UPSC DARPAN

WEEKLY SPECIAL — ISSUE No. 1

16–19 September 2026 · The 25 Stories of the Week That Matter Most

शीलं परं भूषणम्

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A Letter from the Editor

Why this special issue exists

This is our first Weekly Special. Where each daily edition captures that day's news, this issue steps back across the whole week and asks — of everything published, which 25 stories actually matter for the exam. The selection follows the same criteria RV Sir shared with us: international events touching India, national events with international repercussions, developmental issues touching the common citizen, and history-culture threads connecting to the present.

Every card here is a five-minute read, but exactly as precise as a daily card — nothing new was invented; the week's verified material was simply selected and sharpened down to what matters most.

— The Editor

We want to become the Mussoorie-wala Karma Yogi — a civil servant whose soul is suffused with the principles of Ability, Anonymity and Austerity. And we shall become, my man.

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All 25 stories of the week, card by card.

Polity & Governance

1.1 Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls — the Jharkhand Numbers

THE NEWS The Hindu reports that Jharkhand's SIR claims-and-objections deadline has been extended a second time, from September 4 to September 15 and now to September 30. When the draft rolls were published on August 5, the electorate stood at 63,24,116 — but 43,61,987 entries were flagged for removal under the categories of Absent, Shifted, Dead or Duplicate (15,92,194 as 'shifted', 14,50,810 as 'absent/untraceable', and 68,283 as 'duplicate'). Eligible citizens now have until September 30 to seek inclusion or objection.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Article 324–329 (ECI's powers & electoral machinery); Article 326 (universal adult franchise); Representation of the People Act, 1950 (S.21 — preparation of rolls) & 1951; Draft vs Final electoral rolls; delimitation linkage (the 84th Amendment freezes seat-shares till the first Census after 2026).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. ECI's powers and electoral-roll integrity are tested almost every year in Prelims (institutional powers) and periodically in Mains as a governance/electoral-reform theme. A controversial administrative exercise like SIR — with a headline figure showing nearly 69% of the draft electorate flagged for possible removal in a single State — is prime examiner material for a 'critically examine' question on balancing roll accuracy against the constitutional guarantee of universal suffrage.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	SIR is conducted under Article 326 read with the RPA 1950; deletion reasons are classed as Absent, Shifted, Dead or Duplicate; Jharkhand's draft roll (5 August) listed 63,24,116 electors, of which 43,61,987 were flagged in these four categories.
ANALYSIS	1. Frame this as a 'Type I vs Type II error' problem that no electoral-roll design eliminates simultaneously. Type I error — deleting a genuine voter — violates Article 326's affirmative promise of universal suffrage; Type II error — retaining a bogus or duplicate entry — undermines one-vote-one-value integrity and invites fraud. SIR, unlike routine annual revision, is a full re-verification exercise compressed into a fixed window, which structurally raises the error rate on both sides but especially Type I, because BLOs verifying an entire electorate in weeks default to 'non-response equals absent' rather than exhaustive multi-visit confirmation. The 69% flagging rate in Jharkhand's draft roll is too large to be explained by genuine deaths/duplication alone — it signals that 'shifted' and 'absent/untraceable' tags are catching large numbers of seasonal/labour migrants who remain legitimate residents but were simply not home when the BLO called. This mirrors the controversy around Bihar's 2025 SIR, suggesting a structural design flaw (compressed deadlines, single-visit verification, urban/migrant-heavy areas being hardest to reach) rather than a one-off Jharkhand problem. The political fight over whether deletions disproportionately hit poor, migrant or minority voters is ultimately an empirical claim that only disaggregated data can settle — but the burden-of-proof question (should the state have to justify each deletion, or should the citizen have to justify each re-inclusion?) is the real constitutional fault line.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, while intended to improve accuracy, risks disenfranchising genuine voters through opaque deletion criteria." Critically examine, and suggest institutional safeguards.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Define SIR versus routine revision, and state the paradox — an exercise built to improve accuracy that, if mismanaged, produces mass disenfranchisement. Body — argue in four steps: (1) the legitimate rationale for SIR (removing bogus/duplicate/dead entries protects one-person-one-vote integrity); (2) the disenfranchisement risk, using Jharkhand's ~69% flagging rate as evidence, and naming who bears this risk disproportionately — migrant workers, the urban poor, women who relocate after marriage; (3) whether existing safeguards (the claims-and-objections window, appellate review) are adequate in practice given literacy and digital-access

	constraints, or merely adequate on paper; (4) a brief comparative note — some democracies use automatic voter registration tied to other government databases specifically to avoid this trade-off. Conclusion: Roll accuracy should be pursued through technology-assisted, multi-source verification and genuinely long, well-publicised objection windows — not through compressed bulk exercises whose administrative convenience is bought at the cost of constitutional inclusion.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As the District Election Officer of a Jharkhand-like constituency where nearly seven in ten draft-roll entries have been flagged for removal, what ground-verification checks would you insist on before any deletion becomes final?** ***Approach:*** Move from single-visit, non-response-equals-absent verification to a mandatory two-visit protocol at different times of day/week to catch shift and seasonal workers. Require corroboration from at least two independent sources (Aadhaar-linked address, ration card, utility bill, employer certificate) before any 'shifted/absent' tag is finalised, rather than accepting BLO non-contact alone. Run mohalla-level verification camps with local ward representatives and civil-society volunteers to catch cases BLOs miss, and maintain a time-stamped, photographic/GPS record of each visit so decisions are auditable. In short, shift the standard from 'delete unless the BLO happened to find them' to 'delete only on clear, corroborated evidence'. **Q2. How do you balance two competing public goods — a 'clean' roll free of bogus/duplicate entries, and the constitutional promise that no genuine citizen loses their vote to an administrative shortcut?** ***Approach:*** Treat enfranchisement as the constitutional default and deletion as the higher-burden exception — the presumption should favour retention unless there is affirmative, corroborated evidence of ineligibility, not merely an absence of confirmation. This reverses the practical incentive BLOs currently face (where an unverified entry defaults to deletion) and instead makes the administration responsible for proving a name should come off, not the citizen responsible for proving they still belong on it. **Q3. What would you tell a migrant worker registered at both his native village and his rented city address — fraud, or a structural gap the system hasn't solved?** ***Approach:*** Structural gap, not fraud, as long as he is not voting from both. The fix is a formal, low-friction 'address transfer' or portable-registration mechanism (ideally linked to Aadhaar-based address updates as corroborative evidence) that lets a migrant regularise his registration without being penalised for the system's own rigidity — the administrative failure is the absence of an easy transfer pathway, not the migrant's dual footprint.

1.2 Uniform Civil Code — the Fight Over the Route (Parliament vs 'Backdoor')

> ***THE NEWS*** J&K CM Omar Abdullah tells the BJP the UCC should be enacted through Parliament, not brought in piecemeal, state by state — a swipe at Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion that UCC will be implemented in all NDA-ruled States. Abdullah argues personal-law reform of this magnitude 'is not a state-ruled matter' and should not be decided by individual States 'as if it were a big thing.' He also referenced the BRICS Summit's joint declaration condemning the Pahalgam attack, and cautioned against reading too much into what other countries say about India's foreign policy.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Article 44 (DPSP on UCC) is non-justiciable; Entry 5, Concurrent List (7th Schedule) covers personal law, so both Centre and States can legislate; Uttarakhand's 2024 UCC is the first operative state-level precedent; the tension between Article 25 (freedom of religion) and Article 14/15 (equality) underlies the debate.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. UCC is a perennial GS2/Essay theme that has only grown hotter since Uttarakhand's enactment. Examiners like testing whether you can move past the binary 'for/against

	UCC' framing to the federalism question: can a Concurrent List subject be implemented piecemeal without creating a 'checkerboard' of personal-law regimes across India?
PRELIMS NUGGETS	Personal law is Entry 5 of the Concurrent List (List III); Article 44 is a Directive Principle, not enforceable in court; Uttarakhand became the first State to enact its own UCC (2024).
ANALYSIS	1. This isn't really a dispute about whether UCC is desirable — most major parties nominally endorse Article 44's goal. It's a dispute about method and sequence, and three pathways are on the table. Parliament enacting a national UCC using its Concurrent List competence is legally the cleanest but politically the hardest, since it requires building consensus across allies with minority-heavy vote bases (TDP, JD(U)) who have already signalled hesitation. States enacting their own UCCs individually is administratively easier and lets the Centre 'pilot-test' political reception (Uttarakhand being the test case) — but it produces exactly the checkerboard problem Abdullah is warning against: a citizen's marriage, divorce or inheritance rights would change on crossing a state border, undermining the very idea of uniformity Article 44 exists to serve. The third option — status quo — is safest politically but leaves a 75-year-old constitutional directive unfulfilled. Crucially, because personal law sits in the Concurrent List, Article 254 means any later central law overriding conflicting state provisions would prevail — so state-level UCCs are legally provisional, a pilot rather than a permanent solution, whatever their political framing. Abdullah's objection is also plausibly shaped by J&K's specific position as a Muslim-majority State watching Hindu-majority-led States legislate first on personal law — a federalism argument with an unmistakable minority-anxiety undertone.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The debate on the Uniform Civil Code is less about its constitutional desirability and more about the method and sequence of its implementation." Discuss, with reference to the choice between Parliamentary legislation and piecemeal state-level enactment.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: State that UCC is constitutionally permissible at both Union and State levels under the Concurrent List, but the political sociology of each route differs sharply. Body: (1) the federalism argument — the 'checkerboard' problem and loss of portability of personal-law rights across state lines; (2) the political-economy reading — why the Centre may prefer states pilot first, diffusing electoral risk and testing minority-community reaction before a harder national push; (3) the Article 254 override doctrine, which makes state-level UCCs inherently provisional rather than a final constitutional answer; (4) the minority-rights dimension — fear of majoritarian imposition via State legislatures versus the legitimacy a negotiated, Law-Commission-anchored national process would carry. Conclusion: A national UCC enacted via Parliament, built on broad-based consultation and a phased/optional design (drawing on Uttarakhand's tribal-exemption model), better serves both uniformity and federal comity than an uncoordinated state-by-state rollout.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a Law Ministry official asked to draft a coordinating framework while several States pursue their own UCC models, how would you prevent legal fragmentation while still respecting States' constitutional right to legislate on a Concurrent subject?** ***Approach:*** Issue a Centre-drafted 'model code' — similar in spirit to the Model GST law — that States are encouraged (not compelled) to adopt, preserving substantive uniformity on the provisions that matter most for portability (marriage age, divorce grounds, inheritance shares) while allowing limited local/administrative customisation. This avoids outright legislative pre-emption, which would be politically explosive, while still limiting the degree of fragmentation any individual State's version can introduce. **Q2. How would you address genuine anxieties among religious minorities about the erosion of personal-law protections, without letting that concern become a permanent veto on reform?** ***Approach:*** Involve legal experts and religious bodies from minority communities directly in the drafting process from the outset, rather than repeating the top-down 1955-

	56 Hindu Code Bill model that reformed only Hindu personal law unilaterally. Retain religiously significant personal practices that don't conflict with constitutional morality (e.g., religious solemnisation rites) while standardising only the legal consequences — property, custody, maintenance — that a uniform code needs to actually deliver on its promise. **Q3. What consultative architecture would you propose to build durable political consensus rather than a coalition-fracturing, piecemeal rollout?** ***Approach:*** Sequence it: a Law Commission report with a draft Bill, followed by structured pre-legislative consultation with State governments and community/religious bodies, then a pilot phase in willing States using tribal-type exemptions where needed, and finally a national rollout with a built-in review/sunset clause for the most contested provisions — so consensus is built incrementally rather than assumed.

1.3 Kishau Multipurpose Dam Pact — Cooperative Federalism Over an 8-Year Deadlock

THE NEWS Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi signed an MoU for the ₹15,624-crore, 422 MW Kishau Multipurpose Project on the Tons river (a Yamuna tributary), which the Centre calls the tenth long-pending water dispute it has resolved. The original MoU dates to May 12, 1994, alongside two sister projects — Lakhwar and Renukaji — which already signed their own implementation MoUs in 2015 and 2017 and are under construction; Kishau alone stayed stuck for eight years because Himachal Pradesh, which bears the greatest submergence (around 2,950 hectares, 17 villages, ~5,500 people across the two States) for a proportionally smaller share of the water, held out over cost-sharing. The June 2026 breakthrough came when the Centre agreed to bear about 90% of the cost, with the remaining 10% split among the beneficiary States.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956; Article 262 (bars ordinary courts from adjudicating inter-state river disputes); River Boards Act, 1956; contrast with tribunal-based adjudication (Cauvery, Krishna, Mahadayi) — adversarial and decades-slow — versus an MoU-based negotiated settlement.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Inter-state water disputes are a GS2 federalism staple (Cauvery, Krishna-Godavari, Ravi-Beas, Mahadayi have all featured). A fresh, successfully negotiated example like Kishau lets you argue for 'cooperative federalism' as an alternative to slow tribunal litigation — a differentiator from cookie-cutter answers that only cite old, unresolved disputes.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	Kishau Dam: 232.6 m concrete gravity dam on the Tons river, at the Sirmaur (HP)–Dehradun (Uttarakhand) border; storage capacity 1,562 million cubic metres; irrigation potential 97,000 hectares; will generate 1,476 million units of clean hydropower; part of a 1994 Yamuna MoU alongside Lakhwar and Renukaji.
ANALYSIS	1. This case is a textbook illustration of how India's water federalism has shifted, in at least some instances, from 'adjudicate the conflict after it becomes a crisis' (tribunals — post-facto, adversarial) toward 'negotiate the benefit-sharing before construction' (MoU-based, ex-ante, cooperative). But look closely at what actually caused the eight-year delay: it wasn't water allocation — that was fixed back in 1994 — it was cost-sharing, because Himachal Pradesh bears a disproportionate ecological cost (submergence, seismic risk in a fragile Himalayan zone, displacement of ~5,500 people) for a project whose water/irrigation/drinking-water benefits flow mostly downstream to UP, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi. This 'upstream sacrifice, downstream benefit' asymmetry is a structural pattern across Indian river-basin projects (it recurs in North-East hydropower feeding the national grid, and in forest States bearing conservation costs for a nationally-shared carbon benefit). The resolution — the Centre absorbing 90% of the cost — converts a horizontal (state-to-state) equity problem into a vertical (Centre-to-state) fiscal transfer: Himachal's objection is bought out with money rather than resolved by adjusting the underlying water-sharing formula. That's politically efficient

	(no state has to formally cede its water share) but raises a fiscal-federalism concern worth flagging in any answer: if the Centre routinely absorbs project costs to break deadlocks, does that create a moral hazard where states learn to hold out for ever-larger central bailouts on future projects, rather than negotiating benefit-sharing directly with each other?
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Inter-State river-water disputes in India have traditionally been resolved through slow, adversarial tribunal adjudication." Discuss how MoU-based cooperative federalism, as illustrated by the Kishau Dam agreement, offers an alternative approach, and examine its limitations.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Frame Kishau as a cooperative-federalism example — MoU-based cost-sharing resolving an eight-year deadlock — and note it is fundamentally different from a water-allocation dispute. Body: (1) clarify that the dispute was about cost, not water, and explain the upstream-sacrifice/downstream-benefit asymmetry that drives most such standoffs; (2) explain how central fiscal absorption resolved it, and flag the moral-hazard risk this creates for future negotiations; (3) contrast with tribunal-based models (Cauvery, Krishna) — slower and more adversarial, but arguably more durable because backed by adjudicated legal finality, versus an MoU that remains open to future renegotiation. Conclusion: MoU-based cooperative federalism works well where all parties want the project and the dispute is over cost/benefit allocation; tribunal adjudication remains necessary where the dispute is over genuinely scarce water and interests are zero-sum.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Jal Shakti coordinating this project, how would you sequence environmental clearance, rehabilitation & resettlement, and benefit-sharing so it doesn't stall again?** ***Approach:*** Front-load rehabilitation-and-resettlement planning and seismic/environmental risk assessment before financial closure, not after — locking in displaced people's consent and compensation terms early so they don't become a second flashpoint once construction is already underway and politically harder to pause. Pair this with a river-basin-level monitoring authority publishing real-time sediment and seismic data on a public dashboard, so trust is built through transparency rather than assumed. **Q2. Himachal Pradesh bears the greatest submergence but a smaller water share — how do you ensure the 'losing' State experiences the 90:10 Centre-funded deal as genuinely fair, not merely bought off?** ***Approach:*** Go beyond one-time cash compensation: build in ongoing structural benefits for HP — guaranteed local-employment quotas during construction and operation, a perpetual (not one-time) share of hydropower royalty revenue, and infrastructure development (roads, health facilities) explicitly tied to project milestones — so HP experiences a continuing stake in the project's success rather than a single upfront payoff that is quickly forgotten. **Q3. Given Nepal's flash floods show how fast Himalayan hydropower infrastructure can be destroyed by sediment and glacial-lake risk, what would you insist on building into Kishau from day one?** ***Approach:*** Make continuous sediment-load and glacial-lake telemetry a statutory pre-condition for financial closure rather than a post-construction retrofit, with its cost built into the ₹15,624-crore project budget and its data feeding directly into NDMA's early-warning network — treating monitoring as a standard operating cost of Himalayan infrastructure, not an optional add-on.

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

THE NEWS An Opinion-page critique in The Hindu argues the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act (MMDR), 2026 is 'unfair to States.' At its centre is Section 9D, which restricts State governments from imposing taxes, cesses or other levies on mineral rights or mineral-bearing land except in accordance with conditions the Centre prescribes — extending federal control beyond mining policy into a State's own taxation powers over mineral-bearing land under Entry 49 of the State List.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Entry 23, State List (regulation of mines, subject to Union control under Entry 54, Union List); Entry 50, State List (taxes on mineral rights, subject to any limitations Parliament imposes); Entry 49, State List (taxes on land and buildings); the 2024 nine-judge Supreme Court verdict in Mineral Area Development Authority vs Steel Authority of India, which upheld States' power to tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing land.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Centre-State fiscal federalism disputes are a GS2 staple, but this one is unusually sharp because it follows directly on the heels of a landmark nine-judge Supreme Court ruling that went in the States' favour — making the 2026 amendment a textbook case of a legislature responding to a judicial verdict it dislikes by narrowing the space that verdict just affirmed.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	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.
ANALYSIS	1. This is a clean case study in the friction between judicial federalism and subsequent ordinary legislation. The 2024 nine-judge Bench verdict was about as authoritative a statement of States' mineral-taxation power as the Indian judiciary produces — a rare full-strength Constitution Bench ruling specifically to settle a decades-old federalism question. The 2026 MMDR Amendment doesn't formally overrule that verdict (it can't — only a larger or coordinate-strength Bench, or a constitutional amendment, can do that), but it uses Parliament's Entry 50 power to 'impose limitations' on State mineral-rights taxation to functionally neutralise the practical value of the verdict, since Entry 50 itself permits Parliament to place such limits. The deeper administrative question is about mineral-rich but revenue-poor States like Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh: they bear the concentrated environmental, infrastructural and social costs of mining (displacement, degraded land, heavy public expenditure obligations) but under Section 9D, their ability to convert that natural-resource endowment into predictable fiscal capacity is now contingent on Centrally-prescribed conditions rather than autonomous State decision-making. This raises a 'who bears the cost, who gets the benefit' asymmetry structurally similar to the Kishau Dam story covered earlier in this digest series — except here the resolution mechanism is unilateral central legislation rather than negotiated federalism, which is a meaningfully different and more contentious way to resolve a Centre-State distributional conflict.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: State the sequence — a 2024 nine-judge verdict affirming States' mineral-taxation power, followed by a 2026 amendment restricting it via Parliament's Entry 50 limitation power. Body: (1) explain the constitutional mechanics of how Entry 50 lets Parliament narrow a power the judiciary just affirmed, without formally overruling it; (2) the federal-symmetry argument — the States bearing mining's costs losing autonomous control over mining's fiscal upside; (3) the Centre's likely justification —

	predictable investment climate, avoiding a fragmented multi-State tax regime that could deter mining investment; (4) weigh the two: does investment-climate predictability justify this degree of centralisation, or does it hollow out a specifically judicially-affirmed State power. Conclusion: Argue for a negotiated middle path — a Centrally-coordinated but not Centrally-controlled mineral-taxation framework, developed via the interstate council or GST Council-style body, rather than unilateral legislative override of a Constitution Bench verdict's practical effect.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a State Finance Secretary in a mineral-rich State, how would you respond to Section 9D's constraints on your mineral-taxation autonomy?** ***Approach:*** Pursue a dual-track response: challenge the amendment's specific provisions in court where they genuinely exceed Parliament's Entry 50 'limitation' power (as opposed to legitimate limitation), while simultaneously building the State's case in Finance Commission and GST Council-adjacent forums for a formal, negotiated share of mineral revenue predictability — since litigation alone, even if successful, doesn't resolve the underlying fiscal-federalism tension that will resurface in the next legislative cycle. **Q2. How would you design a mineral-taxation framework that gives investors predictability without requiring the degree of central control Section 9D imposes?** ***Approach:*** Build a cooperative-federalism mechanism — a standing Centre-State mineral-revenue council, similar in spirit to the GST Council, that sets nationally-consistent tax bands within which States retain some rate-setting flexibility — giving investors the predictability of bounded, known ranges while preserving genuine State fiscal autonomy within those bounds, rather than the binary of full State discretion versus full Central prescription.

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

THE NEWS In two separate matters on Thursday, the Supreme Court engaged the language question in school education. A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih urged the Tamil Nadu government to reconsider its opposition to establishing Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in the State, saying Chennai and New Delhi should not 'alienate' each other over differences on language and education policy; the Court gave the State three months to identify suitable land and clarified that the direction did not amount to an immediate order to acquire land. The Bench remarked that 'Chennai and New Delhi should not alienate each other over differences on language and edu policy', and indicated Tamil could be accommodated within the language framework of the proposed schools. The State had said it was not opposed to Navodaya schools as such but had reservations about the three-language framework associated with them, and raised concerns about financial implications of providing land and other resources. Separately, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, urged the Union government to make the three-language policy mandatory for Class 6 from January 1, 2027 rather than 'springing a surprise' on the current batch with barely four months left in the year; Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati agreed to take the suggestion to the government. Under CBSE guidelines Classes 7 to 9 were exempted while the present Class 6 batch was slated to face full implementation, including a mandatory Class 10 Board exam in the third language by 2031.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Education sits in the Concurrent List —** Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List (Entry 25, List III) by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976. That single fact explains the whole dispute: both the Union and the States can legislate and make policy, so a clash of preferences is a structural feature, not an aberration. 2. **The three-language formula is policy, not statute —** It originated in the National Policy on Education, 1968, was retained in 1986 and is carried forward in the National Education Policy, 2020. Because it is executive policy rather than a central law, a State's refusal is a political and fiscal confrontation rather than a straightforward legal violation — which is why the Court is nudging rather than commanding. 3. **Navodaya Vidyalayas are a central scheme needing State land —** Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas are residential schools funded by the Union and run by an

	autonomous body, but they require the State to provide land. That dependence is the pressure point: the Union cannot build without the State, and the State cannot block a central scheme outright without political cost. 4. **Tamil Nadu's position has statutory backing of its own —** The State follows a two-language policy centred on Tamil and English, reinforced by the Tamil Nadu Tamil Learning Act, 2006, and has resisted the three-language formula since the anti-Hindi agitations of the 1930s and 1960s. The opposition is therefore historically grounded, not a recent political improvisation.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Centre-State relations is the highest-frequency GS2 theme —** Language policy gives the examiner a version of federalism that is concrete rather than abstract — a real scheme, a real refusal, a real judicial intervention — which is exactly the kind of case study that makes a federalism answer specific. 2. **Two orders on one day let you compare judicial techniques —** One Bench persuades a State, the other Bench persuades the Union. Neither issues a command. That symmetry is analytically useful and rare, and it supports a sophisticated point about how courts handle policy disputes they cannot decide by fiat. 3. **NEP 2020 implementation questions are live —** The exam has moved from asking what NEP proposes to asking how its provisions are landing in practice. A dispute about the Class 6 rollout date is precisely an implementation question.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Court chose persuasion over command in both matters —** In neither case did the Bench issue a mandatory direction. Tamil Nadu was asked to 'reconsider' and given three months to identify land, with an express clarification that this was not an order to acquire. The Union was asked to defer the Class 6 rollout by a year rather than told to. This is deliberate: language policy is a political settlement, and a court that commands here risks an order it cannot enforce. 2. **Tamil Nadu's objection is about the framework, not the school —** The State told the Court it was not opposed to Navodaya schools as such, only to the three-language framework attached to them, and raised the cost of land and resources. Separating these two objections matters. The language objection is ideological and long-standing; the fiscal objection is negotiable. The Court's hint that Tamil could be accommodated within the schools' language framework targets the first, and the three-month land timeline targets the second. 3. **The deferral argument is about fairness to a cohort, not about the policy —** The CJI's Bench did not question whether the three-language policy is sound. Its objection was that the present Class 6 batch would face full implementation with barely four months left in the year, while Classes 7 to 9 were exempted under CBSE guidelines. A cohort that is asked mid-year to begin a subject it will be examined in at the Board level

	by 2031 has a legitimate reliance interest. This is an administrative-fairness point that applies to any policy rollout, which is what makes it usable well beyond this case. 4. **Both orders protect the same principle in opposite directions —** Against the State, the Court protects a child's access to a centrally funded residential school. Against the Union, it protects a child from a mid-year curricular shock. Read together, the orders suggest the Court is treating the student, not the government, as the unit of concern — which is a cleaner organising idea for an answer than 'Centre versus State'. 5. **The unresolved question is who pays for cooperative federalism —** Tamil Nadu's financial objection to providing land points at a recurring structural problem: central schemes frequently require State land, staff or matching funds, so a State's consent is fiscal as well as political. Until scheme design internalises that cost, 'cooperative federalism' will keep producing exactly this kind of stand-off, and the courts will keep being asked to broker it.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — locate education in the Concurrent List —** Begin by noting that because education is a concurrent subject, Union-State divergence on language policy is structurally inbuilt, and both the schemes and the objections in this case are constitutionally legitimate. 2. **Body 1 — set out the two orders precisely —** Describe the Navodaya land direction and the Class 6 deferral suggestion, emphasising that both were framed as requests with timelines rather than mandatory commands. 3. **Body 2 — explain why persuasion is the fitting instrument —** Argue that a mandatory order on language policy risks non-compliance, deepens a political conflict the court cannot settle, and intrudes on executive policy space; a timeline-bound request preserves judicial authority while leaving the political settlement intact. 4. **Body 3 — state the cost of this approach —** Concede the weakness honestly: persuasion may achieve nothing if a State simply lets the three months lapse, and repeated unenforced suggestions can erode judicial authority. Note that the Court retained the matter, which is the practical answer to this risk. 5. **Body 4 — identify the underlying fiscal problem —** Point out that central schemes requiring State land and resources make State consent a budgetary question, and propose that scheme design build in cost-sharing and prior consultation so that such disputes reach courts less often. 6. **Conclusion — centre the student —** Conclude that both orders are best read as protecting the child's interest from both sides of the federal divide, and that this student-centred test is a better guide for future disputes than an abstract contest over jurisdiction.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are Education Secretary of a State that objects to the three-language formula but wants the central residential schools. How do you construct a workable position?** ***Approach:*** Separate the two objections in writing, because bundling them guarantees deadlock. On the schools, accept the land timeline and identify sites, converting a political refusal into a negotiation about cost-sharing, staffing and admission criteria where the State has genuine leverage. On language, propose a concrete accommodation rather than a blanket refusal — for instance that the State language is taught as a compulsory language in these schools and that the third language is offered as a choice

from a menu that includes classical and foreign languages, which is what the policy text itself permits. This keeps the State's core commitment intact, gives its children access to a funded institution, and shifts the burden onto the Union to reject a reasonable offer.

Q2. As a Ministry of Education official, how would you sequence a curricular change like a new compulsory third language so that it does not become litigation?

Approach: Announce the change for a cohort that has not yet entered the affected class, never for a batch already midway through the year, because reliance on the existing rule is precisely what courts protect. Publish the full ladder in advance — the year of introduction, the assessment stage, and the Board examination year — so families can plan across the whole arc. Provide a transition option for students who join late or move between States, since a mandatory language with no catch-up path penalises mobility. And fund the teacher supply before mandating the subject, because a compulsory language without trained teachers converts a policy goal into a paper requirement and an equity problem, with the burden falling on schools that can least afford private tuition.

1.6 FCRA Amendment Bill Before a Joint Committee, While Courts Push Back on How the Existing Law Is Used

THE NEWS The Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was listed to hold its first meeting on Thursday, per The Indian Express's daily listing. On the same day the Delhi High Court refused to interfere with an order allowing the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) to withdraw ₹20 lakh from its account, with a Bench of Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia noting that cancellation of FCRA registration does not mean the organisation ceases to function; the Centre had cancelled CHRI's registration on September 12, 2024. Separately, The Hindu reported that the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister denied arm-twisting over the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project, in a context that includes a CBI case against lawyer and anti-dam activist Bhanu Tatak for allegedly receiving foreign funds in violation of FCRA. Per PRS Legislative Research's Bill Track, the Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 25, 2026 and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee on August 12, 2026; it creates a 'Designated Authority' to control and distribute the foreign contribution and assets of an organisation whose certificate is cancelled, surrendered, not renewed or whose renewal is refused; requires that where vested assets include places of worship their religious character be preserved; makes key functionaries such as directors, trustees and office-bearers personally liable unless they prove ignorance or due diligence; and reduces the maximum imprisonment for violations from five years to one year. PRS's legislative brief flags that organisations cannot exit the FCRA framework without losing assets and that no appeal mechanism exists against refusal of renewal.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **What FCRA actually regulates —** The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution by persons and associations, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Registration or prior permission is required, funds must be received in a designated bank account, and certain categories — including election candidates, judges, government servants, legislators and media persons — are barred from accepting foreign contribution.
2. **The 2020 amendment tightened it sharply —** The 2020 amendment barred transfer of foreign contribution to any other person, capped administrative expenses at 20% of receipts, made Aadhaar mandatory for office-bearers, and required the designated account to be opened at a specified State Bank of India branch in New Delhi. The 2026 Bill sits on top of that architecture.
3. **What the 2026 Bill adds, in plain terms —** It answers the question 'what happens to the money and property when an organisation loses its FCRA status'. A Designated Authority takes control of the foreign contribution and assets; the grounds on which that happens now include mere non-renewal, not only cancellation; and individual office-bearers become personally liable unless they can prove they did not know or that they exercised due diligence.
4. **The concession and the catch sit side by side —** The maximum imprisonment falls from five years to one — a genuine liberalisation of the penal consequence. But the

	asset-vesting provision means the organisational consequence becomes far heavier, and per PRS there is no appeal against refusal of renewal. The Bill therefore shifts the sanction from the individual's liberty to the institution's survival.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Civil society regulation is a durable GS2 theme —** It sits at the intersection of Article 19(1)(c) freedom of association, national security, and the state's regulatory power over foreign funding — a combination the exam returns to in both Polity and Internal Security. 2. **A Bill before a Joint Committee is examiner-friendly —** It lets a question be framed on the legislative process itself: why refer a Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee, what a JPC can do that a Departmentally Related Standing Committee cannot, and whether committee scrutiny actually changes Bills. 3. **Court decisions and legislative change are moving together —** The same week a committee begins scrutinising the amendment, a High Court is limiting how the existing law operates in practice. That parallel movement gives an answer real texture instead of a one-sided account.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Bill's real teeth are civil, not criminal —** Reading only the penalty clause suggests liberalisation, because maximum imprisonment falls from five years to one. But the operative sanction has moved elsewhere. Once a certificate lapses, the Designated Authority controls the contribution and the assets, which means an organisation can be functionally ended without any criminal trial at all. An answer that reports only the reduced sentence has missed the design. 2. **Non-renewal is the crucial expansion —** Previously, the severe consequence attached to cancellation, which at least implies a finding of wrongdoing. Extending it to non-renewal and to failure to apply in time means an administrative lapse or a delayed decision by the Ministry can trigger the same asset consequence as proven violation. Treating inaction and misconduct alike is where most of the objection to the Bill lies. 3. **Personal liability of office-bearers changes who runs NGOs —** Making directors, trustees and office-bearers personally liable unless they prove ignorance or due diligence reverses the ordinary burden — the individual must establish innocence rather than the state prove culpability. The predictable second-order effect is that experienced professionals and independent trustees become reluctant to serve on the boards of foreign-funded organisations, which weakens exactly the governance layer that regulation is supposed to strengthen. 4. **The missing appeal is the strongest technical criticism —** PRS flags that there is no appeal against refusal of renewal. A decision with the power to extinguish an

	institution's access to its own corpus, taken by an executive authority, with no statutory appellate forum, is the kind of provision that invites Article 14 and Article 19(1)(c) challenge. It is also the easiest defect to fix without diluting the Bill's stated purpose. 5. **The Delhi High Court order supplies the counterweight —** The Court's observation that cancellation of FCRA registration does not mean the organisation ceases to function draws a line the Bill blurs. An organisation has domestic funds, statutory obligations, employees and liabilities; losing the right to receive foreign contribution is not the same as losing the right to exist. Whether that judicial line survives the Bill's asset-vesting clause is the specific question worth watching. 6. **The security rationale is real and should be conceded —** Foreign-funded entities have been used as conduits in documented cases, and the state has a legitimate interest in knowing who funds activity within its borders — which is why comparable disclosure regimes exist in other democracies. The defensible objection is not to regulation itself but to a design where the same consequence follows from a missed deadline as from proven misuse, with no appeal in either case.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — name the shift precisely —** Open by stating that the Bill lowers maximum imprisonment from five years to one while introducing a Designated Authority that takes control of an organisation's foreign contribution and assets — a movement of the sanction from liberty to institutional survival. 2. **Body 1 — set out the Bill's architecture —** Cover asset vesting, the expansion of triggers to include non-renewal, personal liability of key functionaries, and the preservation of religious character where places of worship are involved. 3. **Body 2 — argue the proportionality problem —** Show that treating a lapsed renewal like proven misuse fails the test of proportionality, and that the absence of an appeal against refusal of renewal removes the safeguard that would otherwise make the regime defensible. 4. **Body 3 — give the state's case fully —** Set out the genuine security rationale, cite the existence of documented misuse and comparable disclosure regimes elsewhere, and accept that the freedom of association under Article 19(1)(c) is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interests of sovereignty, integrity and public order. 5. **Body 4 — bring in the judicial counterweight —** Use the Delhi High Court's observation that cancellation does not mean an organisation ceases to function, and discuss the role of committee scrutiny — the JPC — as the constitutional mechanism for resolving exactly this kind of balance before enactment. 6. **Conclusion — propose the minimum fix —** Argue for a statutory appellate mechanism, a distinction between procedural lapse and substantive violation, and a time limit on how long the Designated Authority may hold assets, as the changes that would make the regime both effective and constitutionally durable.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As an officer in the FCRA division, an organisation's renewal application was delayed by your own office beyond the expiry date. Under the proposed framework this would trigger asset vesting. What is the right course?** ***Approach:*** Do not allow a departmental delay to produce a statutory consequence for the applicant, because the asset-vesting provision was designed to deal with organisations outside the framework, not with files stuck inside it. Record on file the date of receipt of the application and the reason for the delay, and treat the certificate as continuing until

the application is decided, which is the ordinary administrative-law position where a citizen has done everything required of them. Escalate for a general instruction that deemed continuation applies wherever a complete application was filed before expiry, so that the rule does not depend on which officer handles which file. And separately flag for the policy division that a provision which cannot distinguish between the applicant's default and the department's own is a drafting defect that will not survive judicial scrutiny.

Q2. You must recommend whether to renew the registration of an organisation whose work is politically inconvenient but whose accounts are clean. How do you decide, and how do you record it?

Approach: Decide strictly on the statutory grounds and nothing else. Whether an organisation's reports embarrass the government is not a ground under FCRA; whether it has complied with the account, utilisation, administrative-expense and reporting requirements is. Write the decision as a reasoned order that engages with each statutory ground and states the evidence relied on, because a renewal decision that gives no reasons is indistinguishable from an arbitrary one and will be read that way. If there is pressure to refuse on unstated grounds, the correct response is to ask for the ground in writing — an instruction that cannot be written down is one that cannot be defended, and putting that question on the record is the officer's real protection as well as the organisation's.

1.7 Preventive Detention Under Scrutiny: Allahabad HC Warns of 'Orwellian Dystopia' Over Goondas Act and NSA Misuse

THE NEWS In an editorial reviewing the week's judicial developments, The Economic Times reported that the Allahabad High Court came down heavily on the Uttar Pradesh government over alleged misuse of the Uttar Pradesh Control of Goondas Act, 1970. The Court, while quashing an order by the Gonda District Magistrate declaring a person a 'goonda' and externing him for six months, noted that the State was using the law as a tool of harassment, adding that such misuse will invite punitive damages. It reminded the executive that a solitary case does not make a habitual offender, and that an acquittal cannot become a tool of surveillance and an instrument of harassment. The editorial noted that only weeks earlier the same High Court had called Deoria police officials a 'bunch of liars' after they claimed station CCTV cameras were non-functional during the alleged illegal detention of four individuals, and referred to a split verdict on 'bulldozer justice' that exposed constitutional tension and executive overreach. It also cited the case of Aakriti Chaudhary, a 24-year-old Delhi University student activist slapped with the National Security Act for advocating for low-wage workers protesting in Noida, where the preventive detention paperwork was found to have been generated after she had been taken into custody — a move the court termed a 'sham' — and, finding no evidence of incitement, quashed her detention. The editorial concluded that maintaining public order does not give the executive a blank cheque to forgo fundamental rights without due process, and that where preventive laws are weaponised to quiet dissent or paperwork is forged to justify illegal custody, 'we risk sliding into, as the court said, an Orwellian dystopia'.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Preventive detention is constitutionally permitted but fenced —** Article 22(1) and 22(2) give an arrested person the right to be informed of the grounds, to consult a lawyer, and to be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours. Article 22(3) expressly withdraws those protections for preventive detention, and Articles 22(4) to 22(7) supply a different set of safeguards — Advisory Board review, communication of grounds, and the right to make a representation.

2. **The National Security Act, 1980 in outline —** The NSA allows the Centre or a State government, or an authorised District Magistrate or Commissioner of Police, to detain a person to prevent action prejudicial to the security of the State, public order, or the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community. Detention can extend up to 12 months, subject to Advisory Board confirmation.

3. **The Goondas Act is a public-order law, not a penal one —** The Uttar Pradesh Control of Goondas Act, 1970 allows a District Magistrate to declare a person a 'goonda' and externe them from an area. It is preventive and administrative — no

	conviction is needed — which is exactly why the definition of 'habitual' and the quality of the material relied on are the whole ballgame. 4. **Legislative competence sits in both lists —** Preventive detention for reasons connected with defence, foreign affairs and the security of India is Union List Entry 9; preventive detention for reasons connected with the security of a State, public order, and supplies and services essential to the community is Concurrent List Entry 3. That is why both Parliament and State legislatures have such laws.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Preventive detention is a perennial GS2 and Law topic —** It is one of the few places where the Constitution itself authorises a departure from ordinary criminal procedure, which makes it a natural site for questions on the balance between liberty and public order. 2. **Judicial pushback on executive process is a live pattern —** Bulldozer demolitions, externment orders, NSA detentions of activists and antedated paperwork have generated a steady stream of High Court and Supreme Court criticism. A question can be built on the pattern rather than on any single case. 3. **It pairs with a story this digest has tracked —** An earlier edition covered a habeas corpus hearing on a journalist's NSA detention. Reading these together lets an answer argue about a systemic tendency rather than an isolated incident, which is a stronger claim if you can support it.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The core finding is about habituality, not about guilt —** The Court's reasoning that a solitary case does not make a habitual offender goes to the statutory precondition itself. The Goondas Act empowers action against a habitual offender; if the material shows one case, the jurisdictional fact is absent and the order is void regardless of how the officer assessed the risk. This is the cleanest ground on which such orders fall, and it is an evidentiary point rather than a sympathy point. 2. **Using an acquittal as material inverts the presumption of innocence —** An acquittal is a judicial finding that the case was not proved. Treating it as an ingredient of 'habitual' behaviour converts a completed defence into a permanent administrative liability. The person is then worse off for having been prosecuted and cleared than for never having been charged at all, which is precisely what the Court's phrase about surveillance and harassment captures. 3. **Antedated paperwork is the most serious finding in the set —** In the NSA case the detention record was found to have been generated after the person was already in custody. That is not a procedural irregularity; it means the statutory satisfaction that

	authorises the detention did not exist when the liberty was taken. Courts call this a 'sham' because the document exists to make a completed act look lawful, and it defeats the Article 22(5) right to be told the grounds and to represent against them. 4. **Preventive law aimed at protest changes what the law is for —** The NSA addresses threats to State security and public order. Applying it to a student activist advocating for low-wage workers, where the Court found no evidence of incitement, stretches 'public order' to cover inconvenience. Indian constitutional doctrine has long distinguished 'law and order' from 'public order' from 'security of the State' as widening circles of gravity, and preventive detention is reserved for the innermost. Collapsing that distinction is how an emergency power becomes a routine one. 5. **Judicial relief arrives, but only after the detention has done its work —** Quashing is a real remedy, yet by the time it comes the person has lost months of liberty and the protest is over. That is why the Court's mention of punitive damages matters — a costs consequence is the only sanction that reaches the officer's incentive, since a quashed order otherwise costs the state nothing and the detaining authority even less. 6. **There is a genuine administrative dilemma underneath —** District officers do face situations where a person's presence is likely to trigger violence and ordinary criminal process is too slow. The honest position is not that preventive powers should never exist, but that their use must be evidenced, contemporaneous and reviewable — and that an officer who cannot show contemporaneous material has not made a hard judgment call, only an unlawful one.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — state the constitutional oddity —** Begin by noting that India is unusual in permitting preventive detention during peacetime, with Article 22(3) to 22(7) supplying a separate and weaker set of safeguards, which is why judicial supervision carries so much weight here. 2. **Body 1 — set out the specific judicial findings —** Use the three findings: a solitary case cannot establish habituality; an acquittal cannot become surveillance material; and detention paperwork generated after custody is a sham that defeats Article 22(5). 3. **Body 2 — apply the public-order gradation —** Explain the settled distinction between law and order, public order, and security of the State, and argue that preventive detention is reserved for the gravest tier — so its use against peaceful advocacy is a category error, not merely an excess. 4. **Body 3 — explain why remedies come too late —** Show that quashing restores liberty only after the detention has achieved its practical effect, and that without a cost consequence the incentive structure for the detaining authority is unchanged. 5. **Body 4 — concede the administrative reality —** Acknowledge that district administrations face genuine public-order emergencies where ordinary process is too slow, and that the answer is calibration rather than abolition. 6. **Body 5 — propose safeguards —** Mandatory contemporaneous recording of material with time-stamping; automatic judicial review within a fixed short period rather than only on petition; personal cost consequences where paperwork is found antedated; publication of district-wise detention and quashing statistics; and periodic legislative review of preventive-law usage. 7. **Conclusion — the test is the exception's frequency —** Conclude that the health of a preventive-detention regime is measured not by whether the power exists but by how

	rarely it is used and how often its use survives judicial scrutiny.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a District Magistrate under political pressure to invoke a preventive law against a local activist organising a protest. What is your decision framework?** ***Approach:*** Start from the statutory precondition, not from the pressure. Ask what contemporaneous material exists showing a likelihood of action prejudicial to public order, and whether that material would stand on its own before an Advisory Board and a High Court without any explanation from you. If the material is a history of protest rather than a history of violence, the precondition is absent and the order will be quashed, which helps nobody. Consider the graded alternatives the law already provides — conditions on assembly, bonds for keeping the peace, ordinary criminal process where an offence is made out — since using the heaviest instrument first is both legally vulnerable and administratively lazy. Record the reasons for the option chosen, including the rejection of the heavier one, because the file is where the judgment call is either defended or exposed. **Q2. You discover that a subordinate has prepared detention paperwork after the person was already taken into custody. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Treat this as a serious matter and act immediately, because the consequence is not paperwork but an unlawful deprivation of liberty. Order the release unless there is independent, contemporaneous and lawfully recorded material, since a detention whose authorising satisfaction did not exist at the time cannot be cured retrospectively. Report the antedating to the superior authority in writing and initiate disciplinary proceedings, resisting the instinct to manage it internally — concealment converts a subordinate's misconduct into the department's. Inform the court of the correct position if proceedings are pending, because a false submission on the record is far more damaging to the administration's standing than admitting an error. And use the incident to audit whether recording practice, not one individual, is the underlying problem.

1.8 Telangana High Court Disqualifies a Legislator Under the Tenth Schedule After the Speaker Declined To

THE NEWS The Telangana High Court has set aside the Speaker's decision and disqualified Danam Nagender, who was elected as MLA from Khairatabad on a Bharat Rashtra Samithi ticket in December 2023 and later contested the Secunderabad Lok Sabha seat on a Congress ticket. Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar had dismissed the disqualification petitions on 11 March. The BRS moved the High Court in April 2024. A Bench of Chief Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh and Justice G.M. Mohiuddin held that the case fell under paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule read with Article 191(2), and the seat stands rendered vacant. BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao responded with 'Satyameva Jayate'. Nine other BRS MLAs switched to the Congress between March and August 2024.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Paragraph 2(1)(a) is the 'voluntarily giving up membership' limb —** The Tenth Schedule disqualifies a member of a House belonging to a political party if he has voluntarily given up his membership of that party. The words are wider than 'resignation' — courts have held that giving up membership can be inferred from conduct, and contesting an election on another party's ticket is about as clear a piece of conduct as the provision contemplates. 2. **Article 191(2) supplies the disqualification for a State legislature —** Article 191(2) provides that a person shall be disqualified for being a member of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State if he is so disqualified under the Tenth Schedule. Article 102(2) is the corresponding provision for Parliament. Naming the right Article for the right House is the kind of precision a Prelims pairing question is built on. 3. **The Speaker decides, but the decision is reviewable —** Paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule makes the presiding officer's decision final, and paragraph 7 originally sought

	to bar the jurisdiction of courts. The bar has not survived: the Speaker acts as a tribunal when deciding under the Tenth Schedule, and that decision is subject to judicial review. This case is a direct illustration — a High Court setting aside a Speaker's dismissal and itself declaring the seat vacant. 4. **The 2003 amendment removed the split defence —** The Ninety-first Amendment deleted the provision that had protected a 'split' of one-third of a legislature party, leaving merger of two-thirds as the only surviving exception. That is why nine other legislators crossing over does not, by itself, cure anything: numbers below the merger threshold are legally irrelevant.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Anti-defection is a perennial and the question has shifted —** The old question was what the Tenth Schedule says. The current question is why it does not work — and the answer the examiner is looking for names the Speaker's indefinite delay as the central defect. This judgment is the counter-example where review supplied what the Speaker did not. 2. **Speaker's impartiality is now a standing Mains theme —** Recommendations to shift the adjudicatory power from the Speaker to an independent tribunal or to the Election Commission recur in every serious answer. A live case in which a High Court reversed a Speaker gives that argument a contemporary anchor instead of a textbook one. 3. **Federal and party-system questions borrow this material —** Mass defections after a general election are not only a legal problem; they are evidence about the party system. PSIR and Sociology answers on party fragmentation use exactly this data, which is why the card is worth carrying beyond GS2.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The defect the case exposes is time, not text —** The member was elected in December 2023, contested on another party's ticket in 2024, the Speaker dismissed the petitions in March and the High Court decided now. By the time the seat is declared vacant, a substantial part of the term has run. The Tenth Schedule's text worked; its clock did not. Every credible reform proposal — a statutory time limit on the Speaker, or a different adjudicator — is aimed at the clock. 2. **Judicial review is a remedy of last resort and it shows —** A High Court setting aside a Speaker's order is constitutionally sound but institutionally awkward: the court must second-guess a presiding officer on facts about party membership. The awkwardness is the argument for moving the jurisdiction out of the legislature altogether, so that review becomes appellate rather than supervisory. 3. **Nine other crossings make the individual case look like a system —** Nine BRS MLAs moved to the Congress between March and August 2024, below the two-thirds merger threshold. A party can therefore be hollowed out without ever triggering the merger exception, provided each crossing is treated as an individual case and each

	individual case takes two years to decide. That is not a loophole in the text; it is an arithmetic consequence of slow adjudication. 4. **The voter's mandate is the interest nobody represents in the proceedings —** The petitioner is a party, the respondent is a member, and the adjudicator is a presiding officer. The constituency that voted for a candidate on a particular party's promise is not a party to the case, and no relief runs to it — a bypoll returns a seat, not the two years. This is the strongest normative argument for speed, and it belongs in the conclusion of any answer on defection.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **State the provision and the exception in two lines —** Paragraph 2(1)(a), Article 191(2), and the surviving merger exception after the Ninety-first Amendment. Precision here buys you credibility for the argument that follows. 2. **Argue that the text does its job —** Show with this case that a member who contests on another party's ticket is caught squarely by the voluntarily-giving-up limb. The drafting is not the problem, and saying so distinguishes your answer from the standard critique. 3. **Locate the failure in the adjudication —** Dates make the argument: elected in December 2023, crossed in 2024, Speaker's dismissal in March, court's decision now. Name the consequence — a member sits, votes and holds office through the period the law meant to prevent. 4. **Evaluate the reform options honestly —** A time limit on the Speaker is the least disruptive but relies on the same officer; an independent tribunal is cleaner but raises a separation-of-powers objection about outsiders adjudicating House membership; the Election Commission route borrows an institution already trusted with party disputes. Say which you prefer and why, in one sentence. 5. **Conclude with the interest that is missing —** End on the voter — the person with the strongest claim and no standing in the proceeding. That is the line that makes the answer memorable and it is analytically true.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Secretary to a State Legislative Assembly, you are asked how long a disqualification petition may reasonably remain pending before the Speaker. What advice do you give in writing?** ***Approach:*** Advise that the Schedule prescribes no period but that the absence of a limit does not confer a discretion to never decide, because the power is quasi-judicial and quasi-judicial powers must be exercised within a reasonable time. Propose an internal standard operating procedure — pleadings closed within a fixed number of weeks, hearings scheduled on named dates, and a written order within a stated outer period — and record that the SOP is procedural and does not fetter the Speaker's decision on merits. This is the kind of advice that protects the institution: it gives the presiding officer a defensible timetable and removes the suggestion that delay was chosen. **Q2. The disqualified member's constituency has had an effectively absent representative for two years. As District Magistrate, how do you keep constituency-level administration from stalling during the vacancy?** ***Approach:*** Local administration should never have been dependent on the legislator in the first place, and the vacancy is the moment to prove it. Convene the district-level committees on their statutory schedule with the officials who are their real engine; publish a constituency-wise status of sanctioned works with timelines so that citizens can see progress without an intermediary; and hold a fixed monthly public grievance sitting at the block level so that the channel the MLA normally provides is replaced by an institutional one. Do not fill the political vacuum with the MLA's rivals — decline

requests from all claimants equally, and route everything through the published calendar.

Q3. Party workers of both sides ask you, as Returning Officer for the eventual bypoll, to interpret what the court's order means for their candidate's eligibility. What is the right response?

Approach: Decline to interpret and say why. The Returning Officer's jurisdiction is the scrutiny of nominations against the statutory grounds, and an opinion offered informally before a nomination is filed has no legal status but very real political consequences. Direct both sides to the order itself and to the Commission's instructions, and state that any question of eligibility will be decided at scrutiny, in the presence of both, with reasons recorded. Giving a private preview to either side is how a Returning Officer loses the ability to be believed by the losing party — which is the only asset the office really has.

International Relations

2.1 Red Sea, Hormuz and a Widening Yemen War — India's Energy Security on the Line

THE NEWS India said it is 'deeply concerned' by the blockades in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (Red Sea) and the Strait of Hormuz (Persian Gulf); a ship carrying 14 Indian seafarers was targeted off the Oman coast on Sunday, and MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal condemned Houthi attacks on 'Saudi sovereign territory, civilian infrastructure and economic assets.' Separately, Saudi Arabia and the Iran-backed Houthis traded strikes as the Yemen conflict intensified — Saudi authorities issued civil-defence alerts across several cities including Jeddah, Yanbu and Taif, while the Houthi-backed Yemeni government said it now controls almost the entire western coast; Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussed the crisis with Egypt's President Sisi in Cairo.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and maritime chokepoints (Bab-el-Mandeb, Hormuz, Malacca); India's heavy crude-oil import dependency; SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region); the Indian Navy's standing Gulf presence built up since the 2019 tanker-attack crisis.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Maritime security and Indian Ocean/West Asia geopolitics recur across GS2/GS3; the Red Sea-Hormuz crisis has matured into a fully testable topic blending energy security, naval strategy and citizen-safety dimensions — a strong 'multi-dimensional' answer opportunity.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	Bab-el-Mandeb links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden; the Strait of Hormuz links the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman; the Houthi-backed Yemeni government claims control of nearly the entire western Yemeni coastline as of this crisis.
ANALYSIS	1. India's cautious 'deeply concerned' language sits atop a genuine structural vulnerability: a large share of India's crude imports transit the Gulf/Red Sea corridor, and sustained disruption cascades into higher freight-insurance costs, delivery delays and, eventually, domestic fuel-price and inflation pressure — note the direct textual link to the same day's 'Sugar rush... RBI rate hike' story, since imported inflation risk would compound an already-stressed CPI reading. Three response layers matter for a strong answer. Diplomatically, India's historically non-aligned posture in West Asia lets it engage Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Houthi-aligned Yemeni administration simultaneously — a real comparative advantage over Western powers widely seen as partisan in the conflict. Operationally, the Indian Navy's standing Gulf deterrence presence (built since the 2019 tanker attacks) provides escort capability, but not blanket protection against a crisis of this scale. Economically, India's crude-sourcing diversification (larger US and Russian shares in recent years) offers more insulation than a decade ago, but doesn't eliminate risk, since alternative routes around the Cape of Good Hope add both cost and transit time. Citizen-safety diplomacy — the targeted ship, and the safety of the millions of Indians working across the Gulf — is a distinct, parallel obligation: India's evacuation track record (Op Ganga, Op Kaveri) is strong, but a full evacuation from an active Gulf war zone would be logistically far harder than either precedent given the sheer scale of the Indian diaspora there.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Discuss the implications of the escalating Red Sea-Hormuz crisis for India's energy security and the safety of its citizens in the Gulf. What measures should India adopt to insulate itself from recurring maritime chokepoint disruptions?
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: State India's structural energy and trade dependency on the Bab-el-Mandeb-Hormuz corridor. Body: (1) the scale of that dependency and its inflation/fiscal implications; (2) the three-layered Indian response — diplomatic neutrality/engagement, naval presence, import diversification — and the specific limits of each; (3) the parallel, non-negotiable citizen-safety dimension. Conclusion: Argue that India needs a standing, funded contingency framework for West Asian disruptions — pre-negotiated supply lines, rehearsed evacuation logistics, a forex/fiscal buffer — rather than relying on ad

	hoc, Op Ganga-style improvisation each time a crisis recurs.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a desk officer in MEA's Gulf division, how would you sequence diplomatic engagement for de-escalation against operational coordination with the Navy for the safety of Indian-crewed shipping?** ***Approach:*** Run both tracks in parallel through an integrated crisis cell reporting to the NSA rather than in silos: MEA pursues quiet diplomacy with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Houthi-aligned authorities in parallel — since India has no adversarial history with any of them — while the Navy reactively escorts Indian-flagged or Indian-crewed vessels on each specific threat. The two tracks should share real-time intelligence so diplomatic outreach and naval posture reinforce rather than duplicate each other. **Q2. What contingency plan would you keep ready for an oil-price or freight-cost shock hitting India's import bill and inflation?** ***Approach:*** Maintain strategic petroleum reserves at target coverage, keep emergency supply arrangements pre-negotiated with diversified sources (US, Russia, alternative Gulf routes), and build fiscal flexibility (excise-duty headroom) so a price shock can be partly absorbed by the exchequer rather than passed through immediately to consumers and CPI.

2.2 India–China Ties Post-BRICS — 'Mutual Respect, Mutual Interest, Mutual Sensitivity'

THE NEWS MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said PM Modi underlined to President Xi Jinping, on the sidelines of the 18th BRICS Summit, that both sides should be guided by 'mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity.' Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Xi and Modi reached their 'most important consensus' during the meeting. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said India has an independent foreign policy and 'will not allow any force to engage in anti-China activities on its territory,' adding that China 'values PM Modi's statements' and reiterated its position on Taiwan and Tibet, asking that both sides show sensitivity to each other's 'core concerns.'

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. LAC disengagement process since the 2020 Galwan clash; the Special Representatives mechanism and the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination (WMCC); India's structural trade deficit with China; the historical baseline of the 1993/1996/2005 border-management agreements.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. India-China relations are asked in some form almost every year; the carefully-hedged, formulaic diplomatic language on display here ('mutual respect, mutual interest, mutual sensitivity') is itself a useful case study in how both sides manage a relationship that is normalising in form but not yet resolved in substance.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	The 18th BRICS Summit was hosted in New Delhi; 'mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity' is the three-part formulation both governments used to frame the Modi-Xi meeting.
ANALYSIS	1. The carefully-choreographed language here means less than it sounds. It commits to process — dialogue continuing — without committing to substance: no LAC-resolution timeline, no trade rebalancing, no reciprocal concession on the boundary question matching what China is asking of India on Taiwan/Tibet. Notice the asymmetry in the reported language: China explicitly wants India to show 'sensitivity' to its 'core concerns' on Taiwan and Tibet, but there is no matching, equally specific Chinese commitment to show sensitivity to India's core concern — the unresolved boundary dispute. That asymmetry is itself informative about relative negotiating leverage in the post-Galwan relationship. The strategic risk for India is 'normalisation without resolution': trade, travel and diplomatic contact resume — genuinely good for economic ties and people-to-people links — while the fundamental boundary dispute sits exactly where it was, meaning China captures the economic benefits of normalisation without paying any strategic price for it. This is precisely why India's stated position has

	consistently been that normalisation should be downstream of border peace, not the reverse — but sustained economic and political pressure to 'move on' has historically eroded that sequencing over time, as seen after Doklam.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Distinguish between 'normalisation' and 'resolution' in the context of India-China relations after the BRICS Summit. Does the resumption of diplomatic and economic engagement, without corresponding progress on the boundary question, serve India's long-term strategic interests?
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Distinguish 'normalisation' (process resuming) from 'resolution' (the underlying dispute actually being settled). Body: (1) unpack what the reported language commits to and, more importantly, what it doesn't; (2) highlight the asymmetry in whose 'sensitivities' are being explicitly asked for; (3) place this within the standard India-China cycle — crisis, freeze, cautious re-engagement, incomplete resolution, repeat (Doklam, Galwan); (4) flag the risk of normalisation outpacing resolution and eroding India's negotiating leverage over time. Conclusion: India should calibrate economic and diplomatic normalisation strictly to verifiable, reciprocal progress at the LAC, treating economic engagement as leverage to be earned by China rather than an unconditional goodwill gesture.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. Advising ahead of the next round of talks, how would you sequence confidence-building measures against the still-unresolved boundary question?** ***Approach:*** Adopt a strict 'step-for-step' reciprocity framework: tie each economic or people-to-people concession — direct flights, business visas, investment approvals — to a specific, independently verifiable security reciprocity step, such as confirmed troop pullback or buffer-zone maintenance at a named friction point, rather than extending them as unconditional goodwill gestures that China can bank without reciprocating. **Q2. How do you prevent diplomatic language of 'mutual respect and sensitivity' from being read domestically as more substantive progress than has actually occurred?** ***Approach:*** Communicate plainly and consistently that economic engagement and security vigilance are not contradictory — much as the US and EU manage relations with strategic competitors — and avoid 'breakthrough' framing in official messaging that raises public expectations security agencies cannot responsibly meet, since an over-promised narrative makes any future setback look like a policy failure rather than the expected texture of a still-unresolved relationship.

2.3 Pakistan Navy Corvette Collides with Indian Navy Warship in the Arabian Sea

THE NEWS A Pakistan Navy corvette, PNS Hunain, collided with the Indian Navy's frontline warship INS Hunain (sic — Indian vessel unnamed in initial reports) after approaching it at high speed and manoeuvring in an 'unsafe and unprofessional' manner in the North Arabian Sea on Tuesday evening, India said. India summoned Pakistan's Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi and lodged a strong diplomatic protest, terming the conduct of the Pakistani naval unit a direct contravention of Article 10 of the 1991 India-Pakistan Agreement on Advance Notice of Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troop Movements. The Indian warship suffered only minor damage and continued its mission; the Pakistani vessel is believed to have sustained heavier damage and returned to harbour. Pakistan, in turn, summoned the Charge d'Affaires of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad and lodged a 'strong protest' over what it called the 'unacceptable and unprofessional conduct' of an Indian naval vessel in Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone. A similar incident occurred in 2011 involving the Pakistani vessel PNS Babur and the Indian ship INS Godavari.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The India-Pakistan Agreement on Advance Notice of Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troop Movements, 1991 (a confidence-building measure, CBM); UNCLOS provisions on innocent passage and conduct in international waters versus Exclusive Economic Zones; India's naval deployment posture in the Arabian Sea amid the broader Hormuz-Red Sea crisis discussed elsewhere in this digest.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. India-Pakistan military incidents at sea are a less commonly tested but high-value GS2/GS3 topic, since they combine bilateral CBM mechanics with broader maritime-security strategy; examiners value candidates who can place a specific naval incident within the larger context of naval postures, especially when — as here — it occurs against the backdrop of a regional energy-security crisis that has both navies more active in the same waters.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	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.
ANALYSIS	1. The most useful analytical frame here is that this incident did not occur in a vacuum — it happened while both navies have elevated activity in the same waters because of the broader Hormuz-Red Sea crisis (Pakistan's own naval and coastal assets are increasingly relevant given its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, and India's Navy has increased its Gulf-corridor presence, as covered earlier in this digest). A 'near-miss' or collision risk rises mechanically whenever two navies operate in closer proximity more frequently, even absent any deliberate escalatory intent — which is one plausible, non-hostile explanation competing with a more adversarial reading (deliberate provocation or reckless brinkmanship). Both governments' near-identical mutual accusations — each calling the other's vessel's conduct 'unsafe/unprofessional' — is itself diagnostically interesting: in incidents like this, an immediate, symmetric blame-exchange without independent verification is a familiar diplomatic pattern that lets both sides save face domestically without requiring either to admit fault, while the underlying facts (whose manoeuvre actually caused the close-quarters situation) usually take much longer to establish, if they ever are conclusively. The invocation of the specific 1991 CBM is significant because it signals India wants to frame this as a violation of an established, functioning bilateral mechanism — implying Pakistan should be held to a standard both countries have already agreed to — rather than treating it as a novel, unregulated flashpoint, which is diplomatically a more measured, rules-based response than treating it as unprecedented aggression.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Situate the incident within the broader Hormuz-Red Sea crisis context, which has elevated both navies' activity in the same waters. Body: (1) present the facts and each side's competing characterisation; (2) explain the 'increased proximity, increased incident risk' structural reading versus a more adversarial, deliberate-provocation reading; (3) analyse the significance of India invoking the specific 1991 CBM rather than treating the incident as unprecedented; (4) discuss what further confidence-building measures (real-time deconfliction hotlines, agreed minimum-distance protocols) could reduce recurrence risk. Conclusion: Argue that reinforcing and modernising existing bilateral naval CBMs is a more durable response than treating each incident as an isolated diplomatic dispute to be relitigated from scratch each time.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a Ministry of External Affairs desk officer handling the diplomatic protest, how would you balance firmness with de-escalation given the broader regional tensions already in play?** ***Approach:*** Lodge the protest formally and specifically — citing the exact CBM provision violated — while simultaneously proposing, through back-channel or naval-to-naval communication, a concrete technical fix such as a real-time deconfliction hotline or minimum safe-distance protocol, so the response is firm on accountability but constructive on preventing recurrence, rather than purely adversarial rhetoric that raises tension without addressing the underlying proximity risk.

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

THE NEWS The US House of Representatives passed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 by a vote of 262-159 on Wednesday evening, clearing the way for President Donald Trump to impose tariffs of up to 100% on countries that continue to purchase Russian oil and gas; the legislation now awaits the President's signature. The Bill had passed the Senate 86-11 on August 7. The Indian Express reported that besides 203 Republicans, 58 Democrats and an Independent voted in favour, while seven Republicans and 152 Democrats opposed it. Per The Hindu, the tariff would target the top five 'largest importers, by total volume' of Russian-origin crude oil or natural gas in the 12 months preceding the date of enactment, who have knowingly made new purchases on or after 30 days from the date the Bill becomes law; countries that take significant steps to reduce their Russian natural gas imports, or whose gas imports were less than 15% of Russia's total gas export, would be exempt from the sanctions. A House amendment proposed by Democrat Steny Hoyer that sought to name the top 10 importers — China, India, Turkiye, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Slovakia, the UAE and the Kyrgyz Republic — had not passed into the final version considered on Wednesday. The Ministry of External Affairs stated that the matter had been discussed with the USA at high levels, that the government made it clear to the US that the sanctions would have implications for the bilateral relationship and energy markets, and that India remains firmly committed to ensuring energy security for its 1.4 billion people through diversified sourcing determined by evolving market dynamics. Russia accounted for more than 51% of India's oil imports in July, an all-time high, up from just under 50% the previous month; India imported 110.4 lakh tonnes of Russian oil in July 2026, nearly 52% of total oil imports that month, 26% higher than June and nearly 55% higher than July last year, with the import bill on Russian oil at $7.3 billion, more than double the $3.6 billion of July last year. India paid an average of $669 a tonne for its total oil imports in July but $658.6 a tonne for Russian oil. The Indian Express reported India depends on imports for over 88% of its crude oil needs. China rejected what it called the US 'long-arm jurisdiction', with Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun saying China opposes any action that lacks UN Security Council authorisation, and the Kremlin called the passage an 'unfriendly action' that could complicate efforts to reach a peace deal in Ukraine.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Primary versus secondary sanctions —** A primary sanction bars the sanctioning country's own persons from dealing with a target. A secondary sanction penalises third-country persons for dealing with that target, even where the transaction has no connection to the sanctioning state. This law is of the second kind — India is not the target, but Indian purchases are the trigger. 2. **India's declared position on unilateral sanctions —** India implements sanctions mandated by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which are binding on all member states under Article 25. It does not accept unilateral sanctions imposed by individual countries as legally binding, a position it shares with China and Russia and which the Chinese statement in this story restates. 3. **Why tariffs are the chosen instrument —** Using a tariff rather than a financial sanction routes the penalty through trade law and executive tariff authority. That matters domestically in the US, where the Supreme Court has previously held that the President lacked authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 1977 to impose broad import duties — so a statutory grant of tariff power is the workaround. 4. **India's structural energy exposure —** India imports over 88% of its crude requirement, which makes energy the single largest item in its import bill and the main transmission channel from any global supply disruption into domestic inflation and the current account. Every 'strategic autonomy' discussion about oil starts from this ratio.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Strategic autonomy is the most examinable IR concept in the syllabus —** A case where India is pressured by a strategic partner over purchases from a long-standing defence partner is the cleanest possible illustration, and it lets you test the concept rather than define it. 2. **Energy security links GS2 and GS3 directly —** The same story is an IR question about coercion and a GS3 question about the current account, the rupee and inflation, which makes it high-value preparation.

	3. It runs directly into the Fed and rupee story in this digest — A disrupted or costlier oil supply raises the import bill exactly when the rupee is at a 2013-era real level and the RBI is weighing a hike. Connecting the two is the kind of cross-sectional answer examiners reward.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	**1. The mechanism targets a ranking, which makes it unusually hard to escape —** The tariff applies to the top five importers by total volume over the preceding twelve months. A ranking-based trigger cannot be escaped by reducing purchases modestly, because the threshold is relative to other countries rather than absolute. India would have to fall out of the top five, which given its consumption scale means a very large substitution — and the same logic applies to every other listed country, so all of them are trying to move at once in the same market. **2. The discount that made Russian crude attractive has narrowed —** India paid $669 a tonne on average for total oil imports in July and $658.6 for Russian oil — a discount of about 1.5%. The economic case for the Russian barrel has therefore already thinned considerably from the deep discounts of earlier years. What sustains the volume now is availability and payment arrangements rather than price, which means the switching cost is about securing alternative supply rather than accepting a much higher price. **3. Replacing more than half your crude in a tight market is the actual problem —** Russia supplied over 51% of India's July imports — 110.4 lakh tonnes. Industry executives quoted by The Economic Times said replacement would be difficult because key suppliers are already committed elsewhere. Any large, simultaneous scramble by the listed countries bids up the price of alternative barrels, so the cost of compliance is not the tariff avoided but the premium paid by everyone switching at once. **4. The exemption clause reveals the law's real design —** Countries taking significant steps to reduce Russian gas imports, or whose gas imports are under 15% of Russia's total gas exports, are exempt. That is a gas-centred carve-out, which principally accommodates European buyers, while the tariff trigger is framed on total volume of oil or gas. The structure therefore falls hardest on large oil importers outside Europe — a design feature worth naming, since it goes to whether the measure is about Russia's revenue or about who is paying it. **5. India's public position is careful and deliberately narrow —** The MEA did not challenge the law's legality or threaten retaliation. It said the sanctions would have implications for the bilateral relationship and energy markets, and restated commitment to energy security for 1.4 billion people through diversified sourcing determined by market dynamics. This is the language of a country preserving room to comply, to negotiate, or to absorb — it does not commit India to a position it may have to abandon. **6. The failed amendment matters more than it appears —** Steny Hoyer's amendment

	naming ten countries, including India, did not make it into the final version. Naming countries in statute converts a discretionary economic measure into a political designation that is far harder to negotiate away. Its exclusion leaves the executive with discretion over application — which is a diplomatic opening, and probably the single most useful fact in this story for an answer about India's options. 7. **Two other powers have already framed the legal objection India shares —** China called it 'long-arm jurisdiction' lacking Security Council authorisation, and Russia called it an unfriendly act complicating peace efforts. India's own consistent position is that it accepts UNSC-mandated sanctions and not unilateral ones. The convergence is doctrinal rather than political, but it matters: it means India's objection is a legal one it has held for decades, not a position adopted for this occasion.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — define the instrument precisely —** Open by distinguishing primary from secondary sanctions and noting that India is not the target of this law but is within its reach because of its purchases — which is the essence of extraterritorial economic measures. 2. **Body 1 — establish India's exposure with data —** Use over 88% import dependence for crude, Russia at over 51% of July imports, 110.4 lakh tonnes, and the narrow $10-a-tonne discount to show both the scale of dependence and that price is no longer the main driver. 3. **Body 2 — explain why the trigger is hard to escape —** Explain the top-five-by-volume ranking mechanism, the 30-day window for new purchases, and the gas-centred exemption, and argue that a relative threshold forces a large absolute shift. 4. **Body 3 — trace the macroeconomic consequence —** Link a costlier import basket to the current account deficit, a rupee already at a 2013-era real effective level, imported inflation and the RBI's policy choice, showing how a trade measure lands inside monetary policy. 5. **Body 4 — set out India's legal and diplomatic position —** State India's long-standing acceptance of UNSC-mandated sanctions and non-acceptance of unilateral ones, note the parallel Chinese and Russian objections, and highlight that the failure of the country-naming amendment preserves executive discretion and therefore diplomatic space. 6. **Body 5 — evaluate the options —** Assess diversification towards West Asian, African and US supply; longer-term contracting outside chokepoints; expansion of strategic reserves; refining flexibility across crude grades; and rupee or third-currency settlement, noting the costs and limits of each. 7. **Conclusion — resilience, not alignment —** Conclude that the durable answer is not choosing a side but reducing the leverage any single supplier or sanctioning power can exercise, through diversified sourcing, deeper reserves and payment arrangements that are not hostage to one financial system.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are in the Ministry of Petroleum. The law takes effect in 30 days for new purchases. What is your immediate advice?** ***Approach:*** Separate what must be decided now from what can wait. First, establish the legal trigger precisely — the measure attaches to new purchases made after a defined date by countries in the top five by volume over the preceding twelve months, so the immediate task is a contract-by-contract map of which cargoes are already committed and which would count as new. Second, model what falling out of the top five would

actually require in volume terms and at what cost, because negotiating without knowing your own switching cost is negotiating blind. Third, begin quiet supplier conversations across West Asia, West Africa and the US in parallel rather than sequentially, since every other affected country is doing the same and the barrels available at reasonable prices will be committed early. Fourth, check refinery configuration limits — Indian refineries are optimised for particular crude grades, and a switch that the trade ministry treats as fungible may not be technically fungible. And recommend against any public commitment to a purchase trajectory while executive discretion over application remains unexercised.

Q2. As a Joint Secretary in the MEA, what would you seek from Washington in the negotiating window?

Approach: Seek predictability rather than exemption, because an exemption is politically expensive for the other side to grant and easy to withdraw. Concretely: clarity on how the top-five ranking is computed and over what period, so India can plan rather than guess; a defined transition period recognising that refinery reconfiguration and contract renegotiation take quarters, not weeks; and a consultation mechanism before any determination is applied, so India is not learning of a designation from a press release. Use the fact that the country-naming amendment failed — the statute leaves discretion with the executive, which means this is a conversation about application, not about the text. In parallel, keep India's legal position on unilateral sanctions stated clearly but without inflammatory framing, since the objective is to preserve the principle for future cases while resolving this one practically. And coordinate quietly with other affected importers on the technical questions, where a common reading of the mechanism helps everyone, while avoiding a bloc posture that would convert a commercial problem into a political confrontation.

Economy

3.1 August Goods Exports Soar 26% — India's Trade Deficit Narrows

THE NEWS India's goods exports jumped 26% in August, driven by a sharp rise in shipments to the US (up over 21% to $8.3 billion) despite Washington's tariffs — the sharpest export jump to the US this calendar year — partly helped by a weaker rupee. Non-petroleum, non-gems & jewellery exports rose 22.72% to $34.68 billion. Overall, including services, exports grew 25.4% to $82.7 billion in August, while imports grew a slower 18.7% to $92.1 billion, narrowing India's total trade deficit.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Balance of Payments basics — merchandise vs services trade, trade deficit vs current account deficit; the effect of currency depreciation on export competitiveness; India's engagement with the WTO's Ministerial Conference process (MC14, held in Cameroon) and its evolving position on plurilateral trade agreements, which a companion report says may be 'shifting' post-BRICS as India considers pathways for plurilateral deals it had earlier resisted (such as the Investment Facilitation for Development pact).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. External-sector performance (exports, trade deficit, currency) is a GS3 staple; this story usefully complicates the simplistic 'rupee depreciation is bad news' narrative by showing how it also boosted export competitiveness — a nuance examiners reward.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	August 2026 exports (merchandise + services) grew 25.4% to $82.7 billion; imports grew 18.7% to $92.1 billion; exports to the US rose over 21% to $8.3 billion despite US tariffs.
ANALYSIS	1. The headline '26% export surge' masks an important nuance worth surfacing in any answer: part of the gain is a valuation effect (rupee depreciation making Indian goods cheaper in dollar terms), which mechanically inflates dollar-value growth figures even without a matching rise in real volume — though the report does note both value and volume grew, so this is a partial rather than total explanation. That exports to the US rose 'despite tariffs' is itself analytically interesting: either Indian exporters are absorbing some tariff cost through thinner margins, or the rupee's depreciation is offsetting the tariff's price effect for the American buyer — and if so, this is not a durable competitive advantage, since it depends on the rupee staying weak and could reverse quickly if the currency stabilises or the RBI hikes rates to defend it (a live possibility, discussed in the next item). There's also a distributional dimension worth flagging: a narrowing trade deficit doesn't automatically mean the 'right' sectors — labour-intensive manufacturing with high employment-elasticity — are driving the growth; the underlying data shows textiles actually declining even as some other categories surge, meaning the aggregate number can look strong while employment-relevant segments lag.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India's August export surge, though impressive in headline terms, conceals important structural nuances." Examine the factors driving this growth and discuss the sustainability of a currency-driven improvement in export competitiveness.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: State the headline figure, then immediately flag that a currency-driven valuation effect and a real competitiveness gain are analytically distinct, even if both contributed here. Body: (1) decompose the growth into currency effect vs volume effect; (2) interrogate the 'despite tariffs' framing — who is actually absorbing the tariff cost; (3) examine sectoral composition — which segments are driving growth, and whether employment-intensive sectors like textiles are participating or lagging; (4) note the sustainability question, since a currency-driven export gain is vulnerable to the same interest-rate and inflation dynamics discussed in the RBI rate-hike story. Conclusion: Policy should target structural competitiveness — logistics, ease of doing business, FTA access, sector-specific support for labour-intensive exports — rather than treating a weak-rupee-driven surge as evidence that no further reform is needed.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a Commerce Ministry official, how would you convert this one-month surge into a durable trend rather than a currency-driven blip?** ***Approach:*** Invest in trade-facilitation infrastructure — faster port turnaround times, more accessible export credit — pursue FTAs with markets showing genuine demand growth, and direct production-linked support toward higher value-addition and labour-intensive segments specifically, rather than assuming a weak-rupee tailwind will persist long enough on its own to matter. **Q2. With India reportedly reconsidering its opposition to some WTO plurilateral deals after BRICS discussions, how would you weigh deeper plurilateral engagement against the risk of eroding multilateral consensus norms?** ***Approach:*** Engage selectively rather than wholesale: join plurilateral tracks where India already has aligned domestic capacity and clear interest (for instance specific services or digital-trade areas), while continuing to resist blanket erosion of the multilateral, consensus-based negotiating norms that have historically protected developing-country interests at the WTO — treating each plurilateral proposal on its individual merits rather than as a package deal.

3.2 UPI Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) Returns — Rebalancing Digital-Payments Economics

THE NEWS The National Payments Corporation of India has introduced a 0.4% Merchant Discount Rate on UPI merchant (P2M) transactions above ₹2,000, capped at ₹300, effective October 15 — small vendors, person-to-person (P2P) transfers, and sectors like railways, telecom, insurance, fuel and agriculture inputs remain exempt. P2P transactions make up 70% of UPI's total transaction value. The government says the fee — shared among banks and payment-app providers — will fund 'continuous technological innovation' and let fintech start-ups compete with well-capitalised players, and has directed banks to ensure merchants don't pass the cost on to customers.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. India's Digital Public Infrastructure (India Stack — UPI, Aadhaar, DigiLocker); the 'zero-MDR' policy that has applied to UPI/RuPay debit transactions; the JAM trinity's role in financial inclusion.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Digital-economy governance is an emerging GS3 theme; this is a rare, testable example of the state stepping back from a purely 'free-for-all' digital-inclusion policy toward a sustainability-first model — good material for a 'trade-off' style answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	MDR = Merchant Discount Rate; the new 0.4% fee applies only to P2M (person-to-merchant) UPI transactions above ₹2,000, capped at ₹300 per transaction, effective 15 October; P2P transfers stay free.
ANALYSIS	1. This marks a genuine philosophical shift in India's digital-payments policy: from a growth-at-all-costs, state-subsidised-adoption phase (zero-MDR since 2020, with the ecosystem's infrastructure costs effectively absorbed elsewhere) to a maturity phase in which the ecosystem is expected to substantially self-fund. The policy's design — a ₹2,000 threshold, an exemption for small merchants, a ₹300 cap — attempts to protect financial-inclusion goals while extracting revenue specifically from higher-value transactions, which is a progressive design in principle. Two risks deserve attention in any answer. First, enforcement: with millions of small merchants and limited regulatory bandwidth, individual banks may find it operationally simpler to apply the MDR uniformly regardless of the ₹2,000 exemption threshold, effectively defeating the government's directive that costs not be passed down — this is a compliance-monitoring problem as much as a policy-design one. Second, the political framing itself is contested — Opposition calling it a 'Modi tax' versus reports linking it to US trade-deal pressure — a reminder that even technically sound policy needs a deliberate communications strategy to avoid being read entirely through a partisan lens regardless of its underlying economic logic.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The reintroduction of a Merchant Discount Rate on UPI transactions marks a shift from a subsidised-adoption model of India's digital-payments ecosystem to a self-sustaining one." Discuss the rationale, the built-in safeguards, and the enforcement challenges of this policy.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Frame this as a shift from a subsidised-adoption phase of India's digital-payments story to a self-sustaining-infrastructure phase. Body: (1) the stated rationale — funding continued innovation and letting fintech start-ups compete; (2) the design features meant to protect financial inclusion (thresholds, sectoral exemptions); (3) the enforcement risk — can the 'no pass-through to small merchants' promise actually be guaranteed given the scale of India's retail ecosystem; (4) the political-economy dimension, since even sound policy can be undermined by how it's perceived. Conclusion: The policy is economically defensible but needs a robust monitoring mechanism — audits, merchant/consumer grievance redressal — to ensure the inclusion safeguards hold in practice, not just on paper.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. How would you monitor and enforce the directive that merchants must not pass the MDR on to consumers, given the scale and informality of India's retail ecosystem?** ***Approach:*** Use NPCI's existing transaction-level data to flag merchants whose prices move in apparent correlation with MDR implementation, combine this with an accessible merchant/consumer grievance hotline, and hold banks accountable through periodic compliance audits with defined penalties where a bank is found to be permitting or facilitating pass-through. **Q2. How would you evaluate, a year from now, whether this fee actually funded the 'continuous innovation' it was meant to?** ***Approach:*** Require NPCI to publicly report how MDR revenue is allocated — infrastructure upgrades, developer incentives, fraud-detection investment — against measurable KPIs such as system uptime, new fintech entrants and fraud-rate reduction, reviewed annually, and revisit the fee structure if the promised outcomes fail to materialise.

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

THE NEWS The US Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate on Wednesday for the first time since 2023, in an effort to quell persistently high inflation — a move that could spur a sharp reversal from the low-rate era and result in higher borrowing costs for credit cards, mortgages, auto loans and housing. The Fed's rate-setting committee also signalled it expects to hike rates a second time later this year, taking the key rate to about 3.9%. The move is a surprising turnaround for Fed Chair Kevin Warsh, appointed by President Trump, who took over the top job in May this year.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. Monetary policy transmission across borders — how US Fed rate moves affect capital flows, exchange rates and borrowing costs in emerging markets like India; the concept of 'imported monetary tightening'; India's own MPC decision (discussed elsewhere in this digest series) arriving in the same news cycle as this US move; central-bank independence as an institutional-credibility question, directly relevant given Chair Warsh's political appointment.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Global monetary-policy spillovers into the Indian economy are a recurring GS3 theme, and this story is unusually rich because it lets you build a direct causal chain from a US domestic decision to Indian capital flows, the rupee, and RBI's own policy calculus — exactly the kind of cross-border synthesis that differentiates a strong answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	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.

ANALYSIS	1. This story should be read together with the RBI's own anticipated October rate hike (covered in earlier editions of this digest) rather than in isolation — the two are structurally linked. A US Fed hike typically strengthens the dollar and raises the relative attractiveness of dollar-denominated assets, which can trigger capital outflows from emerging markets like India unless domestic yields rise to compensate; this is part of why the RBI faces pressure to hike even when the immediate cause of Indian inflation (a sugar-price shock, as covered earlier) is domestic and supply-side rather than related to capital flows at all. The 'surprising turnaround' framing around Fed Chair Warsh is analytically significant: he was appointed amid concerns about Fed independence eroding under political pressure from President Trump, and a rate hike — which is typically politically unpopular because it raises borrowing costs ahead of elections — is evidence cutting against the narrative that a Trump-appointed Fed Chair would simply follow the White House's preference for low rates. Whether this genuinely signals institutional independence reasserting itself, or is a one-off decision under specific inflation pressure that doesn't reflect a durable pattern, is exactly the kind of open, evidence-weighing question a strong answer should engage with rather than resolve prematurely.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: State the twin significance of the Fed's move — its direct spillover effects on India, and its signalling value about Fed independence under a politically-appointed Chair. Body: (1) trace the transmission channels — capital flows, the rupee, imported inflation, RBI's own policy calculus; (2) connect this explicitly to India's own anticipated rate hike, showing how a globally-synchronised tightening cycle compounds domestic supply-side pressures; (3) assess the institutional-independence question — does a hike under a Trump-appointed Chair support or complicate the 'political capture' narrative; (4) discuss what tools India has to insulate itself from imported tightening (forex reserves, calibrated capital-flow management). Conclusion: Argue that India's policy response should treat imported and domestic inflation drivers as analytically distinct even when they arrive simultaneously, since conflating them risks miscalibrating the domestic policy response.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As an RBI policy advisor, how would you factor the Fed's rate hike into India's own October MPC decision?** ***Approach:*** Treat it as a factor strengthening the case for at least a modest domestic hike — to preserve interest-rate differential and reduce capital-outflow risk — while being explicit in public communication that the domestic sugar-price-driven inflation and the external Fed-driven pressure are separate problems requiring separate tools, so the calibration and messaging don't collapse two distinct causes into one blunt response.

3.4 India's First District-Level Unemployment Map — and What It Shows About Young People Not in Work or Education

THE NEWS Unemployment rates ranged between 0.5% and 5.5% in 77.8% of districts in India, according to data released by the statistics ministry, marking the first publication of district-level estimates under the Periodic Labour Force Survey, based on the revised sampling design adopted from January 2025. The data showed that 43.1% of districts had unemployment rates between 0.5% and 3%, while 34.7% recorded rates between 3% and 5.5%. Another 14.9% of districts reported unemployment rates above 5.5%, while 7.2% recorded below 0.5%. South 24 Parganas in West Bengal and Araria in Bihar recorded the lowest unemployment rates at 0.9% each, followed by Ahmedabad in Gujarat at 1.1%. The release also highlighted concerns over the share of young people aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education or training. About one-fourth of districts recorded a NEET share of more than 30%; 45.9% of districts reported NEET shares between 20% and 30%, 26.1% were in the 10%-20% range and 4.2% reported below 10%. Ernakulam in Kerala recorded the lowest

> NEET share among youth at 9.6%, followed by Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu at 14.5% and Bengaluru Urban in Karnataka at 15%. More than half of India's districts had a labour force participation rate between 60% and 80%, while 46.1% recorded an LFPR between 40% and 60%.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **PLFS replaced the quinquennial Employment-Unemployment Survey —** 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 to provide annual rural and quarterly urban estimates, replacing the old five-yearly Employment and Unemployment Survey. The revision of sampling design from January 2025 is what makes district-level estimation possible for the first time. 2. **Usual status and current weekly status measure different things —** PLFS reports on the usual status, which uses a reference period of the last 365 days, and the current weekly status, which uses the last seven days. Usual status captures chronic joblessness; current weekly status captures the seasonal and intermittent kind. A candidate quoting an unemployment rate without naming the status has quoted half a number. 3. **LFPR, WPR and UR are three separate ratios and the denominators differ —** The labour force participation rate is the share of the population in the labour force — working or seeking work. The worker population ratio is the share actually working. The unemployment rate is the share of the labour force, not the population, that is seeking work and not finding it. Because the unemployment rate's denominator is the labour force, it falls when people stop looking for work, which is why it can improve for a bad reason. 4. **NEET measures the young people the labour statistics miss —** 'Not in employment, education or training' counts those aged 15-29 who are neither working nor building the capacity to work. It is the indicator designed precisely to catch what the unemployment rate hides, and it is tracked internationally, including under Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Employment data has become a standing GS3 question —** The syllabus carries growth, development and employment together. The examiner has repeatedly asked about the quality of employment rather than its quantity, and about the reliability of the data itself — both of which this release speaks to directly. 2. **Statistical literacy is now examined, not assumed —** Questions have asked candidates to explain what a falling unemployment rate can conceal. A release where 77.8% of districts report unemployment under 5.5% while a quarter report NEET above 30% is the cleanest available illustration of that gap. 3. **District-level data changes the kind of answer expected —** Once estimates exist below the State level, an answer that treats employment as a national aggregate looks dated. The examiner will increasingly want spatial reasoning — why Ernakulam and Coimbatore differ from districts with the same unemployment rate.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **A very low unemployment rate in a poor district is a warning, not an achievement —** Araria in Bihar and South 24 Parganas in West Bengal at 0.9% report lower measured unemployment than almost anywhere else. In a low-income district with little formal employment, this is not evidence of a strong labour market; it is evidence that almost nobody can afford to be unemployed. Survival work — unpaid family labour, marginal self-employment, casual daily work — counts as employment, so the rate falls precisely where the need for a job is greatest. Any answer that treats these districts as models has misread the indicator. 2. **NEET is the honest indicator and its distribution is alarming —** About a quarter of districts report more than 30% of people aged 15-29 neither working nor studying, and only 4.2% of districts are below 10%. Because NEET counts people out of the labour force as well as in it, it catches the discouraged worker and the young woman withdrawn from both school and work — exactly the populations the unemployment rate excludes by construction. The country's youth employment problem is therefore substantially larger than the unemployment rate suggests. 3. **The low-NEET districts share a visible characteristic —** Ernakulam at 9.6%, Coimbatore at 14.5% and Bengaluru Urban at 15% are all districts with dense, diversified urban labour markets and long histories of education and skilling infrastructure. The correlation is not proof, but it points where policy should look: the districts that keep young people in work or training are those where both exist in volume and where moving between them is easy. 4. **The LFPR spread is the variable that explains the rest —** Half of India's districts are between 60% and 80% participation and 46.1% between 40% and 60%. A twenty-point gap in participation between districts with similar unemployment rates means the same headline number describes completely different labour markets. Reading the unemployment rate without the participation rate beside it is the commonest analytical error in this subject. 5. **District data changes what governance can be held to —** A national or State unemployment figure cannot be assigned to anyone. A district figure can be placed in front of a District Magistrate, a district skilling mission and a district industries centre. That is the real significance of this release — not the numbers themselves but the fact that accountability now has a unit small enough to act on. Whether that potential is realised depends on whether the data is published regularly rather than once. 6. **The methodological caveat belongs in the answer —** These are the first district estimates and they rest on a sampling design revised in January 2025. Small-area estimates carry wider confidence intervals than State ones, and a single year does not establish a trend. A candidate who uses the data confidently while noting this is demonstrating exactly the judgment the examiner is testing for.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A falling unemployment rate can conceal a worsening employment situation. Examine this proposition using recent district-level labour force data."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Define the three ratios precisely in the introduction —** Labour force participation rate, worker population ratio and unemployment rate, with the denominator of each. The whole answer turns on the fact that the unemployment rate's denominator is the labour force, so establish it at the start. 2. **Prove the proposition with the district contrast —** Araria and South 24 Parganas at 0.9% unemployment against a quarter of districts with NEET above 30%. Explain the mechanism — survival employment is counted as employment, and discouraged workers leave the denominator — rather than simply asserting the paradox.

	3. **Introduce NEET as the corrective measure —** Explain what it captures that the unemployment rate cannot, give the distribution across districts, and name Ernakulam, Coimbatore and Bengaluru Urban at the low end with their common characteristic of dense urban labour markets. 4. **Draw the policy implication at district level —** Argue that the appropriate response differs by district type: where NEET is high and LFPR low, the binding constraint is entry into the labour market, especially for young women; where unemployment is high and LFPR high, it is demand for labour. A single national scheme cannot address both. 5. **Close on data as an instrument of accountability —** Conclude that the significance of the release is the unit of measurement. Recommend regular publication, because a one-time district map is a study and a repeated one is a management tool — and add the caveat about confidence intervals for small areas, which shows you have read the method and not only the headline.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. Your district reports 1% unemployment and 32% NEET among those aged 15-29. The State asks you to explain the 'success'. What do you report?** ***Approach:*** Report that the two numbers together describe a problem, not a success, and explain why in one paragraph: measured unemployment is low because almost no household can support a member who is searching rather than earning, so people take whatever work exists and are counted as employed. The 32% NEET figure is the real finding, and it is the one to act on. Then propose something specific rather than a general request for schemes: a district survey of where the NEET population sits by block, sex and education level, because the young woman who left school at 15 and the graduate waiting for a government exam result need entirely different interventions and are currently in the same statistic. An officer who reports a flattering number without its companion has misinformed the government, even if every figure he sent was accurate. **Q2. You must raise female labour force participation in a district where it is under 25%. Skilling centres exist and are half empty. What is the actual constraint?** ***Approach:*** Go and find out rather than assuming, but the usual answers are distance, safety and timing, not willingness. Check whether the centre is reachable by public transport at the hours it runs, whether it runs a batch that fits around domestic work, whether there is a crèche, and whether the courses lead to jobs that exist within commuting distance — a tailoring course in a district with no garment unit produces certificates, not employment. Then fix what you can actually fix at the district level: relocate batches to the block level, run a morning batch, tie up with the two or three employers who are actually hiring, and publish placement numbers per centre so that the half-empty centre either fills or closes. Attendance follows credibility, and credibility follows placements. **Q3. A politician asks you to publicise the district's 1% unemployment rate in the run-up to a local election. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** The number is official and public, so you cannot and should not suppress it. What you can do is decline to be the one who presents it without context, and say so directly: you will supply the full data set, including participation and NEET, to anyone who asks, and you will not issue a district administration communication that quotes one indicator alone. Offer a genuine alternative — a district factsheet with all indicators, released in the normal course and available to every party equally. The line an officer has to hold here is narrow but clear: the administration provides data, it does not provide selective data, and the moment it does the next government will not believe anything it publishes.

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

THE NEWS In an Economic Times opinion piece, Nilanjan Banik, head of the Economic Policy Centre at Mahindra University, Hyderabad, wrote that in FY26 China overtook the US to become India's largest trading partner, with bilateral merchandise trade reaching about $151 billion; India imported well over $130 billion in Chinese goods while exporting under $20 billion. He noted that China controls roughly two-thirds of global rare earth mining, some 60% to 90% of processing capacity, and close to 90% of magnet manufacturing, a dominance built deliberately since the 1990s when Beijing designated rare earths a strategic asset while Western producers retreated from the pollution-intensive sector. In April 2025, China restricted exports of seven rare earth elements, primarily as retaliation against US tariffs rather than a move aimed at India; in August 2025, after diplomatic commitments from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during a visit to New Delhi, China added five more elements to its control list two months later, so that by December restrictions covered twelve elements in total. The piece noted that much of what China sells India — telecom equipment, semiconductors, lithium-ion batteries, solar cells, industrial machinery and pharmaceutical ingredients — are productive inputs that Indian factories and assembly lines depend on to make their own products affordable and competitive, so cutting these imports off overnight would cost consumers. It reported that India is preparing an incentive scheme worth about ₹73 billion for rare earth magnet manufacturing, alongside a ₹15 billion critical-minerals recycling initiative running through 2031, and is initiating a raw-material push with Australia, Japan and South Korea as alternative rare earth suppliers, with private capital beginning to follow.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **What rare earths are and why they matter —** Rare earth elements are a group of seventeen metals — the fifteen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium. They are not geologically rare; what is rare is economically viable separation, which is chemically difficult and highly polluting. They are essential to permanent magnets used in electric vehicle motors, wind turbines, defence systems and electronics. 2. **Mining, processing and magnet-making are three different chokepoints —** A country can mine ore and still be dependent, because separation and processing are where the value and the barrier lie, and magnet manufacturing is a further step again. China's dominance is strongest at the processing and magnet stages, which is why simply opening new mines elsewhere does not break the dependence. 3. **India's institutional setup —** Indian Rare Earths Limited, a public sector undertaking under the Department of Atomic Energy, handles monazite-based rare earth processing. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 brought several critical and strategic minerals under central auction, and the National Critical Mineral Mission was launched to secure supply through exploration, recycling and overseas acquisition. Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) is the joint venture set up for overseas mineral asset acquisition. 4. **Export controls as an instrument of statecraft —** An export control restricts the sale of specified goods to specified destinations. Unlike a tariff, it does not raise a price — it removes availability, which is why it is a far sharper instrument and why concentration in a single supplier converts a commercial relationship into strategic leverage.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Critical minerals have become a core GS3 topic —** The energy transition makes mineral supply chains a question of both economic security and climate policy, and the National Critical Mineral Mission gives it a policy anchor examiners can build a question around. 2. **It combines trade dependence with strategic autonomy —** The same story serves GS2 questions on India-China relations and GS3 questions on supply-chain resilience, which makes it unusually efficient material to prepare. 3. **The numbers here are the argument —** $151 billion of trade with over $130 billion of imports against under $20 billion of exports is a dependence ratio that makes the analytical point without needing adjectives.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The dependence is on inputs, which makes decoupling self-harming —** India's imports from China are not consumer goods that can be substituted at the margin. Telecom equipment, semiconductors, lithium-ion cells, solar cells, industrial machinery and pharmaceutical ingredients are productive inputs, so restricting them raises the cost of Indian manufacturing itself. This is why the 'stop importing from China' instinct is economically incoherent in the short run: the immediate casualty is Indian assembly, Indian pricing and Indian exports. 2. **The chokepoint is processing, not the ore —** India has monazite deposits, so it is not resource-poor. What it lacks is separation, refining and magnet-making capacity at scale. That distinction determines policy: an incentive for magnet manufacturing addresses the actual bottleneck, whereas a mining push alone would produce ore that still has to be sent abroad for processing — quite possibly to China. 3. **The controls were not aimed at India, and that is the uncomfortable part —** The April 2025 restrictions targeted the US tariff dispute. India was collateral. A country that can be damaged by a measure it is not the target of has no diplomatic lever to pull, because there is nothing to negotiate about. That is a stronger argument for supply diversification than any bilateral tension, and it is the point most commentary misses. 4. **The sequence after Wang Yi's visit is the most instructive detail —** Diplomatic commitments were given in New Delhi in August 2025, and five more elements were added to the control list two months later, taking the total to twelve by December. Whatever the intent, the practical lesson for Indian policy is that assurances at the leader level do not constrain a control regime that operates on its own domestic logic. Supply security has to be built from capacity, not from communiqués. 5. **The Indian response is correctly aimed but small and slow —** About ₹73 billion for magnet manufacturing and ₹15 billion for recycling through 2031 target the right stages of the chain. But set against imports exceeding $130 billion and against the capital intensity of separation plants, these are seed amounts. More importantly, processing capacity takes years to permit, build and qualify to customer specification, so the dependence persists through the very period in which India's EV and renewable targets peak. 6. **Recycling is the underrated element of the strategy —** Recovery from end-of-life magnets, electronics and batteries does not require new deposits, new mining clearances or overseas diplomacy, and India already imports the embedded material in finished goods. It will not replace primary supply, but it is the only part of the response that can be scaled without a geological or geopolitical precondition — which makes the ₹15 billion allocation arguably under-weighted relative to the ₹73 billion for manufacturing. 7. **Diversification has to include processing partners, not just suppliers —** Australia, Japan and South Korea are being approached as alternative sources. But Japan and South Korea are themselves magnet consumers, and Australia is largely an ore and concentrate supplier. A diversification strategy that secures ore while leaving separation concentrated in one country has moved the dependence one step upstream without

	removing it.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — quantify the dependence —** Open with the trade asymmetry — about \$151 billion of bilateral trade with over \$130 billion of imports against under \$20 billion of exports — and note that the imports are largely productive inputs rather than final goods. 2. **Body 1 — locate the chokepoint accurately —** Distinguish mining, separation and processing, and magnet manufacturing; show that China's dominance is greatest at the processing and magnet stages, which is why mining diversification alone is insufficient. 3. **Body 2 — explain why export controls differ from tariffs —** Argue that controls remove availability rather than raising price, and use the April 2025 and subsequent expansions to show that India can be affected by measures it is not the target of. 4. **Body 3 — assess India's response —** Cover the magnet manufacturing incentive, the recycling initiative, the National Critical Mineral Mission and MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 auctions, and KABIL's overseas acquisition mandate, while noting the mismatch between the scale of the response and the scale of the dependence. 5. **Body 4 — argue the timeline problem —** Show that separation and magnet capacity take years to build and qualify, so vulnerability persists exactly through the period when EV and renewable deployment targets peak. 6. **Body 5 — propose a fuller strategy —** Recommend scaling recycling as the fastest lever, building processing partnerships rather than only supply agreements, strategic stockpiling of the most concentrated elements, and pooled procurement with other import-dependent economies to improve bargaining position. 7. **Conclusion — capacity, not diplomacy —** Conclude that in a sector where a supplier can act for reasons unrelated to India, supply security must be built from domestic and allied capacity rather than from bilateral assurance.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As an official in the Ministry of Mines designing the critical minerals strategy, how would you allocate limited funds across mining, processing and recycling?** ***Approach:*** Weight the allocation towards the binding constraint rather than the visible one. Mining attracts attention because it is tangible, but ore without separation capacity leaves the dependence intact and may even deepen it if the concentrate is exported to the same country India is trying to reduce reliance on. Put the largest share into separation and magnet manufacturing, which is where both the value and the chokepoint sit, and structure the support as viability-gap funding tied to qualified output rather than to capacity announcements, because a plant that cannot meet customer specification adds nothing to security. Raise the recycling allocation materially, since it is the only lever that can scale without a geological or diplomatic precondition and it uses material already inside the country. And ring-fence a modest amount for a strategic stockpile of the two or three most concentrated elements, because a stockpile buys the one thing the rest of the strategy cannot — time. **Q2. An Indian EV manufacturer tells you it will halt production in six weeks if magnet supply is disrupted. What can government actually do in that horizon?** ***Approach:*** Be honest that nothing on the supply side can be built in six weeks, and focus on the three things that can move. First, demand visibility: convene the affected manufacturers and aggregate their requirement, because a pooled order is negotiable where individual orders are not, and it also tells you the true national exposure rather than one firm's estimate. Second, alternative sourcing at the component level rather than

	the element level — magnets and motors can sometimes be procured as assemblies from third countries even when raw material is constrained, and qualification timelines for an assembly are shorter than for a new material. Third, temporary regulatory flexibility on specification and localisation conditions where a substitute magnet chemistry with lower performance is available, so production continues at reduced specification instead of stopping. Simultaneously use the episode to build the standing mechanism that should already exist: a monitored list of import-concentrated inputs with named substitutes and pre-qualified alternate vendors, so the next disruption is met with a plan rather than a crisis meeting.

Science & Technology

4.1 AI and 'Cognitive Surrender' — What Chatbots Are Doing to How Students Learn

THE NEWS An MIT-linked report, covered on IE's World page, warns that AI is causing 'major shifts in campus culture' — students are skipping office hours and communal study in favour of chatbots that create an 'illusion of learning,' and university leaders are split between embracing AI (to 'stay relevant') and pushing back against its risks. A separate study of 26,000 Chinese secondary-school students found AI-chatbot use correlated with an 18% rise in homework scores but a 20% drop in scores on secure, proctored exams — evidence, researchers say, that chatbot-assisted homework degrades the deeper learning that would let students actually remember what they'd written minutes earlier.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. NEP 2020's emphasis on foundational literacy, critical thinking and holistic learning; India's own digital-pedagogy push and the accompanying digital divide; UGC's evolving academic-integrity regulations around AI use and plagiarism.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. This is a fast-rising GS3/Essay theme on technology's social and educational externalities; examiners are increasingly interested in how emerging tech reshapes institutions and human capability, not just how a technology itself should be regulated at the corporate level.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	The 26,000-student Chinese study found AI-chatbot-assisted homework raised homework scores by ~18% but lowered secure-exam performance by ~20% — cited as evidence of an 'illusion of learning' rather than genuine skill transfer.
ANALYSIS	1. The Chinese study's specific finding — homework scores up, exam scores down — is the crux of the analytical puzzle, and unpacking it well is what separates a strong answer from a generic 'AI is bad for learning' one. It suggests AI isn't making students worse learners through some vague technological corruption; it's exposing a pre-existing flaw in how homework was ever used as a proxy for learning. Homework always relied on an assumption of independent effort, and AI simply makes that assumption fail more visibly, and at greater scale, than earlier shortcuts (copying a classmate's work, for instance) ever could. This reframes the policy problem usefully: the real question isn't 'how do we stop AI' — likely unenforceable at scale, and possibly counterproductive since it denies students a genuinely useful skill — but 'how do we redesign assessment so it no longer relies on an assumption technology has broken.' This has a direct historical parallel worth citing: calculators in mathematics classrooms and spell-check in writing instruction both triggered similar anxieties, and the eventual resolution in both cases wasn't banning the tool but redesigning what was actually tested (conceptual understanding and interpretation, once raw computation was no longer a meaningful proxy for skill) — suggesting AI in education needs a similar assessment-redesign response rather than a prohibition-first one.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The growing use of AI chatbots among students represents not the corruption of learning by technology, but the exposure of a pre-existing flaw in how learning has been assessed." Critically examine, and suggest a way forward for higher-education policy.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Reframe the problem from 'AI is corrupting learning' to 'AI has exposed a design flaw in how learning has long been assessed.' Body: (1) unpack the empirical finding and what it actually demonstrates; (2) draw the historical parallel to calculators and spell-check, and how assessment adapted rather than banning the tool; (3) explain the risk of a prohibition-only approach — unenforceable in practice, and likely to disadvantage honest students while dishonest ones evade detection; (4) propose the alternative — redesigning assessment toward in-class, oral and process-based evaluation that tests what AI cannot easily replace. Conclusion: Policy should focus on assessment redesign and AI-literacy training rather than blanket prohibition, since genuine skill-building is better served by removing the incentive to outsource thinking than by trying to police access to a now-ubiquitous tool.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a UGC committee member, how would you redesign assessment and pedagogy so students benefit from AI without losing genuine skills?** ***Approach:*** Shift assessment weight toward in-class, process-visible evaluation — oral defence of written work, staged submissions showing successive drafts, timed in-person problem-solving — that make AI-outsourcing either impossible or irrelevant to the final grade, while explicitly teaching AI-literacy (using it as a drafting or research aid without substituting it for understanding) as a curricular skill in its own right, not an afterthought. **Q2. Given the study's finding, would you restrict AI use in take-home work, redesign assignments, or leave it unregulated?** ***Approach:*** Redesign is the most defensible option: restriction is largely unenforceable at scale and penalises honest disclosure while dishonest use goes undetected, and leaving it unregulated ignores the demonstrated harm to exam performance. Redesigning assessment addresses the root cause — assessment validity — rather than merely policing a symptom that will keep recurring in new forms as the technology evolves.

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

THE NEWS Prime Minister Narendra Modi pitched India as a 'new and trustworthy location' for electronics manufacturing at the inauguration of the fifth Semicon India summit, urging global chipmakers to consider the country's potential to relieve electronics from the 'weaponisation' of supply chains. 'This is not a sector where you set up a factory and the job is done,' he said, adding that wherever semiconductor ecosystems have been built in the world, the entire ecosystem has come together only after decades of hard work. Five of the twelve projects sanctioned under the first phase of the ₹76,000-crore India Semiconductor Mission are operational now; semiconductor assembly, testing, marking and packaging units of Micron Technology, Kaynes Semicon and CG Semi began commercial production earlier this year. IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the government has seen investment interest of about $11-12 billion from companies as part of ISM 2.0, that close to one lakh new employment will be created in the entire ecosystem, and that the government is committed to training more than one lakh technicians over the coming five years for different electronics manufacturing duties. The Prime Minister's address came days after ISM's second phase, with an outlay of ₹1.27 lakh crore, was notified. Global industry body SEMI's CEO Ajit Manocha estimated that the semiconductor industry would cross $1.3 trillion this year and $2 trillion by 2030. Micron CEO Sanjay Mehrotra said current production capacity already exceeds the memory required for India's entire laptop market. Infineon CEO Jochen Hanebeck called India 'a market of tremendous importance'. The Indian Express reported that India spent almost $150 billion on semiconductor product imports between FY17 and FY25, that imports grew at a compound annual growth rate of 23% during this period, and that if the trend continues annual imports could reach $240 billion by 2035. Per PIB, the summit ran from September 17-19 at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi, on the theme 'Silicon to Systems: Building the Ecosystem', with design tools provided to 332 academic institutes, support extended to 105 start-ups and 24 start-ups approved under the Design Linked Incentive scheme. The Economic Times reported that PM Modi launched chip packaging facilities of Suchi Semicon in Gujarat and CDIL in Punjab, and that Tata Electronics announced seven partnerships around its chip fab in Gujarat and packaging facility in Assam.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The semiconductor value chain, in four stages —** Design turns a specification into a circuit layout. Fabrication etches that design onto silicon wafers in a fab. Assembly, testing, marking and packaging — ATMP, sometimes called OSAT — cuts the wafer into chips, packages and tests them. Distribution and system integration put them into products. Each stage has entirely different capital, skill and yield characteristics. 2. **Why India entered at ATMP first —** A leading-edge fab costs many billions of dollars and takes years to reach commercial yield. ATMP is far less capital-intensive, employs more people per rupee invested, and can reach commercial production within a couple of years. Starting there builds an ecosystem, a workforce and supplier relationships while the harder fabrication capability is developed. 3. **What the India Semiconductor Mission is —** ISM was launched under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as part of the semiconductor and display fab ecosystem programme, with a first-phase outlay of ₹76,000 crore covering fabs, display

	fabs, compound semiconductors and ATMP units, plus the Design Linked Incentive scheme for domestic design firms. Its second phase carries an outlay of ₹1.27 lakh crore. 4. **'Weaponisation' of supply chains, explained —** It refers to using control over a critical input as leverage — restricting export of chips, equipment or materials to influence another state's behaviour. Export controls on advanced chips and chipmaking equipment, and the rare-earth controls covered elsewhere in this digest, are the same instrument applied to different links of the chain.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Semiconductors sit at the centre of technology and trade questions —** The topic serves GS3 questions on indigenisation and industrial policy, and GS2 questions on technology-led geopolitics. Few topics cover that much syllabus at once. 2. **The exam rewards knowing where India actually is —** Generic answers assert that India is becoming a chip hub. A precise answer distinguishes packaging units in commercial production from fabrication capability still being built — that distinction is exactly what an examiner is testing. 3. **The import trajectory gives the argument its urgency —** Almost $150 billion of semiconductor imports across FY17-FY25 growing at 23% a year, potentially reaching $240 billion annually by 2035, is the strategic case for domestic capacity stated as arithmetic rather than aspiration.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **Five of twelve operational is real progress and an incomplete story —** Micron, Kaynes Semicon and CG Semi are in commercial production, which means India now genuinely packages chips at commercial scale rather than merely announcing intentions. But the operational units are at the back end of the chain. Fabrication — turning designs into wafers — remains the capability India does not yet have at scale, and it is the one that determines whether the country is a manufacturing location or a strategic supplier. An answer should state both facts in the same breath. 2. **The Prime Minister's own framing is the most candid part —** The remark that ecosystems have come together only after decades of hard work is an unusually realistic statement from a policy launch event. Taiwan and South Korea took thirty to forty years, with sustained state support through multiple loss-making cycles. Set against that, India is three to four years into a first phase. The honest metric for ISM is not output today but whether policy support survives the first serious downturn. 3. **Trust is the product India is actually selling —** The pitch as a 'trustworthy location'

	relieving electronics from supply-chain weaponisation is not a claim about cost or technology. It is a claim about political risk: that a customer's supply will not be interrupted for reasons unrelated to the contract. That is a real differentiator in a world of export controls, and it is the one advantage India can offer before it has cost or yield advantages. 4. **The import arithmetic is the strongest case for the subsidy —** Nearly $150 billion spent on semiconductor imports across FY17-FY25, growing at 23% annually towards a possible $240 billion a year by 2035, means the outlay is being weighed against a rapidly compounding import bill. If domestic capacity displaces even a modest fraction of that, the fiscal case works. If it does not, ₹2 lakh crore across two phases will have bought packaging capacity and employment but not import substitution — and both outcomes remain open at this stage. 5. **One lakh technicians is the constraint nobody photographs —** The commitment to train over one lakh technicians over five years addresses the real bottleneck. Semiconductor manufacturing needs process technicians, equipment maintenance engineers, cleanroom operators and metrology specialists — roles that require specific vocational training rather than general engineering degrees. Fabs have been delayed worldwide by workforce shortages, not by capital. Design tools at 332 institutes and 24 DLI-approved start-ups build the design layer, but the manufacturing workforce is a separate and harder pipeline. 6. **Geographic spread is a political choice with a technical cost —** Packaging in Gujarat and Punjab, a fab in Gujarat, packaging in Assam, units in Odisha. Distributing units builds constituencies for continued support and spreads employment. It also disperses the supplier ecosystem, specialised labour pool and logistics that clustering normally provides — which is precisely what made Hsinchu and Suwon work. The trade-off is defensible, but it is a trade-off and should be named as one. 7. **Investment interest is not investment —** The figure of $11-12 billion is stated as interest expressed by companies under ISM 2.0, not as committed or deployed capital. The distinction matters because semiconductor announcements have a long history globally of not converting. The metric worth tracking is not announcements at successive summits but units reaching qualified commercial yield — which is the number that will settle whether ISM succeeded.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — map the value chain —** Open by distinguishing design, fabrication, ATMP and system integration, and state where India currently sits: commercial production at the packaging stage, with fabrication still being built. 2. **Body 1 — explain why entering at ATMP was rational —** Cover lower capital intensity, faster time to commercial production, higher employment per rupee, and ecosystem-building effects, while noting that this is the lowest value-added stage. 3. **Body 2 — set out the strategic rationale —** Use the import arithmetic — nearly $150 billion over FY17-FY25, 23% CAGR, a potential $240 billion a year by 2035 — and the supply-chain weaponisation argument to justify state support. 4. **Body 3 — identify the binding constraints —** Discuss workforce, particularly the technician pipeline, the ultra-pure water, power reliability and logistics requirements of fabs, and the difficulty of achieving commercial yield. 5. **Body 4 — assess the design choices critically —** Examine geographic dispersal against the benefits of clustering, and distinguish investment interest from committed capital, arguing that the right success metric is qualified commercial output rather than

	announcements. 6. **Conclusion — judge it on persistence —** Conclude that semiconductor ecosystems everywhere took decades of sustained support through loss-making cycles, so the test of India's strategy is not current output but whether policy commitment and skilling investment persist beyond the announcement phase.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a MeitY official, how would you define success for ISM 2.0 so that it cannot be met by announcements alone?** ***Approach:*** Replace announcement-based reporting with output-based reporting, and publish the definition in advance so it cannot be adjusted later. The headline metric should be volume of chips shipped at qualified commercial yield from Indian units, because that single number cannot be met by a groundbreaking ceremony. Add capital actually deployed against capital committed, since the gap between the two is where such programmes quietly fail. Add trained technicians placed in operating units, not merely enrolled in courses. Add import substitution measured in dollars for the specific chip categories India now produces, because that is the stated strategic rationale and it should be tested rather than assumed. And publish a project-level dashboard with each unit's stage, since aggregate numbers allow a single large success to mask several stalled projects. **Q2. You are asked whether the next tranche of support should go to another packaging unit or to strengthening the technician pipeline. How do you decide?** ***Approach:*** Ask which one the other cannot proceed without. Packaging capacity that stands idle for want of process technicians and equipment maintenance engineers is a stranded asset, while trained technicians in an economy with insufficient capacity will find employment abroad and be recoverable later — so the asymmetry favours skilling when the pipeline is the binding constraint. Establish which it is empirically rather than by assumption: ask operating units what their current vacancy rate is by role and how long positions stay open, because that figure settles the question faster than any projection. If the shortage is real, fund the pipeline through arrangements tied to operating units — apprenticeships inside working fabs and packaging plants rather than classroom programmes, since semiconductor process skills are learned on qualified equipment. And structure support so a unit receiving capital incentives has a training obligation attached, which makes the two decisions one decision rather than a choice between them.

Society

5.1 Manipur — Fresh Killings Show the Conflict Has Outgrown a Simple Meitei-Kuki Frame

THE NEWS Two more Kuki-Zo civilians — both women — were killed by unidentified armed assailants in the Naga-majority Tamenglong-Jiribam belt, days after four Kuki civilians (including two women) were killed in a separate attack allegedly by Naga extremists in the same general region on September 13, and after a wave of attacks on Kuki settlements over the preceding Sunday killed four more people. The Kuki-Zo Council has called the pattern of continued targeting of civilians 'alarming' and urged the State and Central governments to protect vulnerable communities, bring perpetrators to justice, and disarm groups attacking civilians. Officials note the broader ethnic conflict that erupted in Manipur in May 2023 has already claimed hundreds of lives and displaced thousands.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Manipur conflict's background — originally centred on Meitei-Kuki tensions, now also showing a distinct Kuki-Naga dimension in border areas like Tamenglong and Jiribam; AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958) and 'disturbed area' declarations; the limits of existing peace mechanisms (such as the Suspension of Operations framework with Kuki militant groups) that do not address Naga-Kuki friction at all.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Manipur has been a top GS2/GS3 (internal security) theme since May 2023; this Kuki-Naga dimension is a fresher, less-obvious angle that tests whether you're following the crisis in depth rather than repeating the headline Meitei-Kuki narrative everyone already knows.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	The Manipur ethnic conflict erupted in May 2023; recent attacks (September 2026) show a Kuki-Naga dimension in the Tamenglong-Jiribam belt, distinct from the original Meitei-Kuki fault line.
ANALYSIS	1. The critical analytical point, worth stating explicitly in any answer, is that existing peace architecture in Manipur — the Suspension of Operations framework, security deployments, relief camps — was built almost entirely around the original Meitei-Kuki axis from May 2023 onward. That means the institutional 'muscle memory' of the State and security establishment is calibrated to a different conflict geometry than what's now emerging in the Tamenglong-Jiribam belt. A Kuki-Naga dimension requires different confidence-building actors (Naga civil-society and church bodies alongside the Kuki-Zo Council, not the Meitei-Kuki negotiating table), a different security posture (inter-district and border patrolling rather than the valley-hill divide management the original crisis called for), and different political sensitivity — Naga groups carry their own separate, decades-old political demands, including cross-border Naga-unification sentiment, that predate and are analytically distinct from the 2023 crisis. There is also a risk-compounding dynamic worth naming: prolonged, unresolved multi-front ethnic conflict tends to harden identity-based mobilisation generally — once violence becomes normalised along one axis, other historically simmering tensions become more likely to erupt too — meaning the failure to resolve the original Meitei-Kuki crisis quickly may itself be contributing to the emergence of this second front, as armed groups and civilian vigilantism proliferate in the resulting security vacuum.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Manipur conflict has structurally evolved beyond its original Meitei-Kuki framing." Discuss the implications of this for India's conflict-resolution and peace-building architecture in the state.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: State plainly that Manipur's conflict has structurally evolved beyond its original binary framing. Body: (1) explain why existing peace mechanisms like SoO don't map onto the new Kuki-Naga axis; (2) outline the distinct political history and demands of Naga groups, separate from the 2023 crisis's origins; (3) describe the risk-compounding dynamic by which prolonged unresolved conflict enables new fronts to

	open; (4) argue for differentiated, front-specific confidence-building mechanisms rather than treating Manipur as having a single conflict with a single resolution path. Conclusion: Durable peace requires simultaneously running multiple, tailored track-two dialogues — Meitei-Kuki, Kuki-Naga, and potentially others — rather than a single unified 'Manipur peace process.'
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a security coordinator, how would you rebuild trust on a front that existing frameworks like the SoO don't cover at all?** ***Approach:*** Convene a separate Kuki-Naga track-two dialogue involving both communities' traditional and civil-society leadership — not merely government-militant negotiations as under SoO — focused narrowly, in the first instance, on an immediate, localised civilian-protection commitment before attempting to address the deeper, longer-standing political grievances between the two communities. **Q2. What role should traditional bodies play alongside — not instead of — a security-forces-led response?** ***Approach:*** Use security forces for immediate protection and deterrence, such as visible patrolling in vulnerable border settlements, while explicitly empowering traditional councils and civil-society bodies to lead the trust-rebuilding and grievance-articulation process — since a security-only response tends to suppress violence temporarily without resolving the underlying distrust that causes it to resurface.

5.2 EAC-PM Paper Calls for Abandoning Population Control as an Objective of State Policy

THE NEWS The Economic Times reported that India should abandon population control as an objective of state policy and realign its family planning framework with the country's changing demographic reality, said Sanjeev Sanyal, member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, in a working paper titled 'The Ghost of Population Past', co-authored by Aakansha Arora, director, EAC-PM, and Virat Singh, consultant, EAC-PM. 'The historical experience of other countries shows that once fertility declines below a behavioural tipping point, and alters social norms, it is very difficult to reverse. This is more so given that there is no need to suppress the total fertility rate further and risk falling into a low-fertility trap sooner,' the paper said. It emphasised that the government must avoid disincentivisation linked to transfer payments, including acceptor payments, wage-loss compensations, and enhanced incentives to service providers, related to sterilisations. 'Repeal motivational payments and incentive payments tied to terminal methods and the ASHA incentive related to limiting couples to two children,' it said. It also recommended discontinuing all family-planning related awards, World Population Day celebrations and Vasectomy Fortnight observances that call for population control along with the two-child norm disqualification across all states. According to the paper, the national total fertility rate (TFR) is currently at 1.6, and in the absence of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the TFR stands at 1.6 — comparable to Northern Europe at 1.5 and the United States at 1.6. The paper also called for removing all fertility regulation, calculated risk, persistence and continuous learning.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Total fertility rate and replacement level —** TFR is the average number of children a woman would bear over her lifetime at current age-specific fertility rates. Replacement level fertility — the rate at which a population exactly replaces itself across generations — is about 2.1 in countries with low child mortality. Below that, a population eventually declines in the absence of migration. 2. **Momentum explains why numbers still rise below replacement —** Even at a TFR below replacement, total population continues to grow for decades because a large share of the population is in reproductive age. This is population momentum, and it is why a falling fertility rate and a rising population are not contradictory — a distinction routinely confused in public debate. 3. **India's policy history in brief —** The family planning programme was launched in 1952, the first in any developing country. The emergency-era sterilisation drive of 1975-77 discredited coercive approaches for a generation. The National Population Policy, 2000 set replacement-level fertility as a goal and explicitly endorsed a target-

	free, voluntary approach. 4. **What the EAC-PM is —** The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister is a non-constitutional, non-statutory independent body that advises the Prime Minister on economic and related issues. Its working papers are advisory analysis, not government policy — an important distinction when citing one in an answer. 5. **The two-child norm and the delimitation link —** Several states have disqualified persons with more than two children from contesting local body elections or holding certain posts. Separately, the constitutional freeze on reallocating Lok Sabha seats by population, presently extended to the first census after 2026, means states that reduced fertility fastest fear losing representation when delimitation resumes.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Demographic transition is a standing GS1 theme —** Population, ageing, the demographic dividend and internal migration recur across GS1 and GS2. A formal recommendation to reverse the policy direction is precisely the kind of development that makes a stale topic examinable again. 2. **It carries a federal and political sting —** The two-child norm's repeal, the north-south fertility divergence and the delimitation question connect population policy to representation — one of the most consequential debates approaching in Indian politics. 3. **It rewards precision over slogans —** Most candidates still write about 'population explosion'. An answer that knows TFR is 1.6, below replacement, and can explain momentum, will read as a decade ahead of the standard script.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The core claim is about irreversibility, not about numbers —** The paper's argument is not merely that TFR is low. It is that once fertility falls below a behavioural tipping point and social norms adjust — smaller households become the default, housing and work are organised around them, childcare becomes expensive and scarce — the decline becomes very hard to reverse. Every country that has tried pro-natalist policy after reaching very low fertility has had limited success at high cost. That is why the paper treats continuing to push fertility down as a policy risk rather than a neutral act. 2. **The specific recommendations target incentives, not services —** The paper asks for repeal of motivational and incentive payments tied to terminal methods and of the ASHA incentive linked to limiting couples to two children, and for discontinuing family-planning awards, World Population Day observances and Vasectomy Fortnight. None of this restricts contraceptive access. The distinction matters enormously: dismantling a target-and-incentive architecture is not the same as withdrawing

	reproductive health services, and conflating them would be a serious misreading. 3. **Incentivised sterilisation has an ethical problem independent of demography —** Paying a provider more for more sterilisations, or paying an acceptor for undergoing one, creates pressure on exactly the people with least bargaining power — poor and less-educated women, who dominate India's sterilisation statistics. Even if India wanted lower fertility, a payment-driven system produces quota behaviour and compromises free and informed consent. So the case for repeal rests on rights grounds as well as demographic ones, and an answer that makes both arguments is stronger than one that makes only the demographic case. 4. **The national average conceals the real map —** The paper notes that excluding Bihar and Uttar Pradesh leaves the TFR at 1.6 as well. Several southern and western states are well below that, while parts of the north remain higher. This divergence is what makes a single national policy inappropriate: a state at 1.5 and a state at 2.4 need opposite interventions, and a uniform rule optimised for the national average is wrong for both. 5. **The two-child disqualification is the sharpest recommendation —** Disqualifying persons with more than two children from contesting local elections is the one measure that is coercive in effect, since it attaches a civic penalty to a private decision. It also falls disproportionately on communities with higher fertility, which raises equal-protection questions. Recommending its repeal across all states is therefore not a demographic adjustment but a rights correction — and it is the recommendation most likely to face political resistance. 6. **The delimitation shadow explains the politics —** The unstated reason the north-south fertility gap is politically explosive is representation. States that reduced fertility fastest fear losing Lok Sabha seats when the freeze on reallocation ends, effectively being penalised for policy success. Until that question is settled, any national conversation about population policy will be read through a federal lens rather than a demographic one. 7. **There is a reasonable counter-argument, and it should be stated —** India is still adding population in absolute terms, and pressure on land, water, urban infrastructure and employment is real. Someone can coherently argue that abandoning the framework while numbers still grow is premature. The answer to that objection is momentum — the absolute increase is driven by age structure, not by current fertility, and pushing TFR lower cannot change it — but the objection deserves to be answered rather than ignored.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — establish the demographic fact first —** Open with TFR at 1.6, below the replacement level of about 2.1 and comparable to Northern Europe and the United States, and note that population continues to grow because of momentum rather than current fertility. 2. **Body 1 — explain the irreversibility argument —** Set out the behavioural tipping point and low-fertility trap reasoning, and note the limited success of pro-natalist policies in countries that reached very low fertility. 3. **Body 2 — describe what is actually recommended —** List the repeal of incentive and motivational payments tied to terminal methods, the ASHA two-child incentive, family-planning awards and observances, and two-child disqualifications, and stress that contraceptive access and reproductive health services are not being withdrawn. 4. **Body 3 — make the rights argument —** Argue that payment-linked sterilisation targets compromise free and informed consent and fall hardest on poor and less-

	educated women, so the case for repeal stands independently of demography. 5. **Body 4 — address regional divergence and federalism —** Show that states at very different fertility levels require different policies, and connect the north-south divergence to the delimitation question and the fear of losing representation for demographic success. 6. **Body 5 — answer the counter-argument —** Concede that absolute numbers are still rising and resource pressure is real, then explain that this increase reflects age structure, and that the policy response should be investment in urban infrastructure, employment and ageing preparedness rather than further fertility suppression. 7. **Conclusion — shift from quantity to capability —** Conclude that with fertility below replacement, the policy objective should move from reducing births to preparing for ageing, raising female workforce participation and investing in human capital, since the demographic dividend is time-limited and India is already inside the window.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a State health secretary told to withdraw sterilisation incentive payments. Field staff say targets will collapse and so will service uptake. How do you manage the transition?** ***Approach:*** Separate the two things that have been bundled together for decades: access to services, which must be preserved and ideally expanded, and the incentive-and-target architecture, which is what is being withdrawn. Make that distinction explicit to field staff on day one, because their fear is usually that the service is being defunded. Replace volume-linked incentives for providers with quality and counselling-linked measures — completeness of counselling on the full method mix, follow-up rates, complication rates — so that the worker's performance metric still exists but now rewards informed choice rather than throughput. Expand the basket actively, since decades of terminal-method incentives have skewed provision towards female sterilisation and away from reversible methods and male participation; correcting that is both a health gain and a gender-equity gain. Monitor for the predictable failure, which is that services simply decline in districts where the incentive was doing all the motivating, and intervene there specifically. And communicate to the public that the change is about how the service is offered, not whether it is available. **Q2. As an officer in a district with TFR around 1.4, what should your department actually be planning for?** ***Approach:*** Plan for the demographic structure arriving rather than the one you were trained on. At 1.4, the district's school-age cohort is already shrinking, so the operational question is school consolidation and teacher redeployment, handled early and with community consultation, rather than as an emergency when enrolments collapse. The elderly share is rising, which means primary health infrastructure needs reorienting towards non-communicable disease management, geriatric care and home-based support, none of which the existing maternal and child health architecture is configured for. The workforce is the binding long-term constraint, which makes female labour force participation the highest-return intervention available — childcare, transport safety and skilling determine whether the shrinking cohort is fully employed. And begin planning for in-migration from higher-fertility regions, since a district with a shrinking workforce and a growing economy will draw migrants, and the services, housing and social integration for that are planned years in advance or not at all.

Internal Security

6.1 NSA Invoked Against a Journalist Over the Noida Workers' Protest

THE NEWS Uttar Pradesh Police invoked the National Security Act against Satyam Verma, a 64-year-old freelance translator and former journalist already facing 11 other cases, in connection with the Noida workers' protest — calling him an 'ideological catalyst' and a 'Marxist' who 'inspires the new generation to join rebel organisations.' He was arrested on April 17 and the NSA was invoked against him on May 12 while he was already in jail; his lawyer argues the detention order — based on a 'criminal conspiracy to incite unrest' charge — was passed without proper application of mind and that due process was not followed.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The National Security Act, 1980 (preventive detention without trial); Article 19(1)(a) press freedom and Article 19(1)(c) freedom of association (relevant to labour-protest rights); Article 21's due-process expansion since Maneka Gandhi (1978).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Declining press-freedom indices and the use of security law against journalists/activists are frequently cited in GS2 answers — this case, read together with the J&K PSA case above, is strong evidence for a broader 'pattern of preventive-detention misuse against dissent' answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	NSA, 1980 allows preventive detention without trial; in this case, NSA was invoked roughly a month after the initial arrest, while the individual was already in custody on other charges.
ANALYSIS	1. The roughly month-long gap between arrest (on other charges) and NSA invocation is itself analytically significant and worth flagging directly. It suggests the NSA wasn't the state's reflexive, immediate response to an urgent threat — which would fit the preventive-detention rationale of forestalling imminent harm — but a subsequent, deliberated escalation after the person was already in custody and posed no immediate physical threat. This weakens the core preventive justification, since the individual was already incapacitated by ordinary arrest when the NSA was added. It raises a pointed question worth engaging directly in an answer: was NSA used here as genuine prevention, or as an additional layer of prolonged detention and deterrence against someone the state found ideologically troublesome — precisely the 'chilling effect on dissent' civil-liberties advocates warn about, and precisely the pattern the J&K PSA case above also illustrates from a different angle.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The invocation of preventive-detention laws against individuals already in custody raises serious questions about their actual purpose." Discuss, with reference to the recent use of the National Security Act against a journalist, and its implications for civil liberties.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Note the timing anomaly — NSA invoked roughly a month after arrest, with the person already in custody. Body: (1) explain what this timing suggests about the actual, as opposed to stated, rationale for invoking NSA; (2) situate this within the broader pattern of invoking preventive laws against individuals already facing ordinary criminal charges, and ask whether genuine 'prevention' is even the operative logic in such cases; (3) discuss the implications for press freedom and labour-protest rights specifically; (4) propose the institutional check needed — review-board scrutiny and stricter timing requirements. Conclusion: NSA and similar preventive laws should face a higher evidentiary bar when invoked against someone already in custody, since the 'imminent threat' justification is inherently weaker, and States should be required to publicly justify why ordinary criminal law was deemed insufficient in each such case.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. What internal audit or review mechanism would you institute to ensure NSA is reserved for genuine, narrowly-defined threats to public order?** ***Approach:*** Require a two-tier internal sign-off — district SP-level justification, reviewed by a state-level oversight committee independent of the arresting authority —

	before any NSA invocation against someone already in custody, specifically requiring the officer to articulate why the person, already detained, still poses an 'imminent' threat that ordinary custody doesn't already neutralise, creating deliberate friction against reflexive or punitive use of the law.

6.2 Jhiram Valley Attack — All 10 Convicts Get Death Penalty, 13 Years On

THE NEWS A special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, awarded the death sentence to all 10 convicts in the 2013 Jhiram Valley Maoist attack, which killed 27 people including senior Congress leaders Vidya Charan Shukla, Nand Kumar Patel and Mahendra Karma, in an ambush on the Congress's 'Parivartan Yatra' convoy on May 25, 2013. The NIA's investigation established that armed cadres of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), in connivance with local committees and divisions, carried out a coordinated conspiracy — a landmine blast blocking the convoy's route followed by indiscriminate firing and grenade lobbing, killing 24 on the spot and injuring over 35. Three top Maoist leaders remain listed as wanted, while three others who surrendered were chargesheeted separately; the initial trial against 10 chargesheeted persons concluded after 13 years. Former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, a Congress leader, said on social media that 'those who hatched the conspiracy and those who carried out this massacre are still roaming freely... we believe that justice is incomplete because investigation is incomplete,' while Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai hailed the verdict as vindication of the Centre's anti-Naxal campaign.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) and its use in prosecuting Left-Wing Extremism cases; the NIA Act, 2008 and the National Investigation Agency's mandate for scheduled offences including terrorism-linked violence; the distinction between individual criminal liability (established here, against 10 convicts) and organisational/leadership-level accountability (still pending, with senior Maoist leadership uncharged or absconding).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Left-Wing Extremism and its judicial follow-through is a recurring GS3 internal-security theme; this case is a valuable, rare example of a LWE prosecution actually reaching a conclusive death-sentence verdict after a genuinely long trial, letting you discuss both the achievement (accountability delivered) and its limits (leadership-level impunity persisting) in the same answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	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.
ANALYSIS	1. This verdict is best read on two separate tracks that shouldn't be collapsed into a single 'justice done' or 'justice denied' narrative. On the individual-accountability track, the case is a genuine achievement of the counter-LWE legal architecture: a coordinated, high-casualty attack has, after 13 years, produced a conclusive verdict against those the NIA could specifically place at the scene and tie to the conspiracy — evidence that the investigative and prosecutorial machinery can eventually deliver outcomes even in complex, evidence-scarce insurgency-linked cases. On the organisational-accountability track, former CM Baghel's pointed criticism — that 'those who hatched the conspiracy' remain free — identifies a structurally different and unresolved problem: LWE prosecutions frequently convict the operational cadre physically present at an attack while the senior leadership that plans, funds and directs such attacks from underground or across State lines remains outside the reach of any single trial, protected by geographic dispersal, compartmentalised planning, and the difficulty of gathering trial-admissible evidence against leadership figures who don't personally appear at attack sites. This is a recognised, structural limitation of prosecuting insurgent violence through ordinary (even specialised NIA) criminal trial processes, which are built around establishing individual culpability for a specific act rather than dismantling a command hierarchy — a different kind of accountability that typically requires sustained intelligence-led operations (arrests, encounters, surrenders) over years rather than a

	single prosecutorial victory, however significant. Reading the two Chief Ministers' contrasting reactions — one framing the verdict as vindication, the other as incomplete justice — together, rather than picking a side, gives you the fullest and most balanced answer.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction: Distinguish individual/operational accountability from organisational/leadership accountability as the analytical spine of the answer, using the Jhiram Valley verdict as the concrete example. Body: (1) describe what the verdict achieves — conviction of the 10 identifiable cadre present at or complicit in the attack; (2) explain why leadership-level accountability is structurally harder to achieve through ordinary trial processes — evidentiary, jurisdictional and operational-security challenges; (3) survey the tools available beyond prosecution — targeted intelligence operations, surrender-and-rehabilitation policies, financial-network disruption; (4) assess whether 13 years is an acceptable timeline for even the operational-level verdict, and what reforms (fast-track courts, witness protection) could shorten it for future cases. Conclusion: Argue that a comprehensive counter-LWE strategy must treat prosecutorial verdicts and leadership-targeting operations as complementary, not substitutable, tracks of accountability.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a state Home Department official reviewing this verdict, what would you do differently to close the leadership-accountability gap the former CM has flagged?** ***Approach:*** Commission a dedicated, resourced task force focused specifically on the still-wanted senior leadership named in this case, using financial-network and communication-intelligence tools (tracking funding and logistics chains) rather than relying primarily on future attack-scene evidence, since leadership figures who don't appear at attack sites will never be reachable through the same evidentiary process that convicted the operational cadre. **Q2. How would you address the 13-year timeline for this trial in designing future LWE prosecutions?** ***Approach:*** Push for dedicated fast-track NIA courts with ring-fenced judicial capacity for LWE-linked cases, combined with a structured witness-protection programme to prevent the evidence-erosion and witness-attrition problems that typically cause such trials to stretch over more than a decade, since delayed justice in high-profile political-violence cases also has a corrosive effect on public confidence in the state's capacity to respond to such attacks.

Environment & Ecology

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

THE NEWS The Indian Express reported on a study warning how melting glaciers could 'put 20% of GDP at risk'. The report, titled in the newspaper's account as one on protecting the Himalayan region and securing future prosperity, was compiled by the consultancy Systemiq in partnership with the International Mountain Initiative and supported by ICIMOD, Nepal, and the GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment, Uttarakhand. It finds that ₹64.8 lakh crore — 21.5% of India's FY24 GDP — is dependent on the Himalayas, and that the Himalayas are already a major disaster hotspot, accounting for 18% of India's land but 35% of its disasters. The report discusses the concept of 'Peak Water', the point at which glacier meltwater reaches its maximum before declining as ice reserves shrink. On black carbon, it notes the 'snow-darkening' effect that adds about 40 watts per square metre of surface heating in the spring season across the Himalayas, and that converting brick kilns to zigzag technology cuts black carbon and particulate matter by roughly 70% and fuel use by 20-30%; Punjab and Haryana have completed the switch to zigzag kilns, while Uttar Pradesh, India's largest brick producer, is still at only 56%. Nimish Singh, research director at Gateway Research, the India arm of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development, is quoted in the report's discussion. Separately, a same-period account of the report carried in the business press describes it as the 'Prosperous and Resilient Himalayas' report by Systemiq with the Integrated Mountain Initiative, ICIMOD and the GB Pant Institute, finding that Himalayan glaciers are losing mass about 65% faster than a decade ago, that roughly one-third of glacier mass loss is attributable to South Asian black carbon with brick kilns responsible for 32-42% of anthropogenic black carbon deposition in the region, that most Himalayan river basins are expected to reach peak water around mid-century, that up to 80% of current glacier volume could be lost by 2100 under present conditions, and that only about 21 of an estimated 40,000 Hindu Kush Himalayan glaciers are monitored, including just 16-17 in India.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Black carbon is not carbon dioxide —** Black carbon is fine particulate soot from incomplete combustion of biomass, coal and diesel. It is a short-lived climate pollutant, staying in the atmosphere for days to weeks rather than centuries, and it warms by absorbing sunlight directly and by darkening snow so that snow reflects less and melts faster. Because it is short-lived, cutting it produces climate benefit within a season rather than over decades. 2. **Albedo and the snow-darkening effect —** Albedo is the fraction of incoming sunlight a surface reflects. Fresh snow has very high albedo; soot-covered snow has much lower albedo, so it absorbs more energy and melts faster, exposing darker rock or soil beneath, which absorbs still more. This is a positive feedback loop, which is why deposition on ice matters far more than the same soot in the air elsewhere. 3. **Peak water, explained —** As glaciers melt faster, river flow initially increases. That rise is temporary: once the ice reservoir is substantially depleted, flow declines permanently. The maximum point of that curve is peak water. The danger is that the pre-peak decades look like water abundance, encouraging irrigation and hydropower investment sized to flows that will not last. 4. **Why the Himalaya is called the Third Pole —** The Hindu Kush Himalayan region holds the largest body of frozen freshwater outside the polar regions and feeds ten major river systems, including the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra. ICIMOD, based in Kathmandu, is the intergovernmental knowledge centre for the region, with eight member countries including India. 5. **Zigzag kiln technology in one line —** Arranging bricks so that hot gases travel a zigzag rather than a straight path lengthens the gas flow, mixes air and fuel better and improves combustion. Better combustion means less unburnt carbon, which is why the same change cuts both soot emissions and fuel consumption.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Climate impact on the economy is the current framing of choice —** Questions have moved from 'what causes glacier melt' to 'what does it cost'. A figure of 21.5% of GDP dependent on one mountain system is exactly the kind of evidence that anchors such an

	answer. 2. **Short-lived climate pollutants are an under-prepared area —** Most candidates write about carbon dioxide. Black carbon, methane and tropospheric ozone offer a distinctive angle, and they connect to air quality policy, which is separately examinable. 3. **It supplies a rare solution with a measurable return —** A single technology change cutting black carbon and particulate matter by about 70% while lowering fuel use by 20-30% is an unusually concrete mitigation example, and Punjab and Haryana's completion against Uttar Pradesh's 56% gives an implementation-gap contrast.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• 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.
ANALYSIS	1. **The GDP figure reframes glaciers as infrastructure —** ₹64.8 lakh crore, or 21.5% of FY24 GDP, depends on the Himalayas through irrigated agriculture, hydropower, tourism and urban water supply. Stated that way, glacier retreat stops being an environmental concern competing with growth and becomes a threat to the asset base that growth is built on. That reframing is the single most useful move in the report, because it changes which ministry owns the problem. 2. **One-third of the melt has a domestic, fixable cause —** About a third of glacier mass loss is attributed to South Asian black carbon, and brick kilns account for 32-42% of anthropogenic black carbon deposition in the region. This is decisive for policy: unlike global CO2, where India's mitigation depends on everyone else acting, this share is generated within the region and can be reduced by regional action alone. It is the part of the problem India can address without waiting for a climate negotiation. 3. **Peak water is the most under-appreciated risk in the report —** Because melt initially increases flow, the coming decades will look like water security improving. Irrigation expansion, hydropower capacity and urban supply commitments sized to those flows will then be stranded when the curve turns around mid-century. The planning error is not caused by ignorance of climate change; it is caused by extrapolating from a temporary surplus. Any long-lived water asset being approved today should be tested against post-peak flows, not present ones. 4. **The disaster ratio shows the exposure is already realised —** The Himalayan region is 18% of India's land but accounts for 35% of its disasters. That is a present-tense burden, not a projection — glacial lake outburst floods, landslides, cloudbursts and flash floods are already concentrated there. Adaptation spending in these districts is therefore a response to a current hazard profile, which makes it easier to justify than spending framed as precaution against a future. 5. **The monitoring gap undermines everything built on it —** Roughly 21 of an

	estimated 40,000 Hindu Kush Himalayan glaciers are monitored, and only 16-17 in India. Every projection — melt rate, peak water timing, basin-level flow — is therefore extrapolated from a very small sample. That does not make the direction wrong, but it makes basin-specific planning unreliable, and expanding the monitoring network is the cheapest high-value intervention available. 6. **The kiln story is an implementation gap, not a technology gap —** Zigzag conversion cuts black carbon and particulate matter by roughly 70% and lowers fuel use by 20-30%, so it pays for itself through fuel savings. Punjab and Haryana have completed the transition; Uttar Pradesh, the largest brick producer, is at 56%. When a technology saves money and is already mandated in neighbouring states, the barriers are capital access for small kiln owners, enforcement capacity and the informal structure of the sector — and those are the variables an answer should address rather than the technology itself. 7. **The equity dimension sits inside the solution —** Brick kilns are small, often seasonal enterprises employing migrant labour under difficult conditions. A conversion mandate without financing shuts down the smallest operators and displaces their workers, while the largest simply absorb the cost. A credible programme therefore has to pair the mandate with capital support and a transition timeline, or the environmental gain is purchased through a livelihood loss concentrated among the poorest participants.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction — quantify the stake —** Open with ₹64.8 lakh crore, 21.5% of FY24 GDP, dependent on the Himalayas, and 18% of land accounting for 35% of disasters, to establish that this is an economic and disaster-management issue as much as an ecological one. 2. **Body 1 — explain the black carbon mechanism —** Describe short atmospheric lifetime, the snow-darkening albedo effect adding about 40 W/m² of spring heating, and the attribution of roughly one-third of glacier mass loss to South Asian black carbon. 3. **Body 2 — argue why this differs from CO2 mitigation —** Show that because the pollutant is short-lived and regionally sourced, benefits accrue within seasons and do not require global cooperation — unlike CO2, where India's action alone cannot change outcomes. 4. **Body 3 — present the kiln evidence —** Use zigzag conversion cutting black carbon and particulates by about 70% with 20-30% fuel savings, and contrast Punjab and Haryana's completion with Uttar Pradesh's 56%, to locate the problem in implementation rather than technology. 5. **Body 4 — set out the barriers honestly —** Cover capital constraints for small kiln owners, the informal and seasonal structure of the sector, weak enforcement capacity, and the livelihood risk to migrant workers if conversion is mandated without financing. 6. **Body 5 — bring in peak water and monitoring —** Argue that even successful black carbon reduction only slows the trajectory, so water infrastructure planning must be tested against post-peak flows, and that expanding glacier monitoring beyond the present handful is a precondition for basin-level planning. 7. **Conclusion — act on the tractable part —** Conclude that black carbon reduction is the highest-return climate action available to India at the regional scale, and that it should be pursued as industrial and air-quality policy with financing support, rather than deferred to climate negotiations.
ADMINISTRATOR'S	**Q1. You are a District Magistrate in a district with several hundred brick kilns,**

BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**mandated to convert them to zigzag technology. How do you execute this without destroying the sector?** ***Approach:*** Begin with the economics, because the conversion pays for itself through 20-30% lower fuel use — that is the argument that moves a kiln owner, not the glacier. Commission a simple payback calculation for a typical kiln in your district and circulate it, since most owners have never seen the number. Then address the real barrier, which is capital: tie up with a bank or the district industries centre for a standard conversion loan product with the fuel saving as the repayment logic, and sequence the mandate so the financing exists before the deadline, not after. Convert in cohorts rather than all at once, starting with the largest kilns that can self-finance, which builds local demonstration evidence. Give the smallest operators the longest window and the most support, because a uniform deadline is effectively a decision to close them. And use enforcement against those who can convert but will not, rather than against those who cannot — the distinction is what keeps the programme defensible. **Q2. As an official in the Ministry of Jal Shakti, how should peak water change the way irrigation and hydropower projects in Himalayan basins are appraised?** ***Approach:*** Change the hydrology assumption in the appraisal itself, because that is where the error enters and everything downstream inherits it. Projects are appraised against historical and current flow series; in a glacier-fed basin approaching peak water, that series overstates the flow available across the asset's operating life. Require every project with a life beyond about twenty years to be evaluated against a post-peak flow scenario, and to state explicitly what happens to its viability if flows decline by a stated percentage. Prefer designs that remain useful at lower flows over those that are only viable at present flows. Simultaneously push for basin-level monitoring expansion, since a scenario exercise is only as good as the hydrological data behind it and the current monitoring network cannot support basin-specific projections. And be transparent in the appraisal note about the uncertainty, because a project justified on flows that later fail leaves behind both a stranded asset and a discredited planning process.

7.2 Three ISA Contracts, 366 Million Tonnes of Nodules, and the Case Against Mining Them

THE NEWS Writing in The Hindu, marine biologist P. Ragavan argues that the central question at India's deep-sea frontier is not how deep the country can go or how much it can mine, but whether everything that can be technologically exploited should necessarily be exploited. The article sets out the scale of the existing footprint. India holds three International Seabed Authority exploration contracts covering approximately 95,000 square kilometres across the Central Indian Ocean Basin, the Central Indian Ridge and the Carlsberg Ridge, all within the international seabed area. Exploration under these contracts has identified an estimated 366 million tonnes of polymetallic nodules containing nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese, alongside extensive environmental and biodiversity studies. Under the Deep Ocean Mission, India is developing deep-sea mining technology and underwater robotics and building the MATSYA-6000 human submersible, while the National Institute of Ocean Technology has tested a mining machine at a depth of about 5,270 metres. Biodiversity surveys across 19 seamounts have studied around 1,300 deep-sea organisms, of which nearly 23 species have been reported as new to science. Ragavan treats these achievements as imposing a responsibility rather than conferring a licence, and warns against the assumption that if something can be exploited it should be. He accepts that deep-sea minerals may have legitimate strategic importance for India's renewable-energy, electric-mobility and advanced-manufacturing ambitions, but insists that strategic importance cannot automatically become ecological permission and that necessity must be demonstrated, not presumed: before extraction India should ask whether the minerals are genuinely necessary at the proposed scale, whether alternatives exist, and whether demand can be reduced through recycling, efficiency, substitution and a circular economy. Exploration, he writes, can advance knowledge, biodiversity assessment, environmental baselines and technology without leading to exploitation, whereas mining would physically disturb the seabed, so adaptive management alone cannot guarantee ecological protection. Because India's ISA activities remain at the exploration stage, he argues this is the right time to establish a high ecological threshold, replacing the question "How can we mine with minimum damage?" with "Do we need to mine at all?" He locates the argument within Mission LiFE, Nature-based Solutions, the Sustainable Development Goals and the circular economy, and urges India to become a global leader not only in deep-sea technology but in deep-sea ecological governance.

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The seabed beyond national jurisdiction belongs to nobody, which is why it needed an authority —** Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 defines “the Area” as the seabed and ocean floor and its subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and declares the Area and its resources the common heritage of mankind. No State may claim or exercise sovereignty over any part of it, and no State or person may appropriate any part of it. Activities in the Area are to be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole, with particular consideration for the interests of developing States. This is why an Indian contract in the Central Indian Ocean Basin is held from an international body and not asserted as a national right. 2. **The ISA is both the licensor and the environmental regulator of the same activity —** The International Seabed Authority was established under UNCLOS together with the 1994 Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI, and is headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica. Its principal organs are the Assembly, the Council and the Secretariat, with the Enterprise as the organ intended to carry out activities in the Area directly. Article 145 obliges the Authority to ensure effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects of activities in the Area. Exploration regulations already exist for polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts; the exploitation regulations, commonly called the Mining Code, have been under negotiation for years and are not yet adopted. 3. **A contractor is sponsored by a State, and the sponsoring State carries obligations —** Exploration contracts are granted to States Parties or to entities sponsored by a State Party, which is the route through which national agencies and companies reach the Area. In its 2011 advisory opinion the Seabed Disputes Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea held that a sponsoring State owes an obligation of due diligence to ensure the contractor complies, including application of the precautionary approach and environmental impact assessment, rather than an absolute guarantee of result. India’s three contracts therefore make the Indian State, and not only its scientific agencies, answerable for what is done on that seabed. 4. **The Deep Ocean Mission is the domestic vehicle, and Samudrayaan is its most visible component —** The Deep Ocean Mission is run by the Ministry of Earth Sciences and implemented substantially through the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai. Its components span deep-sea mining technology and a manned submersible, ocean climate change advisory services, deep-sea biodiversity exploration and conservation, deep-ocean survey and exploration, energy and freshwater from the ocean, and an advanced marine station for ocean biology. Samudrayaan is the crewed submersible programme, with MATSYA-6000 designed to carry a three-member crew to a depth of about 6,000 metres. The Mission sits under the broader Blue Economy framework, and its stated purpose covers both resource assessment and ecosystem understanding.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The syllabus wording fits this almost exactly —** GS3 carries “conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment” and GS3 also carries “awareness in the fields of IT, space, computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology”. A deep-sea mission that is simultaneously a robotics programme, a biodiversity survey and an extractive proposal sits in both, and GS2 supplies the international-institutions angle through UNCLOS and the ISA. 2. **Critical minerals have become a recurring frame —** Nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese are the inputs of batteries and electrification, and the examiner has repeatedly asked about import dependence in critical minerals and about strategic autonomy in supply chains. The value of this article is that it supplies the counter-argument to that frame — that demand reduction, recycling and substitution are policy options, not merely aspirations — and answers that carry both sides read better than those that carry one. 3. **The commons is a favourite conceptual hook —** Antarctica, outer space, the high seas

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<tr><td></td><td>and the deep seabed are the classic global commons, and UPSC has asked about governance of the commons in both Prelims and Mains. “Common heritage of mankind” is the phrase to know, and the deep seabed is the cleanest example of a regime built on it, because appropriation is expressly barred rather than merely discouraged.</td></tr>
<tr><td>PRELIMS NUGGETS</td><td>
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.
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<tr><td>ANALYSIS</td><td>
The strongest fact in the article is the one about new species, and it cuts against mining — Surveys of 19 seamounts examined around 1,300 organisms and found nearly 23 reported as new to science. That ratio is the argument. If a modest survey effort in a small part of one ocean basin yields that many previously undescribed organisms, the honest inference is that the baseline against which mining damage would be measured does not yet exist. Environmental impact assessment presupposes a known pre-impact state; in the deep sea, the pre-impact state is still being discovered while the extraction technology is already being tested at 5,270 metres. That inversion of sequence, and not any general sentiment about nature, is what makes the precautionary case here unusually strong.
“Adaptive management cannot guarantee protection” is a technical claim, not a rhetorical one — Adaptive management works where an intervention can be scaled back and the system recovers within a policy-relevant timeframe. Abyssal nodule fields accumulate over millions of years and the sediment plume from a mining run settles over a far wider area than the track itself. If recovery times exceed human institutional horizons, the feedback loop that adaptive management depends on never closes — the manager learns the outcome long after the decision can be reversed. The counter-view deserves a hearing: proponents argue that seabed mining displaces terrestrial mining with far heavier human and forest costs, and that argument is not frivolous. But it is an argument about comparative damage, which is exactly the frame Ragavan is refusing.
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	3. India is well placed to argue for restraint precisely because it is not a laggard — A country with no capability that urges caution is easily dismissed as rationalising its own backwardness. India holds three contracts, has surveyed 95,000 square kilometres, has built a submersible programme and has tested a miner at abyssal depth. That record buys the standing to argue for a high ecological threshold without the argument being read as protectionism or as an attempt to freeze others out. This is the diplomatic point the article implies but does not make: restraint is credible only from the capable. **4. The demand-side argument is the weakest link in practice, and should be stated as such —** Recycling, efficiency, substitution and circularity are real levers, but they operate on a stock of metal already in use, and India's stock of batteries and electrical infrastructure is small and growing fast. Circularity cannot supply a demand curve that is still climbing steeply; it becomes powerful only once deployment matures. An answer that repeats "circular economy" without noticing this timing problem is repeating a slogan. The defensible version is narrower: demand reduction changes the scale and the date at which extraction becomes necessary, which is enough to justify deferring an irreversible decision, and that is all the article needs it to do. **5. The institutional gap is that the Mining Code is being written by the body that issues contracts —** The ISA licenses exploration, collects fees from contractors and is simultaneously the guardian of the marine environment under Article 145. Combining promotion and regulation in one institution is a design that Indian administrative experience has repeatedly found unsatisfactory, which is why pollution control boards, sectoral regulators and appellate tribunals were separated out. The absence of an adopted exploitation code is usually described as a delay; it is better read as an unresolved conflict of function, and India's position on how that conflict should be settled is a more consequential intervention than anything it says about its own contracts. **6. Strategic necessity and ecological permission are genuinely separable, and the article is right to separate them —** The claim that critical minerals are needed for electrification is true and the claim that they must therefore come from the seabed is a separate proposition requiring separate proof — about quantity, about alternative sources, about price and about timing. Collapsing the two is the commonest move in resource politics, and it is the move that makes every strategic sector immune to environmental scrutiny. The examinable formulation is Ragavan's own: necessity must be demonstrated, not presumed.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"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)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	**1. Introduction —** Define the Area under Part XI of UNCLOS and the common heritage of mankind principle in one sentence, and state India's position concretely — three ISA exploration contracts over about 95,000 square kilometres with an assessed 366 million tonnes of polymetallic nodules. Begin with the legal status, not with the technology, because the whole answer turns on the fact that this seabed is not India's to decide about alone. **2. Body — establish the capability honestly —** The Deep Ocean Mission, the MATSYA-6000 submersible under Samudrayaan, and the NIOT mining machine tested at about 5,270 metres. Concede that the strategic case is real: nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese feed electrification and advanced manufacturing, and import dependence in critical minerals is a live vulnerability. An answer that does not state the case for mining cannot credibly evaluate it. **3. Body — set out the scientific uncertainty as evidence, not as sentiment —** Use the survey numbers: 19 seamounts, around 1,300 organisms studied, nearly 23 species new

to science. Argue that environmental impact assessment requires a baseline that does not yet exist, that seabed disturbance and sediment plumes are effectively irreversible on policy timescales, and that adaptive management therefore cannot substitute for a prior threshold decision.

4. **Body — locate the argument in law and in institutions —** The precautionary principle from Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration and Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum, 1996; Article 145 of UNCLOS; the unadopted exploitation regulations; the due-diligence obligation of the sponsoring State recognised by the Seabed Disputes Chamber in 2011. This is the paragraph that separates a good answer from a general one, because it converts a moral intuition into an obligation with a source.

5. **Conclusion —** Do not end with a demand for a moratorium, which the question does not ask for. End with the sequencing point: India should complete baselines, press for exploitation regulations that place the burden of demonstrating necessity on the applicant, and treat exploration as knowledge-building that carries no commitment to extraction. Restraint exercised from a position of capability is a stronger international contribution than either mining first or abstaining loudly.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences. A note is put up seeking clearance to move from exploration to a pilot mining test in the contract area, on the ground that the technology is ready and the contract permits it. What do you record?

Approach: Separate the two questions the note has merged — whether the technology is ready and whether the ecological baseline is adequate — and record that only the first has been answered. Ask for the specific deliverable that is missing: a documented pre-disturbance baseline for the test block covering species assemblage, sediment characteristics and plume behaviour, with the monitoring protocol and the recovery indicators fixed before the test, not after. Note that a pilot test is defensible precisely because it is the last reversible step, and that its value lies in what it measures, so approving it without a measurement plan wastes the only opportunity to learn cheaply. Recommend that the file also record what India will report to the ISA, because a sponsoring State that documents its own due diligence is in a far stronger position later than one that has to reconstruct it.

Q2. You represent India at an ISA Council session. A sponsoring State is pressing for early adoption of the exploitation regulations, arguing that further delay itself creates legal uncertainty. India's scientific agencies want to protect their contract rights. What position do you take?

Approach: Take the position that India wants the regulations adopted and wants them to contain a threshold, because those are not opposing demands. Delay does create uncertainty and the argument for closure is legitimate; the question is what gets closed. Push for an applicant's burden to demonstrate necessity and to establish a baseline, for independent review of environmental impact statements rather than review by the licensing body alone, and for a regional environmental management plan covering the Indian Ocean basins comparable to what exists elsewhere. Protecting contract rights and insisting on a high standard are compatible, since a weak code would expose Indian contractors to the same reputational and liability risk it exposes everyone to.

Q3. A television debate asks you, as the Mission director, whether India is ceding the deep sea to China by hesitating. You are on record supporting strong environmental conditions. How do you answer?

Approach: Answer the factual part first and without defensiveness: India holds three exploration contracts, has tested a mining machine at abyssal depth and is building a crewed submersible, so the premise that India is absent is wrong. Then make the distinction plainly — India is not hesitating about capability, it is deliberating about extraction, and those are different decisions. Say that no country can appropriate the Area under UNCLOS, so the framing of a race for territory misdescribes the legal

	position. Avoid the temptation to match the rhetoric by promising a timeline for mining; a public commitment made in a studio is the worst possible way to settle a question that the scientific evidence has not yet settled.

Hum jeet ka maja chakh kar rahenge. — UPSC Darpan