K giving Ladakh a directly elected UT-level body with legislative and financial powers, after an understanding with the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance. A year after four people died in police firing in Leh during protests for Statehood and Sixth Schedule status, Sonam Wangchuk demands the inquiry report and compensation.

22 Sep Centre Proposes Article 371K Giving Ladakh a Directly Elected Body With Legislative and Financial Powers

J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 makes Ladakh a UT without a legislature → hill councils in Leh and Kargil lose influence and fear for land, jobs and culture → ABL and KDA negotiate with the MHA for constitutional safeguards → Centre reaches an in-principle understanding on an elected UT-level body → proposal to insert Article 371K, whose content will decide how much autonomy Ladakh gets

- Article 371A, inserted by the 13th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1962, provides that Acts of Parliament on Naga religious or social practices, customary law and ownership and transfer of land do not apply to Nagaland unless the State Assembly so decides by resolution.
- Article 371G, inserted by the 53rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1986, gives Mizoram protections for religious and social practices, customary law and land similar to those of Nagaland.

- Article 371H gives the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh special responsibility with respect to law and order in the State.
- Article 371F was inserted by the 36th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1975, when Sikkim became a State of the Indian Union.
- The original Article 371 placed the governments of Part B States under the general control of the President and was replaced after the Seventh Constitutional Amendment Act, 1956.
- Under Article 240, the President may make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of specified Union Territories, and such regulations may repeal or amend an Act of Parliament applicable to that territory.
- Articles 371 to 371J fall in Part XXI of the Constitution, which deals with temporary, transitional and special provisions.

Mains: “Article 371 shows that the Indian Constitution treats asymmetry as a tool of integration, not a threat to it.” Discuss with reference to existing special provisions and the proposed Article 371K for Ladakh. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the evolution of Article 371 · Body — how 371K differs · Body — concerns and safeguards · Conclusion

28 Sep A Year After the Leh Firing, Sonam Wangchuk Demands the Justice Chauhan Inquiry Report and ₹1 Crore Compensation

Ladakh becomes a Union Territory without a legislature in 2019, and fears over land, jobs and identity grow → a movement for Statehood and Sixth Schedule protection builds, with Sonam Wangchuk as its best-known face → on September 24, 2025, protests in Leh turn violent and police firing kills four → Mr. Wangchuk is detained under the NSA and a judicial inquiry under Justice B.S. Chauhan is set up → the detention is revoked in March 2026, but a year on the report is unpublished, compensation is disputed and most accused still face trial

- Under the National Security Act, 1980, the maximum period of detention is twelve months from the date of detention.
- Under Article 22(4) of the Constitution, no law providing for preventive detention can authorise detention beyond three months unless an Advisory Board reports sufficient cause.
- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution applies to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- Ladakh became a Union Territory without a legislature on October 31, 2019 under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.
- Under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, the findings of a commission of inquiry are recommendatory and not binding on the government.
- An Advisory Board under the National Security Act consists of three persons who are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as, judges of a High Court.
- Articles 244(2) and 275(1) of the Constitution give effect to the Sixth Schedule.

Mains: “Preventive detention and the use of force against protesters test the balance between public order and civil liberties.” Examine this statement with reference to the events in Ladakh since September 2025, and suggest how accountability can be strengthened without compromising security. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — preventive detention · Body — use of force · Body — strengthening accountability · Conclusion

64. IRDAI insurance commission caps (2)

Lens: Market and State. GS3 — Insurance sector and regulation

Story so far — IRDAI proposed replacing a single commission cap with product- and channel-wise limits and a glide path to lower expense limits, with comments due by October 25. Its chairman expects insurers to pass savings to policyholders and says the caps could start in January or April 2027; distributor stocks fell up to 36%.

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

Until 2015 the Insurance Act itself capped commission, and the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Act, 2015 moves commission and expense limits into IRDAI regulations → in 2023 IRDAI replaces product-wise caps with an overall expense ceiling and lets insurers' boards set commission within it → the regulator judges that distribution and operating costs remain too high for the value policyholders receive → the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Act, 2025 expressly empowers IRDAI to specify limits on commission → IRDAI proposes product- and channel-wise caps and a glide path to lower expense limits, with comments due by October 25

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India was established under the IRDA Act, 1999, on the recommendation of the Malhotra Committee, and is headquartered in Hyderabad.
- Under the IRDA Act, 1999, IRDAI consists of a Chairperson, not more than five whole-time members and not more than four part-time members, appointed by the Central Government.
- Section 40 of the Insurance Act, 1938 prohibits payment of commission for soliciting or procuring insurance business to anyone other than an insurance agent or intermediary.

- The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025 raised the FDI limit in Indian insurance companies from 74% to 100% of paid-up equity capital.
- Insurance penetration is premium as a percentage of GDP, while insurance density is premium per capita.
- An insurance broker represents the policyholder, whereas an insurance agent represents the insurer.
- The Insurance Ombudsman functions under the Insurance Ombudsman Rules, 2017, framed by the Central Government.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — why caps now · Body — the risks · Body — safeguards · Conclusion

28 Sep IRDAI Chairman Says Commission Caps Could Start January or April 2027; Distributor Stocks Fall Up to 36%

Insurance penetration stays low and insurers compete for distribution → IRDAI's 2023 rules remove product-wise commission caps and leave payouts to board policy within an overall expense ceiling → commissions grow four to five times faster than premiums and expense ratios climb back above earlier levels → complaints of mis-selling and bundling rise → the September 23 paper proposes new caps and a public registry, and distributor shares fall sharply

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India is a statutory body established under the IRDA Act, 1999, on the recommendation of the Malhotra Committee.
- Section 40 of the Insurance Act, 1938 prohibits payment of commission for soliciting insurance business to any person other than a licensed agent or intermediary.
- Expenses of management of an insurer include commissions and operating expenses, and their limits are governed by Sections 40B and 40C of the Insurance Act, 1938 read with IRDAI regulations.
- Bancassurance refers to the distribution of insurance products by banks, usually acting as corporate agents of insurers.
- An insurance broker represents the customer and can place business with multiple insurers, whereas a corporate agent sells only the products of the insurers with which it has a tie-up.
- Persistency ratio measures the proportion of policies that remain in force, with premiums paid, after a given period from the date of sale.

Mains: "High distribution costs, not low incomes alone, explain India's low insurance penetration." Examine this statement in the light of IRDAI's September 2026 consultation paper on commissions and expenses of management. What safeguards are needed to ensure that the benefits reach policyholders? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — evidence of high distribution costs · Body — the proposals · Body — counter-arguments and safeguards · Conclusion

65. Rupee trade and SWIFT alternatives (2)

Lens: Strategic autonomy and partnership. GS3 — External sector and payments; GS2 — Groupings

Story so far — As sanctions turn the dollar into a weapon, alternatives to SWIFT such as CIPS, SPFS and mBridge are growing; BRICS resolved to trade more in national currencies, and India settles Russia trade in rupees. The UAE has signalled another \$25 billion of investment in India as rupee-dirham settlement reaches double digits.

25 Sep Beyond SWIFT: CIPS, SPFS and mBridge Grow While India Settles Russia Trade in Rupees

The dollar and SWIFT become the default channels of world trade → Western sanctions on Iran (2012) and Russia (2014, 2022) show that access can be withdrawn → Russia builds SPFS, China launches CIPS (2015) and central banks test mBridge for CBDC settlement → India begins settling Russia trade in rupees through vostro accounts, which now cover 96% of that trade → BRICS in New Delhi backs national-currency settlement but stops short of linking CBDCs

- SWIFT is a financial messaging network headquartered in Belgium; it transmits payment instructions but does not itself hold accounts or settle funds.
- The Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) is backed by the People's Bank of China and was launched in 2015 to support settlement in the renminbi.
- Russia's System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) was developed in 2014 as an alternative to SWIFT.
- Project mBridge is a multi-CBDC platform for cross-border payments; the Bank for International Settlements exited the project on October 31, 2024.
- The Special Drawing Right basket consists of the U.S. dollar, euro, Chinese renminbi, Japanese yen and pound sterling; the renminbi was added in 2016.

- Under the RBI's 2022 framework for trade settlement in rupees, partner-country banks hold Special Rupee Vostro Accounts with Indian authorised dealer banks.
- The legal basis for the RBI's digital rupee was created by amending the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 through the Finance Act, 2022.

Mains: "Alternatives to SWIFT are growing, but they represent the fragmentation of the global payment system rather than the end of dollar dominance." Discuss with reference to CIPS, SPFS and mBridge. What approach should India adopt to protect its trade from financial sanctions while preserving its strategic autonomy? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the alternatives · Body — fragmentation, not replacement · Body — India's approach · Conclusion

29 Sep UAE Signals Another \$25 Billion for India as Rupee–Dirham Settlement Reaches Double Digits

India and the UAE sign CEPA in 2022 and a Bilateral Investment Treaty in 2024 → a local-currency settlement framework lets traders bypass the dollar → the West Asia war disrupts Hormuz and bilateral trade dips → the rupee–dirham share of trade reaches double digits and trade returns close to pre-war levels → the UAE signals another \$25 billion, with a \$100 billion target, and cooperation widens to ports, shipbuilding and space

- The India–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement was signed in February 2022 and entered into force on 1 May 2022.
- In July 2023, the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of the UAE signed an MoU on a Local Currency Settlement System for the rupee and the dirham.
- I2U2 is a grouping of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.
- The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor was announced through an MoU signed on the sidelines of the G20 New Delhi summit in September 2023.
- Special Rupee Vostro Accounts, permitted by the RBI in 2022, allow international trade to be invoiced and settled in Indian rupees.
- The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority is a sovereign wealth fund of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.
- India and the UAE elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2017.

Mains: "India's partnership with the UAE has moved from oil and remittances to capital, currency and connectivity." Examine this statement and assess its significance for India's economic security amid disruption in West Asia. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — capital · Body — currency · Body — connectivity and security · Conclusion

66. BRICS after the Delhi summit (2)

Lens: National interest and global commons. GS2 — Regional and global groupings involving India

Story so far — India hosted the 18th BRICS summit in New Delhi on September 12–13, forging consensus among 11 members, including the UAE and Iran, for the Delhi Declaration. Commentators call BRICS a 'plausible multilateralism' that keeps India and China engaged. India now leads two new BRICS tax working groups and will pilot a BRICS mental-health network with NIMHANS as coordinator.

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

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

- The New Development Bank was set up under an agreement signed at the BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014, and is headquartered in Shanghai.
- Each founding member of the New Development Bank holds an equal share of its subscribed capital and therefore equal voting power.
- The BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement is a \$100 billion framework of currency-swap commitments, most of whose drawings are linked to an IMF programme.
- Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates joined BRICS as members from January 2024, and Indonesia joined in January 2025.
- An Advance Pricing Agreement fixes in advance the method of determining the arm's length price of international transactions between associated enterprises for a specified period.
- The Mutual Agreement Procedure in tax treaties allows the competent authorities of two countries to resolve disputes over taxation not in accordance with the treaty, including double taxation.

- Pillar Two of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework sets a global minimum effective tax rate of 15% for multinational groups with annual revenue of at least €750 million.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — strategic value · Body — institutional value · Body — limits · Conclusion

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

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

- Section 18 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 confers on every person the right to access mental healthcare and treatment from mental health services run or funded by the appropriate government.
- Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides that a person who attempts suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished.
- The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides for advance directives and nominated representatives for persons with mental illness.
- The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences, Bengaluru was declared an Institute of National Importance by an Act of Parliament in 2012.
- Tele-MANAS, the National Tele Mental Health Programme, is accessible through the toll-free number 14416, with NIMHANS as its nodal centre.
- The National Mental Health Programme was launched in 1982, and its District Mental Health Programme component in 1996.
- Task-sharing in mental health refers to training non-specialist health workers to identify, support and refer persons with common mental disorders.

Mains: "India's mental-health challenge is less about the absence of law than about the absence of services close to where people live." In the light of this statement, discuss how task-sharing, tele-mental health and international cooperation such as the BRICS Network of Centres of Excellence can help close India's mental-health treatment gap. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework is already strong · Body — closing the service gap · Body — what BRICS cooperation adds · Conclusion

One-off stories (77)

17 Sep Jhiram Valley Attack — All 10 Convicts Get Death Penalty, 13 Years On

- The Jhiram Valley attack occurred May 25, 2013, killing 27 people including senior Congress leaders Vidya Charan Shukla, Nand Kumar Patel and Mahendra Karma; the NIA special court in Jagdalpur delivered its verdict awarding death penalty to all 10 convicts after a 13-year trial; three top Maoist leaders remain wanted.

Mains: "A conclusive verdict against the operational perpetrators of an insurgent attack does not, by itself, establish accountability for the leadership that planned and directed it." Discuss with reference to the Jhiram Valley verdict, and examine what additional tools the state needs to address this leadership-accountability gap.

17 Sep Government Tells Delhi HC: Same-Sex Partner Can Be Nominated for Medical Decisions

- The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 allows a patient to nominate 'any person' as their representative for treatment decisions; the petitioner in this case has been in a relationship with her partner since 2015 and married her in New Zealand in 2023; the government's submission was made through the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the National Medical Commission.

Mains: "Even a principled legal argument advanced by the government in an individual court case can extend meaningful rights, without requiring the more politically difficult step of standalone legislation." Discuss with reference to the government's submission on same-sex partners' medical-decision rights, and evaluate the limitations of rights secured through litigation rather than codified law.

17 Sep 'Academic Freedom Severely Restricted' Under Current Government, International Index Finds

- The Scholars at Risk 'Free to Think 2026' report documents 382 attacks from 321 verified incidents across 59 countries/territories, July 2025-June 2026; India's Academic Freedom Index (AFI) fell from 0.41 in 2015 to 0.14 in 2026 (scale 0 to 1, both readings in the 'severely restricted' category); India recorded the highest number of attacks among all countries surveyed, ahead of China (AFI 0.07) and Afghanistan (AFI 0.09), though India's AFI score itself remains above both.

Mains: "A country recording the highest number of academic-freedom violations in absolute terms is not necessarily the country with the worst academic-freedom environment overall." Discuss this distinction with reference to India's standing in the Scholars at Risk 'Free to Think 2026' report, while critically examining the ten-year decline in India's Academic Freedom Index.

17 Sep 'India Has a Research Blindspot: Its Own Science System' — the Case for Metascience

- Indian publications addressing metascience or closely related questions accounted for only about 1-2% of global research output on the subject between 1950-2024, with total Indian output not exceeding roughly a hundred publications over the entire seven-decade period; the reference US report is titled 'Science: A New Golden Age,' released by the US Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), positioned as a sequel to Vannevar Bush's 1945 'Science: The Endless Frontier.'

Mains: "India needs to invest not only in scientific research, but in the institutional capacity to study how its own science system actually functions." Critically examine this argument for a dedicated Indian 'metascience' capacity, and discuss its implications for how India balances mission-oriented and curiosity-driven research funding.

18 Sep PAC Pulls Up Railways Over Passenger Amenities Despite CAG Findings Since 2007

- The CAG is appointed under Article 148; audit reports on Union accounts are laid before Parliament under Article 151. The CAG's duties and powers are governed by the CAG (Duties, Powers and Conditions of Service) Act, 1971.
- The Public Accounts Committee has 22 members — 15 Lok Sabha and 7 Rajya Sabha — elected annually by proportional representation using the single transferable vote; Ministers cannot be members.
- The PAC's chief function is to examine CAG audit reports; by convention its Chairperson is appointed from the Opposition.
- The three financial committees of Parliament are the Public Accounts Committee, the Estimates Committee (30 members, all from Lok Sabha) and the Committee on Public Undertakings (22 members).
- The CAG has been described as one of the 'bulwarks of the democratic system' by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar; the office can be removed only in the manner prescribed for a Supreme Court judge.

Mains: "The recurrence of identical audit findings across two decades suggests that India's parliamentary financial oversight is strong at detection but weak at enforcement." Examine with reference to the functioning of the Public Accounts Committee, and suggest reforms.

Approach: Introduction — describe the accountability chain · Body 1 — use the evidence of repetition · Body 2 — explain why detection does not force correction · Body 3 — identify the metric problem · Body 4 — propose enforceable reforms · Conclusion — accountability needs consequence

18 Sep International Criminal Accountability: Kosovo's Thaçi Convicted, UN Experts Cite Possible US and Iranian War Crimes

- The International Criminal Court was established by the Rome Statute, 1998, and has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression; India, the United States and China are not parties to the Statute.
- The UN Human Rights Council is a 47-member body established by the General Assembly in 2006, replacing the Commission on Human Rights; members are elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms.
- The International Court of Justice settles disputes between states and gives advisory opinions; it does not try individuals. The ICC tries individuals.
- Crimes against humanity require a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population and do not require an armed conflict; war crimes are serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in armed conflict.
- India does not recognise Kosovo, which declared independence from Serbia in 2008; Kosovo is not a member state of the United Nations.

Mains: "International criminal accountability reaches the leaders of weak states far more reliably than the forces of powerful ones." Critically examine this proposition with reference to recent developments, and discuss India's position on international criminal jurisdiction.

Approach: Introduction — place the two developments side by side · Body 1 — explain the institutional architecture · Body 2 — make the case for selectivity · Body 3 — make the case against dismissing the system · Body 4 — state India's position and assess it · Conclusion — incremental, unequal, but not empty

18 Sep Centre Restricts Stem Cell Therapy for Autism to Approved Clinical Trials

- The National Guidelines for Stem Cell Research, 2017 were issued jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Department of Biotechnology.
- The Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010 applies to States that adopt it by resolution under Article 252 and to Union Territories; it provides for registration, minimum standards, and penalties including cancellation of registration.
- Public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries fall under Entry 6 of the State List; population control and family planning, and medical education, are in the Concurrent List.
- The National Medical Commission Act, 2019 replaced the Medical Council of India; the NMC has autonomous boards including the Ethics and Medical Registration Board.
- Haematopoietic stem cell transplantation is an established therapy for certain blood disorders and cancers; most other stem cell applications remain investigational.

Mains: "The market for unproven medical treatments grows fastest where a condition is serious, chronic and has no established cure." Critically examine India's regulatory response to stem cell therapy being offered for autism, and suggest measures to address both supply and demand.

Approach: Introduction — locate the regulatory unit · Body 1 — explain why the market exists · Body 2 — describe the enforcement architecture · Body 3 — identify the federal gap · Body 4 — address the demand side · Body 5 — defend the trial-only route · Conclusion — regulate supply, but answer demand

18 Sep EAC-PM Paper Calls for Abandoning Population Control as an Objective of State Policy

TFR falls to 1.6, below replacement → but incentives, awards, observances and two-child disqualifications still push fertility down → social norms shift further and become self-reinforcing → fertility falls into a range from which no country has recovered → a rapidly ageing population with a shrinking workforce → a policy designed for 1970s conditions produces a problem India has never faced.

- Total fertility rate is the average number of children born to a woman over her reproductive life at current age-specific fertility rates; replacement level fertility is approximately 2.1 in low-mortality populations.
- India launched the world's first national family planning programme in 1952; the National Population Policy, 2000 adopted a target-free, voluntary approach with replacement-level fertility as its medium-term objective.
- Population momentum causes total population to keep growing for decades after fertility falls below replacement, because of the age structure of the population.
- The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister is a non-constitutional, non-statutory advisory body; NITI Aayog is likewise an executive body created by a Cabinet resolution in 2015.
- Population control and family planning is in the Concurrent List (Entry 20-A, List III), inserted by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
- The National Family Health Survey is the principal source of TFR estimates in India, conducted by the International Institute for Population Sciences under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Mains: "India's family planning architecture was built for a fertility rate the country crossed years ago; continuing it now creates the risk it was designed to prevent." Critically examine, with reference to recent recommendations on population policy.

Approach: Introduction — establish the demographic fact first · Body 1 — explain the irreversibility argument · Body 2 — describe what is actually recommended · Body 3 — make the rights argument · Body 4 — address regional divergence and federalism · Body 5 — answer the counter-argument · Conclusion — shift from quantity to capability

18 Sep Declared Dead, 2,487 Odisha Construction Workers Return to Collect Their Ration

- The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 provides for registration and welfare of construction workers; the companion Welfare Cess Act, 1996 levies a cess of 1% of the cost of construction incurred by an employer.
- Registration under the BOCW Act requires a worker to be between 18 and 60 years of age and to have worked at least 90 days in the preceding twelve months.
- Welfare benefits are disbursed by State Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Boards from the dedicated cess fund.
- Births and deaths are registered under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969; the Registrar General of India coordinates civil registration, with Chief Registrars in each State.
- The National Food Security Act, 2013 provides subsidised foodgrain to up to 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population; Antyodaya Anna Yojana households receive 35 kg per household per month.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General conducts compliance, financial and performance audits; information system audits examine the reliability of computerised systems and their controls.

Mains: "Digitisation of welfare has made fraud detectable without making it preventable." Critically examine with reference to recent audit findings on construction workers' welfare schemes, and suggest controls.

Approach: Introduction — state what was found · Body 1 — explain the scheme architecture · Body 2 — analyse why digitisation detected but did not prevent · Body 3 — identify the single point of failure · Body 4 — connect under-spending to fraudulent spending · Body 5 — propose preventive controls · Conclusion — controls must run at transaction speed

19 Sep India's First District-Level Unemployment Map — and What It Shows About Young People Not in Work or Education

Revised PLFS sampling from January 2025 → sample large enough for district estimates → first district-level map → low unemployment coexists with high NEET → the real problem is named differently

- The Periodic Labour Force Survey is conducted by the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; it was launched in 2017-18.
- PLFS reports estimates on the usual status, with a reference period of 365 days, and the current weekly status, with a reference period of seven days.
- The unemployment rate is expressed as a percentage of persons in the labour force, not of the total population; the labour force participation rate is expressed as a percentage of the population.
- 'NEET' in labour statistics denotes young persons aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education or training.
- District-level PLFS estimates were made possible by a revised sampling design adopted from January 2025.
- Sustainable Development Goal 8 concerns decent work and economic growth, and includes the youth NEET rate among its indicators.

Mains: "A falling unemployment rate can conceal a worsening employment situation. Examine this proposition using recent district-level labour force data."

Approach: Define the three ratios precisely in the introduction · Prove the proposition with the district contrast · Introduce NEET as the corrective measure · Draw the policy implication at district level · Close on data as an instrument of accountability

19 Sep Three ISA Contracts, 366 Million Tonnes of Nodules, and the Case Against Mining Them

UNCLOS declares the international seabed the common heritage of mankind → the ISA licenses exploration and India takes three contracts over 95,000 sq km → the Deep Ocean Mission builds submersibles and a miner tested at 5,270 m → the same surveys turn up nearly 23 species new to science → capability arrives before the ecosystem is understood → the demand shifts from mining carefully to deciding whether to mine

- The Area, under Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, is the seabed and ocean floor and its subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and it and its resources are the common heritage of mankind; no State may claim sovereignty over any part of it.
- The International Seabed Authority was established under UNCLOS read with the 1994 Implementation Agreement, is headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica, and has an Assembly, a Council, a Secretariat and the Enterprise; Article 145 charges it with protecting the marine environment from activities in the Area.
- ISA exploration regulations exist for three resource categories — polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts; the exploitation regulations, known as the Mining Code, are still under negotiation.

- India holds three ISA exploration contracts covering approximately 95,000 square kilometres in the Central Indian Ocean Basin, the Central Indian Ridge and the Carlsberg Ridge.
- The Deep Ocean Mission is implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences, with the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai as the lead technical agency; Samudrayaan is its crewed submersible programme and MATSYA-6000 is designed to carry three persons to about 6,000 metres depth.
- Under the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and other Maritime Zones Act, 1976, India's territorial sea extends to 12 nautical miles, the contiguous zone to 24 and the exclusive economic zone to 200 nautical miles from the baseline; the Area lies beyond national jurisdiction altogether.
- The precautionary principle and the polluter-pays principle were held to be part of the law of India in Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India, 1996; Article 48A is a Directive Principle and Article 51A(g) a Fundamental Duty relating to the environment.

Mains: "Technological capability to exploit a resource is not, by itself, a justification for exploiting it." Examine this proposition with reference to India's deep-sea exploration programme and the international regime governing the seabed beyond national jurisdiction. (250 words, 15 marks)

Approach: Introduction · Body — establish the capability honestly · Body — set out the scientific uncertainty as evidence, not as sentiment · Body — locate the argument in law and in institutions · Conclusion

19 Sep Two Caesarean Deaths in Bundi Take Rajasthan to Nineteen Maternal Deaths in Three Months

Institutional delivery rises and caesarean volumes rise with it → district hospitals perform more surgery than their infection control and monitoring capacity supports → clusters of post-caesarean deaths appear across districts → each is investigated separately and no common cause is established → a theatre is sealed and a doctor is relieved of duty → the system-level defect remains unnamed

- The maternal mortality ratio is the number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births, and is estimated in India by the Sample Registration System of the Office of the Registrar General of India.
- A maternal death is defined as the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, excluding accidental or incidental causes.
- Sustainable Development Goal target 3.1 seeks to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per one lakh live births by 2030.
- The Janani Suraksha Yojana, launched in 2005 under the National Rural Health Mission, is a conditional cash transfer scheme promoting institutional delivery; the Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, 2011, entitles pregnant women to free delivery, drugs, diagnostics, diet, blood and transport in public health institutions.
- Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan provides fixed-day assured antenatal care, and LaQshya is the initiative for quality improvement in labour rooms and maternity operation theatres.
- Under the Maternal Death Surveillance and Response framework, maternal deaths are notified and reviewed at facility and district level, and the review is intended to be non-punitive and system-focused.
- Article 42 of the Constitution directs the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief, and is a Directive Principle of State Policy.

Mains: India has succeeded in moving childbirth into institutions but has not correspondingly assured the quality of care within them. Examine this proposition with reference to recent clusters of post-caesarean maternal deaths in public hospitals, and suggest a framework for accountability. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — evidence of the quality gap · Body — why accountability currently fails · Body — the framework you propose · Conclusion

19 Sep From GaN Circuits to CAR-T: India's Deep-Tech Pipeline Deepens While Patents in Force Lag

Technology denial under the Rafale offsets → DRDO laboratories build GaN MMIC capability in-house → academic institutions supply the talent and an IISc spin-off commercialises it → patent filings and standards contributions rise sharply → but patents in force and translational funding lag, so ownership of the value chain remains incomplete

- Gallium nitride is a wide-bandgap semiconductor used in High Electron Mobility Transistors and monolithic microwave integrated circuits, with applications in radar, satellite communications, electric vehicle chargers and solar inverters.
- The Solid State Physics Laboratory in Delhi and the Gallium Arsenide Enabling Technology Centre in Hyderabad are DRDO establishments associated with India's gallium nitride MMIC capability.
- The Patent Cooperation Treaty is administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization and provides a unified international filing route; patents are still granted nationally, and India's patent office functions under the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

- A standard-essential patent is one whose use is unavoidable in implementing a technical standard, and is licensed on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms; 3GPP is the body that develops mobile telecommunications standards.
- The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council is a public sector enterprise set up by the Department of Biotechnology to support early-stage biotechnology innovation.
- NexCAR19, developed by ImmunoACT with IIT Bombay and the Tata Memorial Centre, is India's first indigenous CAR-T cell therapy and targets the CD19 antigen.
- The Bharat 6G Alliance has stated a target of contributing 10% of global 6G patents by 2030, and the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India heads the office that advises the Prime Minister on science and technology policy.

Mains: "India's innovation story is strong on filings and weak on ownership." Critically examine India's progress from technology implementer to technology owner, with reference to intellectual property, standards participation and deep-tech entrepreneurship. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — evidence of genuine progress · Body — where ownership still fails · Body — the institutional pipeline as the real subject · Conclusion

19 Sep Third Bombay High Court Bench to Hear the Maratha 10% Quota Challenge From October 9

Indra Sawhney fixes a 50% ceiling in 1992 → Maharashtra legislates 16% for Marathas in 2018 → Supreme Court strikes it down in 2021 for want of extraordinary circumstances and for weak data → a fresh Commission report and a fresh 10% Act in 2024 → two High Court Benches dissolve as their judges are transferred and elevated → a third Bench starts the hearing over in October 2026

- Article 15(4) permits special provision for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes and for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; Article 16(4) permits reservation in appointments for backward classes not adequately represented in the services of the State.
- Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) was decided by a nine-judge Bench; it excluded the creamy layer, barred reservation in promotion under Article 16(4), and held that reservation should ordinarily not exceed 50% except in extraordinary situations.
- Article 338B, inserted by the Constitution (One Hundred and Second Amendment) Act, 2018, gives constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes; Article 342A provides for the Central List of socially and educationally backward classes.
- The Constitution (One Hundred and Fifth Amendment) Act, 2021 restored the power of States and Union Territories to prepare and maintain their own lists of socially and educationally backward classes, and inserted Article 366(26C).
- The Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2024 provides 10% reservation for Marathas in education and in services in the State; it was passed on February 20, 2024 and notified six days later.
- The predecessor SEBC Act, 2018 granted 16% reservation; the Bombay High Court in June 2019 upheld the Act but reduced the quota to 12% in education and 13% in government jobs, and the Supreme Court struck the Act down in May 2021.
- A curative petition, the remedy recognised in Rupa Ashok Hurra v. Ashok Hurra (2002), lies only after a review petition has been dismissed and is ordinarily decided in chambers without oral hearing.

Mains: "The persistence of quota agitations by numerically large and politically dominant communities suggests that the reservation debate in India has outgrown the constitutional framework designed for it." Critically examine in the light of the litigation over the Maharashtra SEBC legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional position, stated exactly · Body — why the framework is under strain · Body — the counter-view, honestly made · Conclusion

19 Sep POSH Complaints at Nifty 50 Companies Rise to 1,327 in FY26, the Third Straight Annual Increase

Vishaka guidelines in 1997 fill a statutory vacuum → the POSH Act, 2013 makes an Internal Committee and annual sensitisation compulsory → listed-company disclosure rules make the numbers public → awareness and a publicised case raise trust in the process → complaints at Nifty 50 firms rise for a third year → but the informal sector, which is 90% of the workforce, has no comparable machinery at all

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 codified the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997), which rested on Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g) and 21 and on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- Section 4 requires an Internal Committee in every establishment with ten or more workers; its presiding officer must be a woman employed at a senior level and at least one-half of its members must be women.
- Section 6 requires the District Officer to constitute a Local Committee for establishments with fewer than ten workers and for complaints made against the employer.

- A complaint must be made in writing within three months of the incident under Section 9, extendable by a further three months for reasons recorded in writing; the inquiry must be completed within ninety days, and the employer must act on the committee's recommendations within sixty days of receiving the report.
- Section 21 requires the committee to file an annual report with the employer and the District Officer, and Section 22 requires the employer to disclose the number of cases filed and disposed of in its annual report.
- Section 26 prescribes a penalty of up to ₹50,000 for contravention by an employer, with enhanced punishment and cancellation of licence or registration for a repeat offence.
- Section 2(o) defines workplace to include transportation provided by the employer and, for domestic workers, a dwelling place or house.

Mains: "The effectiveness of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 is best judged not by the number of complaints it generates but by where those complaints come from." Examine this statement with reference to the formal and informal segments of India's workforce. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why rising numbers indicate success, argued and not asserted · Body — locate the failure precisely · Body — the emerging pressures · Conclusion

21 Sep West Bengal's New Government Clears Land for 33 Industries, Weighs Land Pooling Over Acquisition

Land reform after 1977 creates many small holdings and recorded tenancies → Singur and Nandigram protests of the 2000s stall acquisition for industry → later land banks from idle public land prove too small and fragmented → a new government in 2026 clears land for 33 industries and examines land pooling → success now depends on institutional credibility, not on another law

- "Land" is Entry 18 of the State List, while "acquisition and requisitioning of property" is Entry 42 of the Concurrent List in the Seventh Schedule.
- The right to property is a constitutional right under Article 300A, after the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978 removed it from Part III.
- The RFCTLARR Act, 2013 requires the consent of 80% of affected families for acquisition for private companies and 70% for public-private partnership projects.
- The RFCTLARR Act, 2013 mandates a Social Impact Assessment before acquisition for most projects.
- In land pooling, landowners contribute land to a development authority and receive back a developed plot, which is smaller than the original but serviced with infrastructure.
- Operation Barga, launched in West Bengal in 1978, recorded the names of sharecroppers (bargadars) to protect their tenancy rights.

Mains: "Land can be assembled through legislation, negotiation or planning, but capital can only be attracted through confidence." Examine the relative merits of land acquisition, negotiated purchase and land pooling for industrialisation in India, with reference to the experience of West Bengal. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the three mechanisms · Body — merits and limits · Body — the Bengal context · Conclusion

21 Sep Justice Nagarathna Says Supreme Court Is Shifting From Anthropocentric to Ecocentric Environmental Law

Article 21 read to include a healthy environment → courts import precautionary and polluter-pays principles → NGT created in 2010 as a specialised forum → climate change recognised as a rights issue → Supreme Court judge articulates an ecocentric turn at an NGT conference

- Article 48A (Directive Principle) and Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duty) on protection of the environment were inserted by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976.
- The Supreme Court read the right to a pollution-free environment into Article 21 in Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar (1991).
- The precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle were held to be part of Indian law in Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996).
- The public trust doctrine was adopted by the Supreme Court in M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath (1997).
- The National Green Tribunal was established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010; Section 20 requires it to apply sustainable development, precautionary and polluter pays principles.
- Appeals against orders of the National Green Tribunal lie to the Supreme Court.
- An anthropocentric approach treats human beings as the central element of moral concern; an ecocentric approach places ecosystems and the natural environment at the centre.

Mains: "The Supreme Court is pushing for a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach in environmental matters." Discuss the evolution of environmental jurisprudence in India and examine whether an ecocentric approach can be reconciled with the development needs of the poor.

21 Sep Botswana Cheetah CCB-2 Released at Gandhi Sagar as Kuno Births Take India's Count to 56

Cheetah hunted to extinction in India by the mid-twentieth century → Project Cheetah imports African cheetahs to Kuno from 2022 → Kuno's space and prey limits force a second site → males moved to Gandhi Sagar in April 2025 → a Botswana female is added as Kuno records second-generation births and a count of 56

- The cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952.
- The Asiatic cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*) survives in the wild only in Iran; the cheetahs brought under Project Cheetah are African.
- Under Project Cheetah, cheetahs from Namibia were released into Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh, on 17 September 2022, followed by a batch from South Africa in 2023.
- Project Cheetah is implemented by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, a statutory body under Section 38L of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Gandhi Sagar, on the Chambal river in Mandsaur and Neemuch districts of Madhya Pradesh, is India's second cheetah habitat after Kuno.
- The cheetah is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Mains: *Examine the ecological rationale and the risks of reintroducing the African cheetah in India. Has the establishment of a second habitat at Gandhi Sagar strengthened the case for the programme?*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the rationale · Body — the risks · Body — the significance of Gandhi Sagar · Conclusion

21 Sep Tamil Nadu Plans First Statewide Urine Survey and Salt Cut in Government Kitchens to Curb Hypertension

Salt habit acquired in childhood → Indian men average 8.9 gm and women 7.1 gm a day against WHO's 5 gm → water retention raises blood pressure → Tamil Nadu adult hypertension at about 33.9% → State plans urine survey, salt cut in public kitchens and low-sodium substitutes

- The WHO recommends a salt intake of less than 5 gm per day for adults, equivalent to less than 2 gm of sodium.
- The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (2010) was renamed the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in 2023.
- The India Hypertension Control Initiative was launched in 2017 by the Union Health Ministry, ICMR, WHO India and State governments.
- SDG target 3.4 seeks a one-third reduction in premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by 2030.
- Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam is Tamil Nadu's doorstep health programme for screening and treatment of non-communicable diseases.
- Public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries is entry 6 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

Mains: *"Hypertension in India is a disease of habit, and habit is a public health lever." Examine the role of population-level salt reduction in controlling non-communicable diseases, with reference to Tamil Nadu's recent initiative.*

Approach: Introduction · Body — the mechanism and evidence · Body — the Tamil Nadu design · Body — gaps and national role · Conclusion

21 Sep LASI Data Put Dementia at 8.8 Million Older Indians as Geriatricians Push Early, Home-Based Care

Rising life expectancy enlarges the over-60 and over-80 population → LASI finds 7.4% of over-60s living with dementia → memory loss dismissed as normal ageing delays diagnosis → specialist care scarce and new drugs costly → early screening and family-based care proposed as India's realistic route

- The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India is conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai.
- Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and is associated with amyloid plaques and tau tangles in the brain.
- The National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly was launched in 2010.
- The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 provides for maintenance tribunals for senior citizens.
- The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides for advance directives and nominated representatives.
- World Alzheimer's Day is observed on 21 September.
- Article 41 of the Constitution directs the State to provide public assistance in cases of old age, within the limits of its economic capacity.

Mains: “India is ageing before it has built a system of long-term care.” Discuss the challenges posed by the rising burden of dementia in India and suggest a framework for early detection and care.

Approach: Introduction · Body — the challenges · Body — early detection · Body — care and prevention · Conclusion

21 Sep NPCI’s AI-Powered MyUPI and AtOM Push Indian Payments Toward Agentic Commerce

UPI makes payments instant and cheap → fraud and friction become the main problems → AI is used first to screen fraud → pre-authorised limits and PIN-less small payments reduce friction → agentic AI proposes that software, not the customer, initiates payments within a mandate

- The National Payments Corporation of India was incorporated in 2008 as a not-for-profit company promoted by the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks’ Association.
- The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 designates the Reserve Bank of India as the authority to regulate and supervise payment systems.
- The Unified Payments Interface was launched by NPCI in 2016.
- UPI Lite is an on-device wallet that allows small-value UPI payments without entering a UPI PIN.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 governs the processing of digital personal data and establishes the Data Protection Board of India.
- Agentic AI refers to AI systems that execute multi-step tasks on a user’s behalf within defined limits, without needing a prompt at each step.

Mains: Agentic artificial intelligence could make digital payments frictionless but also shifts the act of authorisation from the customer to software. Examine the opportunities and risks of agentic commerce for India’s payments ecosystem and suggest a regulatory approach.

Approach: Introduction · Body — opportunities · Body — risks · Body — regulatory approach · Conclusion

21 Sep Temporary Operational Bases Let Forces Hold the Pir Panjal and Choke Militant Crossings

Poonch-Rajouri declared militant-free in 2012 → militancy shifts back into forested Pir Panjal routes → forces suffer setbacks in raid-and-return operations → Pahalgam attack prompts new SOG units and a doctrine of sustained presence → TOBs deny militants the escape route across the range

- The Pir Panjal range belongs to the Lesser (Middle) Himalaya and separates the Kashmir Valley from the Jammu region.
- The Rashtriya Rifles was raised in 1990 as a counter-insurgency force of the Indian Army under the Ministry of Defence.
- The Mughal Road crosses the Pir Panjal at Pir ki Gali, linking Shopian in Kashmir with Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu.
- Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, police and public order in the Union Territory of J&K rest with the Lieutenant Governor, under the Union Home Ministry.
- Lashkar-e-Toiba is listed as a terrorist organisation in the First Schedule of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act was enacted in 1990.

Mains: “In mountainous terrain, the side that stays longest usually wins.” Examine the changing counter-terror strategy in the Pir Panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir and its limitations. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why the Pir Panjal matters · Body — the new strategy · Body — limitations · Conclusion

21 Sep Army’s AASHVAST Labs Will Scan Drone Firmware for Hidden Chinese Code Before Deployment

Drones become central to modern war → Army buys at scale through emergency procurement → components sourced from China enter ‘Indian’ drones through invoices that hide true origin → firmware backdoors could disable drones in contested zones → AASHVAST labs make firmware inspection mandatory

- Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 designates CERT-In as the national agency for incident response.
- Section 70A of the IT Act provides for the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre.
- The Drone Rules, 2021 introduced the Digital Sky platform for drone approvals.
- The import of foreign drones was banned in February 2022, with exemptions for defence, security and R&D purposes.
- The Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020 governs capital procurement by the Ministry of Defence.
- Firmware is software embedded in a device’s hardware that controls its basic functions.

Mains: “Indigenisation of defence equipment is meaningless without verification of its supply chain.” Discuss in the context of the Indian Army’s initiative to test drones for firmware-level vulnerabilities. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the threat · Body — India’s policy framework · Body — challenges · Conclusion

22 Sep Supreme Court Strikes Down Maharashtra Methanol Colourant Rules as Disproportionate, Issues Anti-Hooch Guidelines

Methanol is cheap, industrial and lethal when mixed into illicit liquor → 1991 Mumbai hooch tragedy kills about 93 people → Maharashtra amends its Poisons Rules in 2011 to require licence checks and colourant-bitterant denaturing → manufacturers challenge the burden on legitimate industry → Supreme Court finds no proven link to preventing hooch, strikes the rules down on September 18 and issues supply-chain guidelines instead

- Article 19(1)(g) guarantees to all citizens the right to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(6).
- Article 47, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health.
- Entry 8 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule covers intoxicating liquors, including their production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale.
- In *State of U.P. v. Lalta Prasad Vaish* (2024), a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that States can regulate industrial alcohol under the entry for intoxicating liquors.
- The Poisons Act, 1919 empowers State governments to make rules regulating the possession and sale of poisons.
- The proportionality test requires that a restriction on a right pursue a legitimate aim, be suitable to achieve it, be necessary as the least restrictive means, and strike a proper balance.
- Methanol is metabolised in the body into formaldehyde and formic acid, which cause metabolic acidosis and damage to the optic nerve.

Mains: “A legitimate aim does not save an unsuitable means.” In the light of the Supreme Court’s ruling on Maharashtra’s methanol rules, discuss the application of the proportionality doctrine to economic regulation in India. What should an effective strategy against hooch tragedies include? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the doctrine · Body — regulation and federal power · Body — an effective strategy · Conclusion

22 Sep Rangarajan and Shanmugam: Tamil Nadu’s \$1.5 Trillion Target Needs 12.2% Real Growth; 2038-39 More Likely

Tamil Nadu grows faster than India in 2005-12, slows to the national average in 2012-19, recovers to 9.1% after 2021 → Chief Minister sets a \$1.5 trillion target for 2035-36 at the NITI Aayog meeting in June 2026 → arithmetic shows it needs 12.2% real growth for 10 years, achieved only thrice before → realistic 9-10% real growth needs a 40% investment rate at an ICOR of 4 and fiscal discipline → most likely date becomes 2038-39

- The Incremental Capital Output Ratio measures the additional capital required to produce one additional unit of output; a lower ICOR indicates more efficient use of capital.
- In the Harrod-Domar model, the growth rate of output equals the investment rate divided by the incremental capital output ratio.
- Under Article 293(3) of the Constitution, a State that owes money to the Government of India needs the Centre’s consent to raise a new loan.
- Gross State Domestic Product is the value of all final goods and services produced within the geographical boundaries of a State in a given period.
- The World Bank classifies countries by income group on the basis of gross national income per capita calculated by the Atlas method.
- Real growth is approximately equal to nominal growth minus the rate of inflation.

Mains: “A growth target is only as credible as the investment, capital efficiency and fiscal discipline behind it.” Evaluate this statement with reference to Tamil Nadu’s goal of becoming a \$1.5 trillion economy. What role should States play in achieving *Viksit Bharat 2047*? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the arithmetic · Body — the requirements · Body — role of States · Conclusion

22 Sep Indian Study Finds 90% of *Candida auris* Isolates Resist Azoles, Exposing Gaps in Dosing Tests

Fungi historically unable to survive human body temperature → warming selects heat-tolerant species and *C. auris* emerges, first reported in Japan in 2009 → heavy antifungal use in ICUs drives *Erg11* duplication and *Fks1* mutations → over 90% of Indian isolates resist azoles while standard tests stop at 2 µg/mL → Indian researchers show tests may understate resistance and call for new testing limits and gentler drug strategies

- *Candida auris* is a yeast, a single-celled fungus, and was first reported from Japan in 2009.
- Azole and polyene antifungals act on ergosterol in the fungal cell membrane, while echinocandins such as caspofungin act on the fungal cell wall.

- The WHO Fungal Priority Pathogens List of 2022 placed *Candida auris* in its critical priority group.
- The Eagle effect refers to paradoxical survival of a microbe at very high concentrations of a drug that kills it at lower concentrations.
- India's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, adopted in 2017, is based on the One Health approach linking human, animal and environmental health.
- Dermatophytosis, a superficial fungal infection of skin, hair and nails, is caused by moulds called dermatophytes.

Mains: "Antimicrobial resistance is no longer only a bacterial problem." In the light of recent Indian research on *Candida auris*, discuss the challenges India faces in detecting and treating drug-resistant fungal infections, and suggest measures to strengthen its response. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the scientific challenge · Body — the system challenge · Body — measures · Conclusion

22 Sep Gaganyaan Crew Module to Land on Two Drogues and Three Main Parachutes Built by ADRDE

India announces a human spaceflight programme and sets up ISRO's Human Space Flight Centre → crew safety demands redundant recovery systems that no foreign partner supplies off the shelf → DRDO's ADRDE develops a staged pilot-drogue-main parachute system with reefing → ISRO completes the first Integrated Air Drop Test in August 2025 and continues sled and drop testing → the system must prove it can survive a single main-chute failure before a crewed flight

- The Gaganyaan crew module parachute system uses pilot, drogue and main parachutes, with drogues deployed early to stabilise and slow the module.
- The Gaganyaan crew module has two drogue parachutes deployed by mortars and three main parachutes deployed by mortar-ejected pilot chutes.
- The Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment at Agra, a DRDO laboratory, is the developing agency for the Gaganyaan parachute system.
- A rail track rocket sled facility for parachute testing is located at the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory, Chandigarh.
- Reefing is a technique in which a cord around a parachute canopy restricts its opening until a timed cutter releases it.
- ISRO conducted the first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-01) for Gaganyaan at Sriharikota in August 2025 using an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter.
- Crew-module parachutes are generally deployed only after the capsule has slowed below the speed of sound, because dynamic pressure on the canopy rises with the square of velocity.

Mains: "In human spaceflight, the most critical systems are the ones that operate for only a few minutes." Discuss with reference to the recovery system of the Gaganyaan crew module, and examine how indigenous development of such systems contributes to India's strategic autonomy in space. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how the system works · Body — testing and development · Body — strategic autonomy · Conclusion

22 Sep Microsoft Opens Fourth Indian Cloud Region as Data-Centre Capacity Must Grow Five- to Seven-Fold

Digitisation of payments, government services and business creates rising demand for local computing → AI multiplies that demand and makes compute a strategic resource → India's data-centre capacity stands at about 2 GW against an estimated need of 10-14 GW → global hyperscalers commit large capital, with Microsoft pledging \$20.5 billion and opening a fourth region in Hyderabad → the State must now supply land, reliable power and water while protecting data and the environment

- Data centres were included in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors in October 2022.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 permits cross-border transfer of personal data except to countries restricted by notification of the Central Government.
- The Data Protection Board of India is established under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.
- The RBI's April 2018 directive requires payment system operators to store payment data only in India.
- MeghRaj, launched in 2014, is the Government of India's cloud computing initiative for government departments.
- Power Usage Effectiveness is the ratio of the total energy used by a data centre to the energy used by its IT equipment.

Mains: Data centres have been called the physical foundation of the digital economy. Examine the opportunities and challenges for India in expanding its data-centre capacity, with particular reference to energy, water, investment and data sovereignty. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — opportunities · Body — challenges · Body — the way forward · Conclusion

22 Sep EPW Study Finds Parents Acting as 'Hindu Customers' Push Majoritarian Rules Into Delhi's Private Schools

1991 liberalisation opens schooling to private providers → urban middle classes shift to private schools, where state control is thin → schools compete for fee-paying parents → political preferences formed by media and neighbourhood enter as consumer demands → schools accommodate the majority, citing neutral reasons, and sideline minority families

- Article 28(1) provides that no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.
- Article 29(2) prohibits denial of admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving State aid on grounds only of religion, race, caste or language.
- Article 30(1) gives all minorities, whether based on religion or language, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- The word "secular" was added to the Preamble by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
- Section 12(1)(c) of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 requires private unaided schools to reserve at least 25% of entry-level seats for children from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups.
- Article 51A(f) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of the country's composite culture.
- Article 21A, inserted by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged six to fourteen.

Mains: "Marketisation of education can turn majoritarian preferences into consumer demands." Examine this statement in the context of private schooling in India. What institutional safeguards can protect the secular character of schools? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how the mechanism works · Body — constitutional framework · Body — balance and safeguards · Conclusion

22 Sep Jamui Mob Assault on Two Class 10 Students Brings POCSO Case, NCW Action, Three Arrests

Patriarchal norms treat a girl's movement and friendships as community property → a group of men stop two teenagers on a road and punish them for being together → the act is filmed and the videos go viral, adding a second injury → police register a POCSO case and arrest three, NCW and the State women's commission step in → political blame follows while the question of patrols and video circulation remains

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years and is gender-neutral.
- Section 19 of the POCSO Act, 2012 makes reporting of an offence mandatory, and Section 21 punishes failure to report.
- Section 23 of the POCSO Act prohibits the media from disclosing the identity of a child victim.
- Section 24 of the POCSO Act requires the child's statement to be recorded, as far as practicable, by a woman police officer not below the rank of sub-inspector, at the child's residence or place of choice.
- Section 74 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 punishes assault or criminal force to a woman with intent to outrage her modesty.
- The National Commission for Women was constituted in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
- Under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, a child aged 16 to 18 alleged to have committed a heinous offence, one with a minimum punishment of seven years, may be assessed for trial as an adult.

Mains: "Moral policing is patriarchy acting in the name of culture." Examine this statement in the context of recent incidents of vigilante violence against young people in public spaces. Evaluate the adequacy of the legal framework for protecting children and women from such violence. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the social mechanism · Body — the legal framework · Body — gaps and remedies · Conclusion

22 Sep US Admits Deploying 'On-Orbit Space Control Weapons', Exposing the Outer Space Treaty's Conventional-Weapons Gap

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty bans only nuclear and mass-destruction weapons in orbit → the U.S., Russia, China and India develop counter-space capabilities, including India's Mission Shakti in 2019 → the U.S. creates the Space Force in 2019 → satellites multiply to over 18,000 and become dual-use and commercial → the U.S. admits on September 14 that it has deployed on-orbit space control weapons, and editorials call for multilateral governance

- Article IV of the Outer Space Treaty, 1967, prohibits placing nuclear weapons or any other weapons of mass destruction in orbit around the earth, but does not expressly prohibit conventional weapons in orbit.

- Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty makes states internationally responsible for national activities in outer space, including those carried on by non-governmental entities.
- Under the Liability Convention, 1972, a launching state is absolutely liable for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight.
- India is a signatory to the Moon Agreement, 1979, but has not ratified it.
- The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) was established by the UN General Assembly in 1959.
- Mission Shakti (March 27, 2019) was India's anti-satellite missile test conducted by the DRDO against a satellite in low earth orbit.
- The Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) is an agenda item of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Mains: “The Outer Space Treaty was written to keep nuclear weapons out of orbit; it was never designed for a crowded, commercial and armed space.” In the light of the U.S. admission of deploying on-orbit weapons, examine the adequacy of the international legal regime for outer space and suggest a role for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the existing regime · Body — why it is inadequate · Body — India's role · Conclusion

23 Sep Supreme Court Says State May Fix Vande Mataram's Stanzas but Cannot Prosecute Conscientious Objectors

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Vande Mataram becomes a freedom-movement anthem → the Congress in 1937 limits national singing to its first two stanzas, and on January 24, 1950 the Constituent Assembly declares it will be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana → a 2026 amendment extends Section 3 of the 1971 Act to the 'national song', and Home Ministry directions in January and July require all six stanzas → T.M. Krishna challenges this as religious assent compelled under threat of punishment → the Supreme Court restates Bijoe Emmanuel orally and gives the Centre two weeks to reply

- Article 51A(a) makes it a fundamental duty to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem; the national song is not named in it.
- Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 punishes intentionally preventing the singing of the National Anthem, or disturbing an assembly engaged in singing it, with imprisonment of up to three years, a fine, or both.
- Vande Mataram was composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and forms part of his novel Anandamath (1882).
- On January 24, 1950, the President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, declared that Vande Mataram would be honoured equally with the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana.
- In Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986), the Supreme Court held that expelling students who stood respectfully but did not sing the National Anthem violated Articles 19(1)(a) and 25.
- Under Article 28(3), no person attending an educational institution recognised by or receiving aid from the State can be required to take part in religious instruction or worship there without his consent or, for a minor, the guardian's consent.
- Article 26 gives every religious denomination the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, to manage its own affairs in matters of religion, and to own and administer property in accordance with law.

Mains: “The State may decide what the national song is, but it cannot compel a citizen to sing it.” Examine this proposition in the light of the Bijoe Emmanuel judgment and the constitutional limits on penal legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the power to define · Body — the limit on compulsion · Body — penal law must be certain · Conclusion

23 Sep Centre Warns States of Ageing, AI and Climate Strains as Mumbai Plans India's Largest Municipal Bond

The Constitution assigns health, policing, water, urban services and much of social welfare to States and local bodies → States end up doing about two-thirds of general government spending while the Centre holds the more buoyant taxes → ageing, AI-driven job change, fast urbanisation and climate risk add new, long-term claims on State budgets → the Centre, through an RBI-authored paper, tells States to reprioritise spending and keep finances sustainable to support 8% real growth to 2047 → cities with weak transfers turn to capital markets, and the BMC plans a debut bond of about ₹9,500 crore

- Under Article 293(3) of the Constitution, a State that is indebted to the Government of India must obtain the Centre's consent before raising any loan.
- Article 293(1) permits a State to borrow only within the territory of India, on the security of its Consolidated Fund.
- Article 243Y requires the State Finance Commission constituted under Article 243-I to review the financial position of municipalities and make recommendations to the Governor.
- Article 243W and the Twelfth Schedule, added by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, list 18 functions that may be devolved to municipalities.
- Municipal bonds issued to the public in India are regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India under regulations framed in 2015.
- The Finance Commission is constituted by the President under Article 280 to recommend the distribution of the net proceeds of shareable taxes between the Union and the States.

- Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.

Mains: “With States accounting for about two-thirds of general government expenditure, their fiscal choices will decide whether India reaches developed-economy status by 2047.” Discuss the emerging pressures on State finances from demographic ageing, technological change, urbanisation and climate risk. How can States and urban local bodies expand their fiscal capacity? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the new pressures · Body — constitutional constraints · Body — expanding fiscal capacity · Conclusion

23 Sep Maharashtra’s Women Farmers’ Law Recognises Landless Women as Farmers Through a ‘Woman Farmer Certificate’

Patriarchal inheritance and custom put land records in men’s names → States use land revenue records to decide who is a ‘farmer’ for schemes → male out-migration and rural distress push more women into farm work, much of it unpaid → women do nearly half the farm work but hold 14% of operational holdings and 23% of PM-KISAN benefits → Maharashtra legislates an activity-based ‘Woman Farmer Certificate’ in July 2026, delinking recognition from land

- The National Policy for Farmers, 2007, framed on the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers chaired by M.S. Swaminathan, defines a farmer by activity and includes agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, livestock rearers and pastoralists.
- Maintenance of land records falls under Entry 45 of the State List, and land, including land tenures, falls under Entry 18 of the State List.
- PM-KISAN is a Central Sector Scheme that provides ₹6,000 a year in three equal instalments by direct benefit transfer to eligible landholding farmer families.
- The Agriculture Census, conducted every five years by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, counts operational holdings, meaning land operated as one technical unit irrespective of title.
- The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 made daughters coparceners with rights equal to sons and omitted the provision that had left agricultural tenancy rights to State tenancy laws.
- In the Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by the National Statistics Office, unpaid helpers in household enterprises are classified as self-employed workers.
- Agri Stack, under the Digital Agriculture Mission, comprises a Farmers’ Registry with a unique Farmer ID, geo-referenced village maps and a Crop Sown Registry.

Mains: “Women in rural India are increasingly the farmers, but the state still recognises the landowner.” In the light of Maharashtra’s Women Farmers’ Empowerment law, examine how the reliance on land records in agricultural schemes excludes women, and suggest measures to make recognition translate into access. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how exclusion happens · Body — what Maharashtra does and its limits · Body — measures · Conclusion

23 Sep Punjab Draws 152% of Its Extractable Groundwater, and Falling Water Tables Shift Wealth to Large Farmers

Food-security push after the 1960s makes Punjab the centre of Green Revolution rice-wheat → assured MSP procurement and free or subsidised farm power make paddy the least risky crop → groundwater extraction outruns recharge, reaching 152% in 2025-26 with 72% of blocks in the red zone → falling water tables raise the cost of deeper tube-wells → small farmers buy water from large landowners, turning depletion into a transfer of wealth

- In the Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment, an assessment unit with a stage of groundwater extraction above 100% is classified as ‘over-exploited’; above 90% and up to 100% is ‘critical’; above 70% and up to 90% is ‘semi-critical’.
- The stage of groundwater extraction is the ratio of annual groundwater extraction to the annual extractable groundwater resource, expressed as a percentage.
- The Central Ground Water Authority is constituted under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment is carried out jointly by the Central Ground Water Board and State groundwater departments using the Ground Water Estimation Committee, 2015 methodology.
- Water, including irrigation, is a State subject under Entry 17 of the State List, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List.
- The Atal Bhujal Yojana, a World Bank-assisted scheme for community-led groundwater management, covers seven States, and Punjab is not one of them.
- The Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009 prohibits transplanting paddy before a date notified by the State government.

Mains: “In Punjab, falling groundwater tables have turned an environmental crisis into a mechanism of rural inequality.” Examine the statement. Suggest how farm subsidies and cropping incentives could be redesigned to protect both the aquifer and the small farmer. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how the crisis was made · Body — the inequality mechanism · Body — redesign · Conclusion

23 Sep Farmers Get 57.8% of the Food Rupee Spent at Home, Only 8.4% When Eating Out

Indian diets remain built on fresh, minimally processed food bought for home cooking → short value chains leave a large share, 57.8% in 2023-24, with the farm → rising incomes bring packaged food into nearly every household and push more eating out → food away from home passes through restaurants and services where the farm share is only 8.4% and falling → the overall farm share is set to decline, so farmers must own downstream enterprises to capture the value moving off the farm

- The Food Dollar series, which divides consumer food spending between the farm and post-farm marketing activities, was developed by the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture.
- Engel's law states that as household income rises, the proportion of income spent on food declines.
- The Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme that follows a One District One Product approach.
- The Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is an umbrella Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries covering mega food parks and cold chain infrastructure.
- Producer companies were introduced into company law by the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2002, following the recommendations of a committee chaired by Y.K. Alagh.
- The National Dairy Development Board was set up in 1965 with its headquarters at Anand, Gujarat, and implemented Operation Flood from 1970.
- Up to 100% foreign direct investment is permitted under the government approval route for trading, including through e-commerce, of food products manufactured or produced in India.

Mains: "A high farm share in consumer food spending is often read as fairness to farmers, but it may equally signal an underdeveloped food processing sector." Discuss with reference to recent estimates for India. How can farmers capture a larger share of post-harvest value? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why India's share is high · Body — why share is not income · Body — capturing value · Conclusion

23 Sep Tharoor Revisits the 1918 Battle of Haifa: Celebrated by India and Israel, Resented by Palestinians

The Ottoman Empire joins the Central Powers in the First World War → Britain promises a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 → on September 23, 1918, the Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers take Haifa from mainly Ottoman forces, helping secure British control of Palestine → the British Mandate ends in 1948 with the creation of Israel and the Palestinian displacement Palestinians call the Nakba → a century later India and Israel commemorate the charge as friendship, while Palestinians see the imperial project it served

- The Battle of Haifa was fought on September 23, 1918, by the Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers of the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, mainly against Ottoman forces.
- The Teen Murti memorial in New Delhi was renamed Teen Murti Haifa Chowk in 2018.
- The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, was a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild supporting a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.
- The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was a secret understanding between Britain and France, with Russian assent, dividing Ottoman Arab territories into spheres of influence.
- India recognised the State of Palestine in 1988 and established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992.
- India Gate, designed by Edwin Lutyens, commemorates soldiers of the British Indian Army who died in the First World War and the Third Anglo-Afghan War.
- UN General Assembly Resolution 67/19 of 2012 accorded Palestine non-member observer State status.

Mains: The Battle of Haifa (1918) is commemorated in India and Israel but viewed very differently by Palestinians. Discuss how colonial-era military history shapes contemporary diplomacy, with reference to India's relations with Israel and Palestine. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — three memories · Body — memory as diplomacy · Body — balancing today · Conclusion

23 Sep Centre Doubles Port Environmental Clearance Validity to 20 Years, With Two Conditional Five-Year Extensions

The EIA Notification, 2006 gives every clearance a fixed validity so that appraisals do not go stale → large ports take years to finance, phase and build, and a 10-plus-one-year window forces fresh clearance midway → industry and the Ports Ministry seek "rationalisation" as maritime expansion and maritime finance grow → the Centre notifies a 20-year validity with two conditional five-year extensions → a port clearance can now remain live for up to 30 years from the original appraisal

- The EIA Notification, 2006 was issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and replaced the EIA Notification of 1994.

- Under the EIA Notification, 2006, Category A projects are appraised by the Expert Appraisal Committee at the Centre, while Category B projects are cleared by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority on the recommendation of the State Expert Appraisal Committee.
- The four stages of environmental clearance under the 2006 Notification are screening (for Category B projects only), scoping, public consultation and appraisal.
- The Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2019, which replaced the 2011 notification, is issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The Supreme Court recognised the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle as part of Indian environmental law in Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996).
- Blue bonds are debt instruments used to raise finance for projects related to oceans and water, such as sustainable fishing, shipping, marine conservation and ocean energy.
- Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Central Government to take measures to protect the environment, including restricting the areas in which industries may operate.

Mains: "Longer validity for environmental clearances gives certainty to long-gestation infrastructure, but risks turning environmental appraisal into a one-time formality." Critically examine this statement in the context of the recent amendment to the EIA Notification, 2006 for ports and harbours. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for certainty · Body — the risks · Body — a balanced design · Conclusion

23 Sep Rhino Phase I (2026-31) to Expand Range Into Bihar, Arunachal as a Grassland Atlas Is Planned

Rhinos once ranged along the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra floodplains → hunting and conversion of floodplain grasslands shrink them to a few protected areas in Assam, U.P. and West Bengal → strict protection lifts numbers from about 1,500 in the 1980s to over 4,000 by September 2024, but most animals remain in a handful of sites → concentration creates flood, disease and genetic risks, so the 2019 National Conservation Strategy prescribes range restoration → Phase I (2026-31), proposed for CAMPA funding, targets expansion into Bihar and Arunachal, backed by a national grassland assessment

- The greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix I of CITES.
- Kaziranga and Manas National Parks in Assam were both inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1985.
- Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam has the highest density of the greater one-horned rhinoceros.
- The Javan and Sumatran rhinoceros are both classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.
- Under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016, the National Fund is kept in the Public Account of India and 90% of the collected funds go to the State Funds.
- The New Delhi Declaration on Asian rhinos was adopted in 2019 at the Second Asian Rhino Range States Meeting by India, Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal.
- The Forest Survey of India, which publishes the biennial India State of Forest Report, is headquartered in Dehradun.

Mains: India's rhino recovery is often cited as a conservation success, yet the concentration of the population in a few protected areas remains a risk. Discuss the rationale and challenges of expanding the range of the greater one-horned rhinoceros, and explain why grassland management is central to its long-term survival. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — rationale for range expansion · Body — challenges · Body — grasslands · Conclusion

23 Sep Tamil Nadu Extends Free School Breakfast to Classes 6-8, Taking Coverage to 34.64 Lakh Children

Justice Party leader P. Theagaraya Chetty starts meals for poor children in Madras Corporation schools in 1922 → Kamaraj in the 1950s and M.G. Ramachandran's noon meal scheme of 1982 make school feeding a Tamil Nadu tradition → a Supreme Court order of 2001 and the National Food Security Act, 2013 make a cooked midday meal a legal entitlement across India → evidence that children arrive at school hungry leads Tamil Nadu to add breakfast for Classes 1-5 in 2022 → a new government keeps the scheme, names it after Kamaraj and extends it to Classes 6-8 in September 2026

- Under Section 5(1)(b) of the National Food Security Act, 2013, every child up to Class VIII or aged 6 to 14 years is entitled to one free midday meal every day, except on school holidays.
- Schedule II of the National Food Security Act, 2013 prescribes 450 kilocalories and 12 grams of protein for primary classes and 700 kilocalories and 20 grams of protein for upper primary classes.
- PM POSHAN, which replaced the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in 2021, covers children in Balvatika (pre-primary) and Classes 1 to 8 in government and government-aided schools; the Ministry of Education is its nodal ministry.
- In PUCL v. Union of India, the Supreme Court in November 2001 directed all States to provide cooked midday meals in government and government-assisted primary schools.

- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improving public health as among its primary duties.
- The National Education Policy 2020 recommends a simple, energising breakfast for school children in addition to the midday meal.
- In 1922, P. Theagaraya Chetty, a Justice Party leader and president of the Madras Corporation, introduced meals for poor children in selected city schools.

Mains: “Morning hunger is an invisible barrier to learning.” In the light of Tamil Nadu’s extension of its school breakfast scheme to Classes 6 to 8, examine the case for adding a breakfast to PM POSHAN across India. What design safeguards would make such a scheme effective? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for breakfast · Body — the concerns · Body — design safeguards · Conclusion

23 Sep President Murmu Asks Film Stars Not to Endorse Harmful Products, Seeks Social Security for Film Workers

Film stars command huge influence over young fans → companies pay stars to endorse products, including ones harmful to health, often through surrogate advertisements → law responds with COTPA 2003, endorser liability under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the 2022 CCPA guidelines banning surrogate ads → enforcement remains weak and fees stay large → the President uses the 72nd National Film Awards on September 22, 2026 to appeal to stars’ conscience, and to ask the industry to protect its own informal workers

- Under Section 21 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the Central Consumer Protection Authority can impose a penalty of up to ₹10 lakh on an endorser of a false or misleading advertisement, and up to ₹50 lakh for a subsequent contravention.
- The CCPA can prohibit an endorser of a misleading advertisement from making any endorsement for up to one year, extendable to three years for a subsequent contravention.
- The CCPA’s 2022 guidelines on misleading advertisements prohibit surrogate advertising, that is, advertising a product whose advertising is banned by using its brand name on another product.
- Section 5 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 prohibits direct and indirect advertisement of cigarettes and other tobacco products.
- The Dadasaheb Phalke Award, instituted in 1969, is India’s highest award in cinema; its first recipient was Devika Rani.
- Santali was added to the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution by the 92nd Amendment Act, 2003, along with Bodo, Maithili and Dogri; it is written in the Ol Chiki script.
- The Code on Social Security, 2020 subsumed the Cine-Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1981 and defines gig workers and platform workers.

Mains: “Celebrities command influence without matching accountability.” Discuss the legal and ethical responsibilities of public figures who endorse products, with reference to the President’s appeal at the 72nd National Film Awards. How can the law and self-regulation together close the gap? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal framework · Body — the ethical dimension · Body — closing the gap · Conclusion

23 Sep IAF’s Tarang Shakti-26 Brings Eight Air Forces, Including US F-35s, and 32 Observers to Jodhpur

For decades the IAF engages foreign air forces mainly through one-to-one bilateral exercises → in August-September 2024 it hosts its first multinational exercise, Tarang Shakti, with 11 countries flying → recent conflicts and Operation Sindoor underline integrated air and missile defence, counter-drone capability and jointness → Tarang Shakti-26, September 26 to October 12 at Jodhpur, brings eight air forces and 32 observer nations → India moves from being a guest at others’ exercises to a convenor of air power partnerships

- Pitch Black is a multinational air combat exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force, and Red Flag is a multinational air combat exercise hosted by the United States Air Force.
- Garuda is a bilateral air exercise between India and France, and Cope India is a bilateral air exercise between India and the United States.
- The Tejas Light Combat Aircraft was designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency and is manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.
- The Chief of Defence Staff is the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs.
- The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) between India and the United States was signed in 2018, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020.
- The Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Act, 2023 gives commanders of inter-services organisations disciplinary and administrative powers over personnel of all three services serving under them.
- MILAN is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy.

Mains: “Multilateral military exercises hosted by India serve foreign policy as much as military preparedness.” Discuss with reference to the Indian Air Force’s Tarang Shakti exercise. What are the limits of such exercises in building operational capability? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — foreign policy value · Body — military value · Body — limits · Conclusion

24 Sep Road-Accident Compensation Explained, as Supreme Court Values a Homemaker’s Care at ₹30,000 a Month

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

- Section 165 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 empowers State Governments to constitute Motor Accidents Claims Tribunals by notification.
- Section 146 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 prohibits the use of a motor vehicle in a public place without a policy of insurance covering third-party risks.
- After the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, fixed compensation of ₹5 lakh for death and ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt is payable in motor accidents without the claimant having to prove negligence.
- Under the ‘pay and recover’ principle, an insurer may be directed to pay compensation to the victim first and recover it later from the owner or driver where a policy defence is established.
- In National Insurance Co. Ltd. v Pranay Sethi (2017), a five-judge Constitution Bench laid down additions for future prospects and fixed amounts for loss of estate, funeral expenses and consortium, to be enhanced by 10% every three years.
- The Motor Vehicles Act, as amended in 2019, defines the ‘golden hour’ as the period of one hour following a traumatic injury during which prompt medical care has the highest likelihood of preventing death.
- Section 134A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, inserted in 2019, protects Good Samaritans who assist accident victims from civil or criminal liability.

Mains: “Motor accident compensation in India has evolved from a private remedy in tort into an instrument of social justice.” Discuss with reference to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Supreme Court’s recognition of the economic value of homemakers’ unpaid work. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the statutory scheme · Body — judicial standardisation · Body — social justice and gender · Conclusion

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

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

- The Bureau of Indian Standards is the National Standards Body of India, established under the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 2016, and functions under the Department of Consumer Affairs.
- Section 16 of the BIS Act, 2016 empowers the Central Government, after consulting BIS, to make the use of the Standard Mark compulsory for goods on grounds including health, safety, environment, prevention of unfair trade practices and national security.
- Quality Control Orders are issued by the ministry or department that administers the product, while certification under them is carried out by BIS.
- Article 2.2 of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade requires that technical regulations not be more trade-restrictive than necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective.
- The WTO’s Trade Policy Review Mechanism is set out in Annex 3 of the Marrakesh Agreement, and reviews are conducted by the Trade Policy Review Body, which is the General Council.
- Gross value added is the value of output minus the value of intermediate consumption.
- The Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026 was notified by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade on June 25, 2026.

Mains: Quality Control Orders were intended to raise product standards and curb substandard imports, yet evidence suggests that orders on intermediate inputs can hurt the very manufacturers they were meant to help. Critically examine this statement and suggest principles for the ongoing reassessment of QCOs. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the case for QCOs · Body — the evidence of harm · Body — principles for reassessment · Conclusion

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

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

- Under the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-Debt Instruments) Rules, 2019, a foreign investment of 10% or more of the post-issue paid-up equity of a listed Indian company is classified as FDI; a holding below 10% is FPI.
- Remittances by Indians working abroad are recorded as secondary income in the current account of the balance of payments.
- External commercial borrowings, NRI deposits and foreign portfolio investment are recorded in the capital and financial account, not the current account.
- A loan is classified as a non-performing asset when interest or an instalment of principal remains overdue for more than 90 days.
- The gross NPA ratio is gross non-performing assets expressed as a percentage of gross advances.
- The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development was established under the NaBFID Act, 2021 as a development finance institution for infrastructure.
- The 'twin balance sheet problem', highlighted in the Economic Survey 2016-17, refers to simultaneous stress on the balance sheets of corporate borrowers and banks.

Mains: "Alliances are fragmented, supply chains are being used as weapons, and capital can be switched on and off." In this context, examine the structural risks to India's external sector and discuss how the financial system can move from accommodating growth to enabling it. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the external-sector risks · Body — responses in the real economy · Body — the financial system · Conclusion

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

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

- In *All India Bank Employees' Association v. National Industrial Tribunal* (1962), the Supreme Court held that the right to form unions under Article 19(1)(c) does not include a guaranteed right to strike.
- In *T.K. Rangarajan v. Government of Tamil Nadu* (2003), the Supreme Court held that government employees have no fundamental or statutory right to strike.
- Under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, a worker in any industrial establishment may not strike without giving notice within 60 days before the strike, or within 14 days of giving such notice.
- The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 treats concerted casual leave taken by 50% or more of the workers on a given day as a strike.
- The four labour codes came into effect on November 21, 2025, consolidating 29 central labour laws.
- The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 has been subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.
- Hyperbolic discounting, a concept of behavioural economics, describes the tendency to prefer smaller immediate rewards over larger future ones, which weakens voluntary saving.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the law · Body — why strikes still happen · Body — the balance · Conclusion

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

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

- Under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 as amended in 2021, a pregnancy may be terminated up to 20 weeks on the opinion of one registered medical practitioner, and between 20 and 24 weeks on the opinion of two, for categories of women specified by rules.
- Under the amended MTP Act, the gestational limit does not apply where termination is necessitated by substantial foetal abnormalities diagnosed by a Medical Board constituted by the State or Union Territory government.
- Section 5 of the MTP Act permits termination of a pregnancy at any stage where it is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman.
- Survivors of sexual assault, rape or incest and minors are among the categories of women eligible for termination between 20 and 24 weeks under the MTP Rules.
- In *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration* (2009), the Supreme Court held that a woman's right to make reproductive choices is a dimension of personal liberty under Article 21.
- In *X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department* (2022), the Supreme Court held that unmarried women are entitled to seek termination of pregnancy between 20 and 24 weeks on the same footing as married women.
- Section 19 of the POCSO Act, 2012 makes reporting of a sexual offence against a child mandatory, and Section 21 prescribes punishment for failure to report.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — the statutory framework and its gap · Body — the constitutional reasoning · Body — reforms · Conclusion

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

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

- Under the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, 'Buy (Indian-IDDMM)' is the highest-priority capital acquisition category and requires a minimum of 50% indigenous content.
- The Strategic Partnership model enables the Ministry of Defence to select Indian companies to build major platforms — fighter aircraft, helicopters, submarines and armoured vehicles — in India in collaboration with foreign original equipment manufacturers.
- Project-75 (India), for six conventional submarines fitted with air-independent propulsion, was the first acquisition programme under the Strategic Partnership model.
- Air-independent propulsion allows a conventional submarine to remain submerged far longer by generating power without atmospheric oxygen, reducing the need to snorkel to recharge its batteries.
- The Kalvari-class submarines of Project-75 are of the French Scorpène design and were built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, Mumbai.
- The Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW) is a precision-guided glide weapon designed by DRDO's Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad, to strike airfield assets from stand-off range.
- The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by the Defence Minister, accords Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisitions of the armed forces.

Mains: "India's conventional submarine programme shows both the promise and the limits of acquiring military capability through foreign collaboration." Examine this statement in the light of Project-75 and Project-75 (India). How can the Strategic Partnership model and inter-governmental agreements be used to close the submarine capability gap while building indigenous design capacity? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the record so far · Body — what the new deal adds and its limits · Body — the indigenous track · Conclusion

25 Sep Chhattisgarh Churches Put Up 'Enter at Own Risk' Boards as Freedom of Religion Act, 2026 Takes Effect

Article 25 guarantees the right to "propagate" religion, but the Supreme Court in *Stainislaus* (1977) holds that it does not include a right to convert another person → States enact and tighten anti-conversion laws requiring prior notice to the district administration → Chhattisgarh notifies the Freedom of Religion Act, 2026 in August with a 60-day advance-intimation rule → churches fear that the mere presence of non-Christians at worship could be read as attempted conversion, while right-wing

groups disrupt prayer meetings → Dhamtari churches put up 'enter at own risk' boards and more than 1,000 worshippers file self-declarations at the Collectorate

- Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees to all persons, including non-citizens, freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health.
- In *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977), the Supreme Court held that the right to propagate religion under Article 25 does not include a fundamental right to convert another person.
- The *Stanislaus* judgment upheld the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967 and the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam, 1968, treating such laws as falling under public order in the State List.
- Article 26 guarantees every religious denomination the right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion and to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes.
- Article 25(2)(b) empowers the State to throw open Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.
- In *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M.* (2018), the Supreme Court held that an adult's choice of a life partner and of faith is protected under Article 21.
- In *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017), a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court declared the right to privacy a fundamental right under Part III.

Mains: "Anti-conversion laws are defended as protecting the freedom of conscience of the vulnerable, but in practice they may burden the freedom of religion of all." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent developments in Chhattisgarh and the Supreme Court's jurisprudence on Articles 21 and 25. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional basis · Body — the burden on everyone · Body — administration and minorities · Conclusion

25 Sep Digi Yatra to Pilot Face-Based Boarding for International Departures at Five Airports, Seeks EU Interoperability

Airports face congestion at entry and security gates → the Civil Aviation Ministry backs a biometric boarding system run by a not-for-profit company owned by AAI and five airport operators → Digi Yatra goes live domestically in December 2022 and spreads to 39 airports → the DPDP Act, 2023 sets consent and security duties for handlers of personal data → Digi Yatra now pilots e-passport enrolment for international departures and seeks credential-sharing with the EU Digital Identity framework

- The Digi Yatra Foundation is a not-for-profit company registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, in which the Airports Authority of India holds 26% of the shares.
- Under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, consent for processing personal data must be free, specific, informed, unconditional and unambiguous, and may be withdrawn by the data principal.
- In *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India* (2017), a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court held the right to privacy to be a fundamental right protected under Article 21 and Part III of the Constitution.
- The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN specialised agency established under the Chicago Convention of 1944, sets the global specifications for machine-readable and electronic passports.
- The International Air Transport Association, which runs the One ID initiative for contactless travel, is a trade association of airlines and not an inter-governmental organisation.
- Under Article 45 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation, the European Commission may decide that a non-EU country ensures an adequate level of data protection, permitting personal data transfers without further authorisation.

Mains: Biometric travel systems such as Digi Yatra promise convenience but raise questions of consent, accountability and cross-border data protection. Critically examine in the light of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and the Supreme Court's privacy jurisprudence. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — benefits · Body — legal tests · Body — accountability and cross-border issues · Conclusion

25 Sep Surinder Koli Found Dead Ten Months After Nithari Acquittal, Exposing India's Missing Law on Wrongful Conviction

Remains of missing children found in Nithari, Noida in 2006 and a domestic servant becomes the face of the crime → confessions extracted under torture and public branding as 'the butcher of Nithari' → 13 death sentences between 2009 and 2022, and an execution stayed four hours before it was due in 2014 → cases collapse one by one, ending in a Supreme Court acquittal in November 2025 → release with no compensation, rehabilitation or public acknowledgement → death on September 18, 2026, reopening the demand for a law on wrongful conviction

- Article 20(3) of the Constitution provides that no person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.
- In *Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa* (1993), the Supreme Court held that monetary compensation for violation of Article 21 is a public-law remedy to which the defence of sovereign immunity does not apply.

- In *Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab* (1980), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the death penalty and limited it to the “rarest of rare” cases.
- Section 84 of the *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita*, 2023 corresponds to Section 82 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and empowers a court to publish a proclamation requiring an absconding person to appear.
- The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022, which replaced the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920, governs the taking, storage and use of measurements, including photographs, of convicts and arrested persons for identification.
- Under Article 72(1)(c), the President has the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions, or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence, in all cases where the sentence is a sentence of death.
- Section 74 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 prohibits disclosure of the identity of a child in conflict with law in any newspaper, magazine or audio-visual media.

Mains: “In India, the criminal justice system can take away decades of a person’s life but has no settled obligation to repair the harm when it is found to have been wrong.” In the light of the *Nithari* case, examine the need for a statutory framework on wrongful prosecution and the rehabilitation of the wrongly convicted. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — how wrongful convictions are produced · Body — the present remedy and its gaps · Body — what a framework should contain · Conclusion

25 Sep Gurugram Registrar Orders Mahindra Aura RWA to Lift Ban on EWS Residents Using Common Parks

Rising urban land prices push the poor to the city’s edges → States attach EWS-flat conditions to private group-housing licences to force mixed-income projects → EWS blocks are built as physically separate towers with separate, capped maintenance → conveyance deeds carve EWS owners out of common areas and the RWA → the RWA enforces the carve-out as a bar on parks and pathways → a District Registrar rules that deeds cannot override basic mobility, and the RWA appeals

- Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Urban, Economically Weaker Section households are those with an annual household income of up to ₹3 lakh, and Low Income Group households those with ₹3 lakh to ₹6 lakh.
- Article 15(2) of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in access to shops, public restaurants, hotels, places of public entertainment, and in the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort.
- Article 17 abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form, and is enforceable against private persons.
- The Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019 inserted Articles 15(6) and 16(6), enabling up to 10% reservation for economically weaker sections in education and public employment, and was upheld in *Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India* (2022).
- Under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, “common areas” include parks, open spaces and internal roads, and the promoter must convey the undivided proportionate title in common areas to the association of allottees.
- In *Kaushal Kishor v. State of Uttar Pradesh* (2023), a majority of a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held that fundamental rights under Articles 19 and 21 can be enforced even against persons other than the State.
- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Urban is implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and includes an Affordable Housing in Partnership vertical involving public and private developers.

Mains: “Inclusionary housing policies in Indian cities have succeeded in producing affordable units but not in producing inclusive neighbourhoods.” Critically examine this statement in the light of recent disputes over access to common areas by Economically Weaker Section residents in private housing societies. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — achievements · Body — why neighbourhoods do not become inclusive · Body — reforms · Conclusion

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

The 73rd Amendment (1992) makes panchayats constitutional but leaves their money dependent on State and Central transfers → Article 280(3)(bb) brings panchayat grants into the Finance Commission’s remit → the 15th Finance Commission attaches conditions on timely transfer, audited accounts and online reporting → the Centre uses portal data on e-Gram Swaraj to decide releases → Karnataka’s receipts on the portal fall about ₹225 crore short and ₹2,186.20 crore is withheld, which the State calls selective treatment

- Article 280 of the Constitution provides for a Finance Commission to be constituted by the President every five years, consisting of a Chairman and four other members.
- Article 280(3)(bb), inserted by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, requires the Finance Commission to recommend measures to augment a State’s Consolidated Fund to supplement the resources of panchayats.
- Under Article 243-I, the Governor of a State constitutes a State Finance Commission every five years to review the financial position of panchayats.
- Article 243H empowers a State Legislature to authorise panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

- The 15th Finance Commission was chaired by N.K. Singh, and the 16th Finance Commission by Arvind Panagariya.
- Tied grants to local bodies can be spent only on specified purposes, whereas untied grants can be used for locally felt needs, except salaries and establishment costs.
- e-Gram Swaraj is the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's online application for panchayat planning, accounting and progress reporting.

Mains: "Conditional grants to local bodies strengthen accountability but can weaken fiscal federalism." Examine this statement with reference to the Finance Commission grants for panchayats. How can the design of such grants be improved? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional framework · Body — accountability gains · Body — federal costs · Conclusion

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

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

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

Mains: "The use of Article 3 to convert a State into a Union Territory raises questions about the federal character of the Indian Constitution." Discuss with reference to Jammu and Kashmir, and examine the constitutional route and challenges in restoring its Statehood. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional framework · Body — the judicial position · Body — challenges · Conclusion

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

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

- Article 39 of the WTO TRIPS Agreement deals with the protection of undisclosed information, including trade secrets and test data submitted to regulators.
- Under TRIPS Article 39, information is protected if it is secret, has commercial value because it is secret, and has been subject to reasonable steps to keep it secret.
- India has no dedicated statute on trade secrets; protection rests on the Indian Contract Act, 1872, the equitable doctrine of breach of confidence and judicial precedents.
- Section 27 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872 declares agreements in restraint of lawful trade, profession or business void, subject to a limited exception for the sale of goodwill.
- A trade secret confers no exclusive right against independent discovery or reverse engineering and can last indefinitely so long as confidentiality is maintained.
- The Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 applies to disclosures about corruption or misuse of power by public servants.
- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is the nodal department for the National Intellectual Property Rights Policy, 2016.

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

Approach: Introduction · Body — present position · Body — case for a law · Body — balancing · Conclusion

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

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

- Under Entry 27 of the Union List, ports declared by or under law made by Parliament to be major ports are a Union subject, while ports other than major ports fall under Entry 31 of the Concurrent List.
- The Major Port Authorities Act, 2021 replaced the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 and converted port trusts into Boards of Major Port Authority.
- The National Highways Authority of India was constituted under the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988.
- Land for national highways is acquired under Section 3A of the National Highways Act, 1956.
- The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan is a GIS-based digital platform for integrated planning of infrastructure across ministries, launched in 2021.
- Sagarmala is the Central programme for port-led development, covering port modernisation, port connectivity, port-linked industrialisation and coastal community development.
- A passenger car unit (PCU) is a measure that converts different vehicle types into the equivalent number of passenger cars for assessing road capacity.

Mains: "India's logistics costs are shaped as much by rules and standards as by investment." Discuss in the light of the notification of India's first mega ports and NHAI's uniform design guidelines for high-speed corridors. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — ports · Body — highways · Body — the system · Conclusion

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

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

- The Time Use Survey in India is conducted by the National Statistics Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; the first all-India round was conducted in 2019.
- Article 51A(e) of the Constitution lays down a Fundamental Duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- The Fundamental Duties were inserted into the Constitution by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976, on the recommendation of the Swaran Singh Committee.
- The National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (2022) covers children aged three to eight years, including Classes 1 and 2.
- Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.4 calls for recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, including through the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family.
- The Periodic Labour Force Survey, conducted by the National Statistics Office, measures the labour force participation rate, worker population ratio and unemployment rate.
- Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.

Mains: "Gender roles are learnt long before they are questioned." In this context, examine the role of school curriculum and textbooks in addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work in India. What are the limits of such interventions? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why curriculum matters · Body — the economic link · Body — limits · Conclusion

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

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

- Article 371A of the Constitution, inserted by the Thirteenth Amendment Act, 1962, contains special provisions for Nagaland, including protection of Naga customary law and ownership and transfer of land and its resources.

- The State of Nagaland was created under the State of Nagaland Act, 1962 and was inaugurated on December 1, 1963.
- The 16-Point Agreement of 1960 between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention preceded the creation of Nagaland.
- The NSCN was formed in 1980 by Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang, and split into the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) in 1988.
- The NSCN-IM has been in a ceasefire with the Government of India since 1997, and the Framework Agreement was signed on August 3, 2015.
- The Naga National Political Groups signed an 'Agreed Position' with the Government of India in 2017.

Mains: *The Naga peace process, running since 1997, shows both the strengths and the limits of India's approach to resolving ethnic insurgencies through negotiation. Discuss with reference to the recent decision to include a Union Minister in the talks and the unresolved demands of the NSCN-IM. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — strengths · Body — limits · Body — way forward · Conclusion

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

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

- India's nuclear doctrine was operationalised by a decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security on January 4, 2003, following the Draft Nuclear Doctrine of 1999.
- Under India's nuclear doctrine, nuclear weapons will be used only in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere, with an exception for a major biological or chemical attack.
- The Political Council of India's Nuclear Command Authority is chaired by the Prime Minister and is the sole body that can authorise the use of nuclear weapons.
- The Executive Council of the Nuclear Command Authority is chaired by the National Security Adviser.
- The Pokhran-II nuclear tests were conducted on May 11 and 13, 1998.
- India is not a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons or the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.
- The Nuclear Suppliers Group granted India a waiver for civil nuclear trade in 2008.

Mains: *"Reviewing a doctrine is not the same as revising it." In the light of changes in India's strategic environment, examine whether India's nuclear doctrine of 2003, particularly No First Use and massive retaliation, requires revision. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — changes in the environment · Body — the case for revision · Body — the case for review without revision · Conclusion

28 Sep Monsoon Session's 46-Day Sine Die Gap Without Prorogation Is the Third-Longest in Lok Sabha History

Article 85 leaves the timing of sessions to the executive, subject only to a six-month gap → the Presiding Officer adjourns a House sine die and the President normally prorogues soon after → a disrupted Monsoon Session is adjourned on August 13 but not prorogued → the House stays technically in session, allowing the Speaker to recall it without a fresh summons → the gap reaches 46 days, third only to the Bofors-era gaps of 1987 and 1989

- Under Article 85(1), not more than six months shall intervene between the last sitting of a House in one session and its first sitting in the next session.
- Under Article 85(2), the President may prorogue either House of Parliament and dissolve the Lok Sabha.
- Adjournment sine die is ordered by the Presiding Officer of a House, while prorogation is ordered by the President.
- Bills pending in Parliament do not lapse on prorogation of the Houses.
- On dissolution of the Lok Sabha, a Bill pending in the Lok Sabha lapses.
- A Joint Parliamentary Committee is constituted by a motion adopted in one House and agreed to by the other.
- Departmentally related standing committees of Parliament were first set up in 1993.

Mains: *"The executive's control over the summoning and prorogation of Parliament has weakened legislative oversight." Critically examine in the light of the recent prolonged sine die adjournment of the Lok Sabha. Suggest measures to ensure regular functioning of Parliament. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Introduction · Body — constitutional framework · Body — effect on oversight · Body — reforms · Conclusion

28 Sep Supreme Court's Mandatory FIR for Every Missing Person Stretches a Child-Protection Rule to Adults

Missing-child cases were long treated as non-cognisable 'missing reports' with little follow-up → Bachpan Bachao Andolan (2013) makes FIRs mandatory and presumes abduction or trafficking for children → Lalita Kumari (2013) makes FIR registration mandatory for cognisable offences generally → a 2011 Chennai case untraced for 14 years reaches the Supreme Court → the Court's directions in G. Ganesh extend mandatory FIRs to every missing person, including adults with legal agency

- In Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh, a Constitution Bench held that registration of an FIR is mandatory when information discloses a cognisable offence.
- Section 173 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 replaces Section 154 of the CrPC on information in cognisable cases.
- Section 173 of the BNSS allows a First Information Report to be registered at any police station irrespective of where the offence was committed.
- An FIR given by electronic communication under the BNSS must be signed by the informant within three days.
- Section 143 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 defines the offence of trafficking of persons.
- Article 23 of the Constitution prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour.
- In Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India (2013), the Supreme Court directed mandatory registration of FIRs in cases of missing children.

Mains: The mandatory registration of FIRs protects vulnerable persons but may also intrude on personal liberty. Discuss with reference to the Supreme Court's directions on missing persons and the provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the legal basis · Body — benefits · Body — concerns · Conclusion

28 Sep Iran Completes the Chabahar–Zahedan Rail Link as Kashmir's Old Trade Routes Re-enter the Connectivity Debate

Pakistan denies India overland transit to Afghanistan and Central Asia → India invests in Iran's Chabahar port and the INSTC to go around it → U.S. sanctions on Iran slow India's role, and Iran builds the Chabahar–Zahedan railway itself → the line is completed while Hormuz is closed and Iran is under blockade, so India negotiates to hold management rights in trust until sanctions lift → the question returns of whether India's own northern routes through Kashmir and Ladakh could ever be reopened

- Chabahar port is located in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province on the Gulf of Oman, outside the Strait of Hormuz.
- India develops and operates the Shahid Beheshti terminal at Chabahar through India Ports Global Limited.
- The International North–South Transport Corridor was agreed by India, Iran and Russia in 2000 as a multimodal route linking the Indian Ocean to Russia through Iran.
- India acceded to the Ashgabat Agreement, a transit arrangement for a transport corridor between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf, in 2018.
- Zahedan is the capital of Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province, near the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The Karakoram Pass historically linked Ladakh with Yarkand in Xinjiang on the caravan trade route.
- Cross-LoC trade between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir began in 2008 and was suspended by India in April 2019.

Mains: "India's access to Central Asia is hostage to geography, sanctions and unresolved borders." In the light of the completion of the Chabahar–Zahedan rail link and the debate on reopening Kashmir's historic routes, discuss the prospects and limits of India's connectivity strategy towards Central Asia. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — geography · Body — sanctions · Body — borders · Conclusion

28 Sep Railways Shelve the Uri–Baramulla Line and Qazigund–Srinagar–Budgam Doubling After Ecological and Local Objections

The Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla line links the Valley to the national network → the Army and planners seek to extend rail to Uri near the LoC and add capacity by doubling the Valley line → the alignment would cut through Baramulla town, orchards and Zone 5 mountains → farmers' protests stall the Anantnag branch lines and the Baramulla MLA demands an independent seismic study → the Cabinet Secretariat returns both proposals and the Railway Board drops them

- Seismic zoning in India is set out by the Bureau of Indian Standards in IS 1893, in which Zone V denotes the highest seismic hazard.
- The Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla Rail Link was declared a national project in 2002, and Baramulla is the northern terminus of the Kashmir rail line.
- The Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006, is issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and railway projects are generally not listed in its Schedule requiring prior environmental clearance.

- The Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, as amended in 2023, exempts forest land within 100 km of international borders, the LoC or the LAC for strategic linear projects of national importance concerning national security.
- Railways are a subject in the Union List of the Seventh Schedule.
- The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, requires a Social Impact Assessment before land is acquired, subject to exemptions.

Mains: “Strategic infrastructure in ecologically fragile and seismically active border regions must balance national security with ecological and social costs.” Discuss with reference to the recent shelving of the Uri–Baramulla rail line. Suggest an institutional framework for deciding such projects. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the strategic case · Body — ecological and social costs · Body — institutional framework · Conclusion

28 Sep Legal Metrology (IST) Rules, 2026 Make NPL’s Atomic-Clock Time India’s Only Legal Time From February 2027

The second is redefined in 1967 on the caesium atom and NPL becomes India’s timekeeper → networks, exchanges and banks quietly adopt free GPS time over four decades → NavIC, meant as India’s own source, loses satellites to clock failures and falls below four working craft → wars and jamming show that a foreign satellite signal can be denied or spoofed → the Department of Consumer Affairs notifies the IST Rules on August 27, 2026, making NPL-traceable IST mandatory from February 2027

- The Legal Metrology Act, 2009 is administered at the Centre by the Department of Consumer Affairs, and State Controllers of Legal Metrology enforce it.
- Since 1967, the SI second has been defined as 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom.
- Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) is computed by the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) at Sèvres, France, from atomic clocks maintained by national laboratories.
- Indian Standard Time is based on the 82.5° E meridian, which passes near Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, and is five and a half hours ahead of UTC.
- CSIR-National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi, is India’s National Metrology Institute and maintains the country’s primary standards of SI units, including time.
- NavIC (IRNSS) is designed as a seven-satellite regional system covering India and about 1,500 km around it, and a receiver needs signals from at least four satellites to fix position.
- A hydrogen maser provides very high short-term frequency stability, while a caesium clock provides the primary definition of the second.

Mains: “Precise time is invisible infrastructure.” In the light of the Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2026, discuss why India has chosen to make IST, sourced from its own atomic clocks, the only legal time reference, and examine the challenges in implementing the mandate. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why time matters · Body — why a national source · Body — challenges · Conclusion

28 Sep Women Are Only 5.5% of ITI Enrolment in Core Engineering Trades, a NITI Aayog Working Paper Finds

Social norms steer girls away from machines and towards “suitable” service work → ITIs fill service trades with women while electrician, fitter and welder courses stay almost all-male → factories hiring from these trades see few women applicants, reinforcing the belief that shop floors are male spaces → hostels, safety and family permission remain practical barriers for women who must move to train → NITI Aayog finds women at only 5.5% of core engineering enrolment in 2019–2024, while employer-run institutes experiment with fee waivers and hostels

- The Directorate General of Training, which sets standards for Industrial Training Institutes, functions under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- The National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) was formed by merging the National Council for Vocational Training and the National Skill Development Agency.
- The National Skills Qualifications Framework organises qualifications into levels based on learning outcomes to enable mobility between vocational and general education.
- The Periodic Labour Force Survey is conducted by the National Statistics Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- Apprenticeship training in industry is governed by the Apprentices Act, 1961.
- The Skill India Mission and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana were launched in 2015.
- The National Education Policy, 2020 targets exposure to vocational education for at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system.

Mains: “India’s skilling system risks reproducing the gender division of the labour market.” Examine this statement in the light of the low share of women in core engineering trades at Industrial Training Institutes, and suggest measures to increase women’s participation in manufacturing. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — causes · Body — consequences · Body — measures · Conclusion

28 Sep Underwater Excavations off Poompuhar Recover a West Asian ‘Torpedo Jar’, Adding to Evidence of the Chola Port’s Sea Trade

The Cauvery’s mouth offers a natural harbour for the early Cholas → Puhar grows into an international port trading with the Gangetic plains, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and the West, celebrated in Sangam poetry → floods, a possible tsunami and rising seas submerge large parts of the city in the early centuries CE → marine archaeologists from the 1990s find structures offshore → the 2026 TNSDA-Indian Maritime University dive recovers a West Asian torpedo jar and seabed ring wells marking a drowned river channel

- Poompuhar, also known as Kaveripoompattinam or Puhar, was a port of the early Cholas at the mouth of the Cauvery river on the Bay of Bengal coast.
- The Tamil epic Silappatikaram, attributed to Ilango Adigal, begins in the city of Puhar and tells the story of Kovalan and Kannagi.
- Pattinappalai, a poem of the Pattuppattu collection, describes the port of Puhar in praise of the Chola king Karikala.
- The tiger was the royal emblem of the Chola dynasty.
- Arikamedu, near Puducherry, is an archaeological site that has yielded evidence of Indo-Roman trade, including amphorae.
- The Chola ruler Rajendra I led a naval expedition against the Srivijaya kingdom of Southeast Asia in the eleventh century CE.
- In Sangam literature, the term Yavanas was used for foreign traders from the West, including Greeks and Romans.

Mains: “The ports of the Tamil coast were nodes of a vast Indian Ocean exchange long before the colonial era.” Discuss with reference to literary and archaeological evidence from Poompuhar and other sites. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — literary evidence · Body — archaeological evidence · Body — network and continuity · Conclusion

29 Sep Only 233 of 1,114 High Court Judges Came From the District Judiciary, and the Supreme Court Has None

Colonial courts leave criminal magistracy to ICS officers and higher Benches to lawyers → the Constitution separates the judiciary from the executive and creates State judicial services, while Article 217 opens two streams without a ratio → an informal two-thirds Bar, one-third service convention settles in, and the collegium draws mostly from the Bar → judicial officers reach the zone of consideration only in their late fifties → only 233 of 1,114 High Court seats and no Supreme Court seat are held by career judges

- Under Article 217(2), a person is qualified to be a High Court judge if he or she has held a judicial office in India for at least ten years or has been an advocate of a High Court for at least ten years.
- Under Article 124(3), a distinguished jurist, in the opinion of the President, is eligible for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court, but there is no such category for High Court judges.
- Under Article 233, district judges are appointed by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to that State.
- Article 235 vests control over district courts and courts subordinate to them in the High Court.
- The provision enabling an All India Judicial Service was inserted into Article 312 by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, and the service cannot include posts inferior to that of a district judge.
- The Third Judges case (1998) settled that the collegium for Supreme Court appointments consists of the Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.
- Article 50, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to take steps to separate the judiciary from the executive in the public services of the State.

Mains: “The subordinate judiciary is the foundation of the justice system, yet its members are under-represented in the higher judiciary.” Discuss the reasons for this imbalance and suggest measures to create a fair career path from the district courts to the High Courts and the Supreme Court. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — constitutional and conventional framework · Body — reasons for the imbalance · Body — measures · Conclusion

29 Sep PRS Data Show MPs From Reserved Seats Took Part in Fewer Lok Sabha Debates Than Peers

Separate electorates for depressed classes are replaced by joint electorates with reserved seats in the Poona Pact of 1932 → the Constitution carries reserved seats into Articles 330 and 332 → reserved-seat MPs must win votes from all communities and

depend on party tickets → floor time in the Lok Sabha is rationed through party whips and leaders → an NDA Minister writes to the Speaker, and PRS data confirm a participation gap across parties

- Article 330 of the Constitution provides for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha, and Article 332 in State Legislative Assemblies.
- The Constitution (104th Amendment) Act, 2019 extended the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies till 2030 and discontinued nomination of Anglo-Indian members.
- Seats reserved for SCs and STs are filled through joint electorates: all voters of the constituency vote, but only SC or ST candidates may contest.
- The Poona Pact of 1932 between Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar replaced separate electorates for depressed classes, granted in the Communal Award, with reserved seats in joint electorates.
- Under Article 329(a), the validity of any law relating to delimitation of constituencies or allotment of seats cannot be questioned in any court.
- The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha are made by the House under Article 118 of the Constitution.
- The Business Advisory Committee of the Lok Sabha, chaired by the Speaker, recommends the time to be allotted for discussion of Bills and other business.

Mains: “Reservation of seats has secured the presence of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Parliament, but not necessarily their voice.” Critically examine this statement in the light of recent data on participation of MPs from reserved constituencies in Lok Sabha debates. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the constitutional design · Body — reasons for the gap · Body — the other side · Conclusion

29 Sep **FAO Says India Leads on Post-Harvest Loss Data but Lags on Retail and Household Waste**

Rising output outpaces storage, drying and cold-chain capacity → a significant share of produce is lost between farm and retail, and mandis dump organic waste in landfills where it emits methane → India measures farm-to-retail loss through three national surveys, but not household and retail waste → SDG 12.3 and the Food Loss Index create a reporting obligation → the FAO urges finance-led loss reduction and waste-to-energy models such as Surat’s bio-CNG plant

- SDG target 12.3 aims to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains by 2030.
- The FAO is the custodian agency for the Food Loss Index and UNEP is the custodian agency for the Food Waste Index under SDG indicator 12.3.1.
- The International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste is observed on 29 September, while World Food Day is observed on 16 October.
- Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is implemented by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.
- Operation Greens, announced in the Union Budget 2018-19, initially covered tomato, onion and potato.
- The SATAT initiative for compressed biogas is an initiative of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 mandate segregation of waste at source.

Mains: “India has the world’s best data on post-harvest food loss and among the weakest on food waste.” Examine the implications of this imbalance for India’s food security and climate commitments, and suggest measures to address food loss and waste across the value chain. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the imbalance · Body — food security and climate · Body — measures · Conclusion

29 Sep **NFHS-6: Men Still Carry Almost No Contraceptive Burden as WHO Sets Male-Method Benchmarks**

India starts a national family planning programme in 1952 and leans on sterilisation for decades → coercive vasectomy drives during the Emergency make male sterilisation politically toxic → policy shifts to women-centred, target-free services after Cairo 1994 → fertility falls below replacement, but women carry 36.5% sterilisation against men’s 0.5% in NFHS-6 → WHO sets benchmarks for reversible male methods, reopening the question of shared responsibility

- The National Family Health Survey is conducted under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, with the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, as the nodal agency.
- India launched a national family planning programme in 1952, the first country in the world to do so.
- The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 shifted population policy from demographic targets to reproductive rights and choice.
- Replacement-level fertility corresponds to a Total Fertility Rate of about 2.1 children per woman.
- Unmet need for family planning refers to women who wish to stop or delay childbearing but are not using any method of contraception.

- No-scalpel vasectomy is a method of male sterilisation that can be performed under local anaesthesia.
- Sustainable Development Goal target 3.7 calls for universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning.

Mains: “India has achieved replacement-level fertility, but the burden of contraception continues to rest on women.” Discuss in the light of NFHS-6 findings. What steps can increase male participation in family planning? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — the evidence · Body — reasons · Body — steps · Conclusion

29 Sep AI-Made Fake Videos and Unverified Messages Trigger Clashes in Ujjain and Violence at Two Punjab Universities

A development project, road-widening for the 2028 Simhashta, touches religious structures, and a Punjab campus carries old student grievances → a local dispute over authority or administration creates a group ready to believe the worst → AI-generated videos or unverified messages supply a false trigger within hours → crowds gather faster than officials can verify or explain → stone-pelting, arson and highway blockades follow, and police respond with FIRs against pages and influencers after the damage is done

- Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 empowers the Union government to direct the blocking of public access to online information on grounds including sovereignty, security of the State and public order.
- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides conditional ‘safe harbour’ to intermediaries for third-party content, subject to due diligence.
- In Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015), the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act as unconstitutional.
- In Tehseen S. Poonawalla v. Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court directed States to designate a nodal officer, not below the rank of Superintendent of Police, in each district to prevent mob violence.
- The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 replaced the Indian Penal Code, 1860 with effect from July 1, 2024.
- Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 punishes promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence and language.

Mains: “AI-generated misinformation has shortened the distance between a rumour and a riot.” Discuss with reference to recent incidents. What legal, technological and administrative measures can prevent rumour-driven violence without curtailing free speech? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Introduction · Body — why rumours now lead to violence faster · Body — the legal framework · Body — administrative and technological measures · Conclusion

30 Sep ₹1 Lakh Crore RDI Fund Stalls as TDB Stops Applications, Awaiting DST’s Money

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

- The Anusandhan National Research Foundation was established by the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023; the Prime Minister is the ex-officio president of its governing board.
- The Technology Development Board is a statutory body under the Department of Science and Technology, set up under the Technology Development Board Act, 1995.
- Soft loans under the RDI Fund cover up to 50% of project cost; the firm raises the rest from non-government sources.

Mains: “India’s problem in research funding is less the size of the corpus than the machinery of delivery.” Critically examine with reference to the Research, Development and Innovation Fund. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Directive — Critically examine · Introduction — ₹1 lakh crore promised, ₹2,192 crore out in a year · Risk, gestation and spillovers justify patient public capital · The corpus is adequate; the pipe is blocked · Integrity must travel with speed · Conclusion — tie release to milestones, not files

30 Sep Centre asks Supreme Court to halt Calcutta HC hearings on Great Nicobar, disputing petitioner’s standing

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

- FRA 2006, Section 4(5): no forest dweller may be evicted until recognition and verification of rights is complete.
- The Shompen of Great Nicobar are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group; the Nicobarese are a Scheduled Tribe of the same island.
- Article 136 lets the Supreme Court grant special leave to appeal from any court or tribunal except military tribunals.

Mains: “Gram sabha consent is a mere procedural hurdle for projects of national importance.” Critically examine with reference to the Great Nicobar project. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Directive — Critically examine · Introduction — a strategic project meets a statutory right · Body — the strategic case is genuine and time-bound · Body — consent is substance, not paperwork, for isolated groups · Body — procedural shortcuts cost more time than they save · Conclusion — redo consent openly and let the court decide on merits

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

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

- The Great Indian Bustard is Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and listed in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Under the UNCCD, India has committed to restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
- The Wastelands Atlas of India is prepared by the Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development, with the National Remote Sensing Centre.
- The pygmy hog, a grassland species, has been reintroduced in Orang National Park in Assam.

Mains: To what extent does classifying grasslands as “wastelands” undermine India’s conservation and climate goals? (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Directive — To what extent · Introduction — a third of land carbon, officially waste · Body — the label steers solar, mining and plantations onto grasslands · Body — it conflicts with UNCCD and climate goals · Body — the label is partly right where land is genuinely degraded · Conclusion — a legal grassland category and a National Grazing Policy

30 Sep NCERT’s new Class 9 book replaces European revolutions with medieval Indian ‘resistance’

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

- NCERT was established in 1961 as a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860; it is not a statutory body.
- Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
- The Battle of Saraighat (1671) was won by the Ahom commander Lachit Borphukan against a Mughal fleet on the Brahmaputra.

Mains: “A history textbook teaches citizenship as much as the past.” In the light of NCERT’s revised Class 9 textbook, critically examine how school curricula should be decided. (15 marks, 250 words)

Approach: Directive — Critically examine · Introduction — textbooks shape how young citizens see the nation · Body — the case for revision rests on a real Eurocentric gap · Body — the case against rests on lost ideas and a single frame · Body — legitimacy depends on open process and States’ role · Conclusion — a book that teaches students to weigh evidence serves every view

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

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

- Article 243K: superintendence, direction and control of panchayat elections vests in the State Election Commission, not the Election Commission of India.
- Article 243D reserves not less than one-third of panchayat seats and chairpersons’ posts for women, including within SC and ST reserved seats.
- Article 243A provides for the gram sabha, all persons on the village panchayat’s electoral roll.

Mains: Unopposed gram panchayat elections are often presented as a sign of village harmony. Examine this claim with reference to the representation of women and marginalised groups. (10 marks, 150 words)

Approach: Directive — Examine · Introduction — Maharashtra villages with no poll for 60–70 years · Body — consensus can reduce feuds and cost, as model villages show · Body — pre-settled seats hand reserved posts to compliant nominees · Conclusion — protect the right to contest

30 Sep Cybercrime rises 17.9% in NCRB’s 2024 data as survey shows bribes and contacts drive recovery

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

- Section 66D of the Information Technology Act, 2000, punishes cheating by personation using a computer resource; Section 66C punishes identity theft.
- “Police” and “Public order” are subjects in the State List of the Seventh Schedule.
- The NCRB functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs; 1930 is the national cyber-fraud helpline.

Mains: *“Fraud has become less a tax on carelessness than a tax on connectivity.” Analyse this with reference to cyber fraud in India and the gaps in redressal for its victims. (15 marks, 250 words)*

Approach: Directive — Analyse · Introduction — cyber fraud is rising against the national crime trend · Body — exposure grows with connectivity, not ignorance · Body — redressal rewards bribes and contacts, hitting the poor hardest · Body — State-wise policing fragments a borderless crime · Conclusion — procedure, not influence, should recover money