

Pramukh

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PM MITRA



GST 2.0



21 CR. WINNING PRIZE

MONTHLY

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Practice Questions (Prelims+Mains)

Preface

The **3rd** edition of **PRAMUKH SAMEEKSHA** meticulously compiles and analyzes the most significant editorials published in *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, PIB from **September 1 to September 30, 2025**. This edition is specially curated for aspirants of the **UPSC Civil Services Examination** and various **State PSCs**, providing an integrated approach that connects **current affairs with static syllabus topics**.

Each editorial is examined through a **Prelims-cum-Mains lens**, focusing on the **political, economic, social, environmental, and ethical dimensions**. The analyses are structured to help aspirants understand how contemporary issues align with UPSC-relevant themes and how they can be effectively utilized in answer writing for both **Prelims and Mains**.

A distinctive feature of this edition is the **systematic linkage of static concepts with dynamic current affairs**, enabling aspirants to build conceptual clarity while strengthening contextual understanding. Infographics, analytical charts, and topic-wise notes further enhance comprehension and retention.

Through this holistic compilation, **PRAMUKH SAMEEKSHA** continues its mission to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world applications — nurturing **critical thinking, analytical depth, and exam-oriented precision** among serious aspirants. We sincerely hope that this edition serves as a valuable resource in your journey toward excellence in the Civil Services Examination.

Prepared by:

Divas Dwivedi (Faculty Current Affairs)

Best Wishes ,
BAPS Pramukh Academy

BAPS Pramukh Academy is not merely a UPSC coaching centre — it is a sacred institution born out of the divine vision of His Holiness **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** to create a spiritually rooted, **value-driven bureaucracy for Bharat**. Inspired by his profound belief that “**Nation-building is not about constructing structures, but about constructing character**,” the Academy prepares aspirants not only to succeed in India’s most prestigious civil services examinations, but to embody the **virtues of integrity, humility, empathy, and righteous leadership in public life**.

Nestled in **green, clean, and serene residential campuses**, the Academy offers a uniquely peaceful and disciplined environment that nurtures both academic excellence and moral growth. The residential facilities are thoughtfully designed to support focused preparation — with **well-equipped libraries, tech-enabled classrooms, guided study hours, nutritious meals, separate secure hostels for boys and girls, and dedicated spiritual spaces for reflection and meditation**. The ambience fosters deep concentration, self-discipline, and enabling aspirants to grow not just in **knowledge, but in character**.

In addition to its offline foundation, the Academy also runs the ‘**Pramukh SAMPURN Programme**’ — a fully online UPSC preparation initiative that brings the same **spirit of value-based learning to students across Bharat**. This programme ensures that aspirants from remote or **financially disadvantaged backgrounds can access high-quality, structured, and holistic civil services preparation from anywhere in the country**. Through live classes, recorded lectures, daily mentorship, practice tests, and value-enrichment sessions, the online initiative aims to democratize UPSC coaching while upholding the Academy’s commitment to **affordability, accessibility, and ethical guidance**.

Whether it is through **targeted offline batches for UPSC-CSE, GPSC (Class 1–2), and Class-3 Master programmes**, or through its online reach, **BAPS Pramukh Academy** remains steadfast in its mission: to produce not just officers, but officer-saints — servant-leaders who carry forward India’s administrative legacy with **wisdom, compassion, and unwavering moral strength**. True to **Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s** timeless words — “**Without character, even the most educated person is dangerous to society**” — every initiative at the Academy is a step toward building a **Viksit Bharat** through character-first leadership.

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GST 2.0 is a landmark in India's tax journey

Source: The Hindu, **Author:** Chandrakant Banerjee

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Federalism, Cooperative Institutions, Policy Reform)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Taxation, Fiscal Policy, Ease of Doing Business)

Introduction

The **56th GST Council meeting (September 3, 2025)** marks a transformative moment in Indian taxation. **GST 2.0** brings major reform in rates and structure, signaling a shift toward a simpler, fairer, growth-oriented taxation system. The editorial highlights industry and public demand for slab rationalization, compliance relief, and alignment with global best practice.

Key Issues

1. **Complexity and Multiple Slabs:** Earlier GST architecture used five distinct slabs (5%, 12%, 18%, 28%, plus zero), causing confusion and compliance headaches for businesses and consumers. The overhaul now simplifies slabs to just two: the **Standard Rate (18%)** and **Merit Rate (10%)**, making taxation more transparent.
2. **Ease of Compliance and Filing:** Previous systems placed a heavy compliance burden—especially on MSMEs—through complex filing, classification disputes, and procedural delays. GST 2.0 emphasizes streamlined procedures, faster refunds, and easier dispute resolution for improved taxpayer experience.
3. **Sectoral Relief and Inclusion:** Farmers and the agriculture sector benefit from major reductions; tractors, farm machinery, and vital inputs now attract only 5% GST. Gradual reduction or elimination of GST on basic needs (health, education, affordable housing) improves progressivity and social impact.
4. **Critical Sector Rationalization:** Key sectors such as hospitality, telecom, construction, and logistics have seen reduction in tax rates, promoting new investment and expansion. Service providers can now opt for the simplified composition scheme, further reducing compliance costs.

Goods and Services Tax (GST) – Key Features

1. **Applicability:** Levied on the **'supply'** of goods or services, replacing earlier taxes on manufacture, sale, or services.
2. **Destination-Based Tax:** Follows **destination-based consumption taxation** instead of origin-based taxation.
3. **Dual GST:**
 - Both **Centre (CGST)** and **States (SGST)** levy GST simultaneously on a common base.
 - **Inter-state supplies** and imports attract **Integrated GST (IGST)** in addition to customs duties.
4. **Rate Determination:** **CGST, SGST & IGST rates** are mutually decided by Centre and States on **GST Council recommendations**.
5. **Multiple Tax Slabs:**
 - Now , GST has **four rates:** 5%, 18%
 - Item classification under these slabs is recommended by the GST Council.
6. **Legislative Basis:**
 - Introduced via **122nd Constitution Amendment Bill (2014)**; passed as **101st Constitution Amendment Act (2016)**.
 - CGST covers excise/service tax; SGST covers VAT/luxury tax; IGST coordinates inter-state trade.
 - **Article 246A** empowers states to tax goods and services.
7. **GST Council:**
 - Formed under **Article 279A**, chaired by the Union Finance Minister, with state ministers as members.
 - Voting: Centre **1/3**, states **2/3**; decisions require **3/4 majority**.

- Almost Immediate Benefits for Industry:** Business now faces far fewer classification disputes, simplified invoicing, and faster export refunds. Lower litigation risk and reduced transaction costs improve India's competitiveness and boost growth avenues for MSMEs.

Global Practices

Country	Tax Structure Approach
Singapore	Single GST/VAT rate, digital-first reporting, rapid refunds
Australia	Two GST rates, sectoral exemptions for essentials
EU	Harmonized VAT bands, pan-EU compliance standards
UK	Minimal rate slabs, strong platform for dispute resolution and digital filings
New Zealand	Single rate GST, full digital integration for transparency

Indian Committee Recommendations

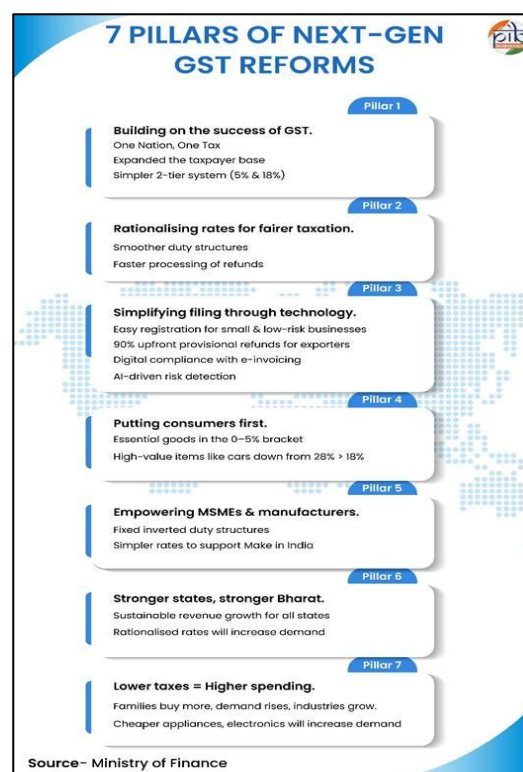
Body	Recommendation
15th Finance Commission	Slab simplification, greater fiscal autonomy for States
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance	Faster refunds, lower compliance costs, database integration
GST Council, CBIC	Regular stakeholder review, digital compliance, inclusion of MSME concerns
NITI Aayog	Sector-wise tax impact studies, gradual transition to minimal slabs

Way Forward

- Transition to Fewer, Transparent Slabs:** Ensure seamless migration to two primary GST rates, minimize exemptions, and maintain clarity for all taxpayers.
- Digitize Compliance and Grievance Redressal:** Adopt global best practices in e-filing, real-time invoicing, and dispute resolution through digital platforms.
- Strengthen Refund and Dispute Systems:** Ensure prompt refunds for exporters/service providers, speed up redressal, and lower regulatory friction for MSMEs.
- Continuously Monitor Sectoral Impact:** Conduct regular analysis of these reforms, consult stakeholders, and adjust policy as necessary for economic inclusivity and growth.
- Institutionalize Cooperative Federalism:** Empower States in GST policy-setting, ensure transparent sharing of tax proceeds, and maintain regular GST Council reviews.

Conclusion

GST 2.0 marks a watershed in India's tax reform, delivering simplicity, growth, and better compliance for industry and citizens alike. Success depends on effective digital integration, sectoral sensitivity, and robust stakeholder engagement—making these reforms key to India's competitive future.



Mains Practice Question

Q1. "GST 2.0 is hailed as a major tax milestone in India. Critically analyze its impact, challenges, and the lessons from global best practice for sustained tax efficiency and equity."

Student Notes 

India's Economic Churn, the Nectar of Growth

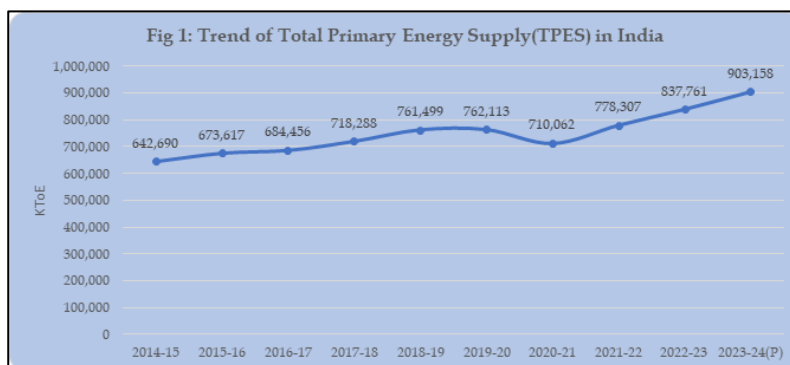
Source: Editorial (*The Hindu*)

UPSC Reference:

- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Energy Security, Growth, Infrastructure)
- **GS Paper 2:** Policy (Governance, State-Centre Relations)
- **Essay**

Introduction

India's **renewed economic growth** is closely linked to shifts in **energy security** and the **energy transition**. Amid **global shocks** and **energy market volatility**, India's ongoing **economic "churn"** is generating **opportunities**, fostering **growth**, and creating **buffers against external risks**—notably through the **modernization of its fuel basket** and increased **domestic investment** in the energy sector..



Key Challenges

1. **Heavy Energy Import Dependence:** India is the **third largest energy consumer and imports a large share of oil, gas, and coal. 30% of diesel and petrol and 30% of jet fuel are imported**, risking exposure to global price shocks.
2. **Rising Demand and Sustainability:** Energy demand is projected to double by 2070; the need for clean, diversified fuels is urgent.
3. **Cost of Transition:** Subsidy reforms, green energy investments, biofuel infrastructure and grid upgrades demand high upfront investment.
4. **Disparate State Roles/Outcomes:** Central and state taxes, roles in pricing, and regulatory diversity create inefficiencies and complicate the energy transition.
5. **Inclusion & Affordability:** Large, price-sensitive consumer base—energy affordability, industrial competitiveness, and household access must be balanced.
6. **Infrastructure Lags and Skill Gaps:** Domestic fuel/green infrastructure roll-out struggles to keep pace with fast economic growth, requiring more efficient investment and innovation.
7. **Need for Global Diversification:** Reliance on a few source countries (oil, LNG) exposes India to geopolitical and price risk.

Here's a concise summary of the key highlights from the Energy Statistics India 2025 report:

1. **Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES):** Grew by 7.8% in 2023-24 despite global uncertainties.
2. **Per Capita Energy Consumption:** Increased from 14,682 MJ (2014-15) to 18,410 MJ (2023-24); CAGR 2.55%, reflecting improved energy access and living standards.
3. **Largest Energy Consumer:** Industrial sector, with demand rising from 2.42 lakh KToE (2014-15) to 3.12 lakh KToE (2023-24).

Global Practices

Country/Region	Best Practice/Feature
USA, China	Massive energy infrastructure investment, energy security as economic growth driver.

EU (Germany, France)	Structured, milestone-based clean energy transitions, high support for renewables.
Brazil	Pioneered flex-fuel vehicles, large-scale ethanol blending, strong farm-to-fuel programs.
Japan, South Korea	Diversified fuel imports, innovative efficiency, large-scale storage for energy security.
Saudi Arabia, UAE	Transforms oil revenue into clean tech, green hydrogen, storage, and exportable tech.

Indian Committee Suggestions

Committee/Body	Recommendations / Policy Actions
NITI Aayog, Integrated Energy Policy	Expand biofuels, electric mobility, energy self-sufficiency in all fuels.
Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas	National Biofuel Policy, ethanol blending targets, clean fuel focus.
Parliamentary Committee on Energy	Public investment in infrastructure, upgrade grids, smart metering, storage.
CEA, State Energy Regulatory Commissions	Cooperative federal approach; regular review of state-centre roles, pricing, infra.
Economic Advisory Council	Fiscal incentives, skill training, and MSME support for energy transition.

Way Forward

- Boost Domestic Production and Diversification:** Ramp up all domestic sources—oil, gas, coal, renewables, biofuels, and green hydrogen.
- Accelerate Clean Energy Transition:** Invest aggressively in biofuel blending (E20 targets), renewables, and transport/industry electrification.
- Upgrade Infrastructure:** Upgrade grid and storage, support new refineries, pipelines, and energy transport networks—reduce logistics delays.
- Reform Pricing & Subsidy:** Phase out outdated subsidies, ensure price signals support efficiency, but insulate the poor from volatility.
- Inclusive, Federal Approach:** Center-state coordination in tax/infra policy, promote investments, training, and rural employment through clean energy.
- Foster R&D and Tech:** Nurture Indian clean tech, MSME innovations, and public-private skill partnerships for future-ready jobs.
- Global Leadership:** Continue to hedge energy risk, strike long-term contracts, and expand ties with diverse supplier nations.

Conclusion

India's energy "churn"—balancing growth, self-reliance, and transition—will determine how sustainably it reaps the nectar of economic opportunity. The road ahead demands bold federal reforms, clean tech innovation, and inclusive investment for resilient, green growth.

Mains Question:

Q1. "India's economic growth, energy security, and green transition are interlinked. Critically discuss the steps, global lessons, and policy reforms needed to make this churn a driver of sustained prosperity."

What justice is not – The trial of nine accused in the Delhi riots conspiracy case as a trial of India’s criminal justice system

Source: The Hindu Author: Yogendra Yadav

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Indian Constitution (Justice, Judicial Process, Rights, Police)
- **GS Paper 1:** Society (Communalism, Social Justice)
- **GS Paper 4 and Essay:** Ethics (Fairness, Institutional Integrity)

Introduction

The editorial critically examines the trial of nine accused in the **Delhi riots conspiracy case**, arguing that this episode exposes deep flaws in India’s criminal justice system. The trial’s conduct raises foundational questions about fairness, treatment of dissent, and the health of democratic institutions—revealing what true justice is not.

Key Issues

1. **Prolonged Pretrial Detention:** The accused have spent years in jail without conviction, often denied bail while waiting for charges to be framed—contravening the principle of “innocent until proven guilty.” Delayed due process is highlighted as a denial of justice.
2. **Misuse of Conspiracy Charges:** Authorities have invoked broad “conspiracy” allegations, amalgamating routine activism, dissent, and protest with serious criminal charges—blurring lines between political activism and unlawful conduct.
3. **Procedural Delays and Arbitrary Hearings:** Repeated hearing postponements, slow progression of trial, and insufficient judicial scrutiny are cited, raising doubts about institutional competence and commitment to speedy justice.
4. **Targeting of Dissent and Chilling Effect:** Activists and protestors, especially those involved in anti-CAA movements, are accused and held on tenuous grounds. This reflects a disturbing trend of criminalizing opposition voices.
5. **Institutional Failure and Human Costs:** Systemic neglect of bail rights, fair investigation, and timely prosecution has led to long-lasting distress for accused and their families, undermining public trust and democratic values.

Article 20 – Protection in Respect of Conviction for Offences

1. **No Ex Post Facto Laws (Article 20(1))**
 - A person cannot be convicted for an act that was not an offence at the time it was committed.
 - Cannot receive a penalty greater than what was prescribed when the act was done.
2. **Protection Against Double Jeopardy (Article 20(2))**
 - No person can be prosecuted or punished for the same offence more than once.
 - Protects individuals from harassment through repeated trials.
3. **Protection Against Self-Incrimination (Article 20(3))**
 - No accused can be compelled to be a witness against themselves.
 - Right applies to oral and documentary evidence, ensuring the right to remain silent.

Global Practices

Country	Approach to Justice and Fair Trials
UK	Strict bail rights, independent review of detention, explicit time-bound trials

USA	Constitutional protections for dissent, judicial oversight of conspiracy cases, regular bail hearings
Germany	Rapid review of pretrial detention, requirement to justify and minimize delay
Canada	Independent prosecutorial scrutiny, special safeguards for protest-related trials
France	High standard of evidence for conspiracy, periodic judicial review of charges

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Key Recommendations
Law Commission of India	Bail reform, time-bound trial recommendations, curb misuse of conspiracy laws
Supreme Court (multiple benches)	Guidelines for speedy trial, protection of dissent, minimum evidence threshold for pretrial detention
National Human Rights Commission	Monitoring prolonged detentions, regular legal aid and compensation for unjust incarceration
Parliamentary Committee on Home Affairs	Audit of police processes, training in constitutionality and rights

Way Forward

- Institutionalize Speedy, Fair Trials:** Mandate time-bound hearings, transparent judicial review of detention, and regular scrutiny of bail denial.
- Clarify and Restrict Conspiracy Charges:** Define legal standards for conspiracy more narrowly; protect activism and protest as constitutionally legitimate expressions.
- Strengthen Judicial Accountability:** Promote independent supervision of trial procedures; regular review and audit of delays, especially in sensitive cases.
- Expand Legal Aid and Rights Awareness:** Ensure timely access to legal counsel, public reporting of case progress, and compensation for wrongful detention.
- Safeguard Dissent and Democratic Freedoms:** Uphold constitutional protections for peaceful protest; curb arbitrary prosecution and institutional harassment.

Conclusion

The Delhi riots conspiracy trial reveals urgent need for institutional reform—remedying delays, protecting dissent, and restoring faith in justice. True justice demands not just punishment, but fairness, speed, and constitutional integrity.

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Events like the Delhi riots conspiracy trial expose serious shortcomings in India's criminal justice system. Critically discuss the key issues and reforms with reference to global standards and committee advice."

Student Notes 

Recurrent Irritant – Delayed Funds and Salaries Hurt Science Careers

Source: Editorial (*The Hindu*)

UPSC Reference:

1. **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Science & Research Funding, Institutional Accountability)
2. **GS Paper 3, Essay:** Economy (Innovation, R&D, Human Capital)

Introduction

Despite India's growing emphasis on **innovation and research**, its **scientific ecosystem** continues to suffer from chronic **delays in the disbursement of funds and salaries**, especially for **young researchers and fellows**. Such **administrative inefficiencies** not only **demoralize talent** but also **disrupt ongoing projects**, **threaten career trajectories**, and **compromise the quality and global competitiveness** of national **research and development (R&D)**. Ensuring **timely funding** is thus critical for sustaining India's **scientific momentum** and nurturing its **next generation of innovators**.

Key Challenges

1. **Serious Delays in Payments: Recent report:** 75% of those selected for DBT fellowships had not received sanction letters or salaries, echoing a wider pattern in Indian research management.
2. **Impact on Young Researchers:** Lab work, publishing, and even basic living needs are affected—forcing the brightest minds to pursue uncertain or contractual jobs.
3. **Career Instability:** Opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and innovation suffer, pushing talented graduates to seek positions abroad or outside academia.
4. **Administrative Inefficiency:** Slow, opaque procedures and lack of accountability for delayed paperwork impact morale, trust, and long-term planning.
5. **Fragmented Support Systems:** Poor coordination between institutes, funding agencies and ministries; dependency on paperwork and delayed reviews.
6. **Discouraging Talent Retention:** India's research ecosystem loses its competitive edge when fellows migrate or abandon research, risking a national "brain drain."

Global Practices

Country/Region	Best Practice/Feature
USA, UK, Germany	Dedicated grant disbursement timelines, online tracking of fund flow, direct stipend payments.
EU (Horizon/Marie Curie)	Multi-year funding cycles, rapid onboarding of fellows, transparent reporting and appeals.
Japan, South Korea	Centralized research portal, regular audit of administrative efficiency, "no lapse" guarantee systems.
Singapore	Seamless digital fellow/fund management, high researcher autonomy.

Indian Committee Suggestions

Committee/ Body	Recommendations / Policy Actions
Science and Technology Parliamentary Committee	Streamline and digitize research fund disbursement; set time-bound delivery mandates.
DBT, DST, CSIR task forces	Unified national research database, automated reminders, grievance portals.

NITI Aayog	Periodic review of HR practices in research, rewards for compliance and timely wages.
Academic councils	Simplified, user-centric administrative procedures, mentoring for young researchers.

Way Forward

1. **Time-bound Fund and Salary Mandates:** Set strict deadlines for fund sanction and salary disbursal; automate notifications and approvals.
2. **Digitize and Centralize Process:** Build national portals for real-time fund tracking, grievance redressal, and documentation.
3. **Accountability Mechanisms:** Link administrative performance to institutional ratings and individual accountability.
4. **Foster Mentorship and Stability:** Safeguard career tracks of young researchers, reduce dependence on contractual roles, and promote research leadership.
5. **Promote International Best Practice:** Adopt global models of continuous, transparent, and efficient funding, including multi-year fellowships.
6. **Regular Audits and Feedback:** Institutionalize periodic review of grant cycles; treat delays as systemic failures for urgent redress.

Conclusion

Administrative delays in research funding and salaries are a major barrier to India's scientific excellence and retention of talent. Accountability, digitization, and policy reform must be made national priorities to protect livelihoods—and the future of Indian research.

Mains Question:

Q1. "Delays in disbursement of funds and salaries hinder India's research ecosystem and careers. Discuss the causes and suggest a robust framework for accountability and reform, with reference to global and Indian committee practice."

Student Notes

The rise and risks of health insurance in India

Source: The Hindu

Author: Anfaz Ashraf Vahab, Jean Drèze

UPSC Relevance:

1. **GS Paper 2:** Health Policy, Governance, Welfare Schemes
2. **GS Paper 3:** Economy, Insurance, Social Justice

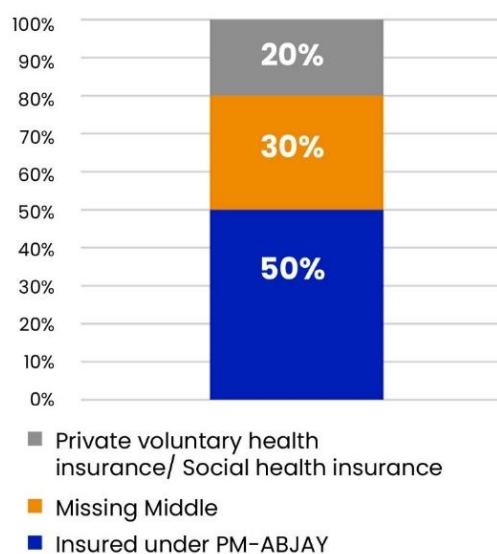
Introduction

India's health insurance sector has expanded rapidly over the last decade, driven by Ayushman Bharat (PMJAY) and numerous State schemes. Despite greater financial access to hospital care, the insurance-driven model remains inadequate for universal health coverage (UHC). The editorial critically explores how exclusion, profiteering, underfunding, and administrative complexity still undermine equity and effectiveness.

Key Issues

1. **Hospitalization-Centric Coverage:** Most schemes cover only inpatient care, excluding outpatient, preventive, and chronic disease management. This fills hospital beds but leaves families paying for routine healthcare, medicines, and long-term treatments.
2. **Exclusion of Marginalized Groups:** Vulnerable populations—elderly, women, chronic patients, rural and disabled—are frequently uninsured or denied care at network hospitals, limiting scheme effectiveness. NFHS-5 reports only 34% rural and 32% urban household coverage.
3. **Profit Motives of Private Hospitals:** Private providers often select profitable cases, inflate billing, and may refuse complex or high-cost treatments to scheme beneficiaries, undermining public trust and wasting public resources.
4. **Underfunding and Fiscal Strain:** Annual claim requirements for insurance schemes regularly exceed government allocations. PMJAY's projected need (~₹32,000 crore, 2023) far exceeds its actual outlay (~₹6,400 crore), resulting in service rationing and delayed payments.
5. **Fragmented Administration:** Overlapping national and state schemes cause confusion in eligibility, access, and hospital networks, resulting in denial of services even for those carrying insurance cards.

Health Insurance- Missing Middle



Universal Health Care (UHC) & Insurance in India

1. **UHC Vision:** Proposed by Bhore Committee (1946), aimed at equitable health for all.
2. **India's Gap:** Still far from UHC, increasingly relying on **insurance schemes** instead of strengthening public health infrastructure.

State-Sponsored Health Insurance

1. **PMJAY (2018, Ayushman Bharat):** ₹5 lakh annual cover per household.
2. **Coverage (2023-24):** 58.8 crore individuals; budget ₹12,000 crore.
3. **State Health Insurance Programmes (SHIPs):** Modeled on PMJAY, budget ₹16,000+ crore.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Health Insurance/UHC Model
UK (NHS)	Tax-funded, universal coverage for OPD and hospital; strong public regulation
Canada	Equity-focused, publicly funded, comprehensive coverage
Thailand	Tax-funded UHC, covers outpatient, chronic care, robust digital audits
Germany	Compulsory social insurance, regulated fees, universal coverage
Nordic States	Integrated public health model, near-zero exclusion and universal access

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Recommendation
National Health Policy (2017)	Integrate insurance and public systems, expand primary care
NITI Aayog	Raise health funding, regulate private hospitals, prioritize inclusion
Parliamentary Committees	Expand outpatient/preventive coverage, digitize scheme management
Finance Commission	Pool resources, increase predictable budget provision

Way Forward

- Expand OPD, Chronic, Preventive Care Coverage:** Reform insurance to cover outpatient, diagnostics, and long-term care, moving closer to real UHC.
- Enforce Strong Regulation of Private Providers:** Ensure transparent billing, compulsory treatment for all eligible, and effective audits and penalties for discrimination.
- Boost and Sustain Health Funding:** Increase government allocations to meet actual scheme demand and claims, securing fiscal sustainability.
- Unified Digital Platform and Redressal:** Integrate scheme administration, eligibility, and hospital networks; make grievance redress user-friendly and accessible.
- Active Inclusion Strategies:** Enroll marginalized and under-covered groups through targeted campaigns, regular audits, and learning from global best practices.

Conclusion

India's insurance expansion has increased formal coverage but has not achieved true universal care. Bold reforms in scope, funding, regulation, integration, and inclusion are essential for equitable, effective protection for every citizen.

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "India's insurance-centric health system expands access but perpetuates exclusion and inequity. Critically analyze risks, global good practices, and forward reforms for true universal health coverage."

Student Notes

Rewiring the Equilibrium

Source: The Hindu Author: Pankaj Saran

1. UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (India-China, Geopolitical Strategy, Major Power Dynamics)
- **GS Paper 3:** Security (Border Issues, Multipolarity, Diplomatic Engagement)

Introduction

The article examines the evolving dynamics of **India-China relations in a shifting global landscape**. While there is diplomatic talk of partnership, **genuine engagement is hampered by historic distrust, competing interests, border disputes, and the challenge of balancing national autonomy with participation in multilateral groupings**. The author argues that for major powers, there are no ideal partnerships—only continual recalibration and prudent management of mutual competition and cooperation.

Key Issues

1. Strategic Distrust and Security Tensions:

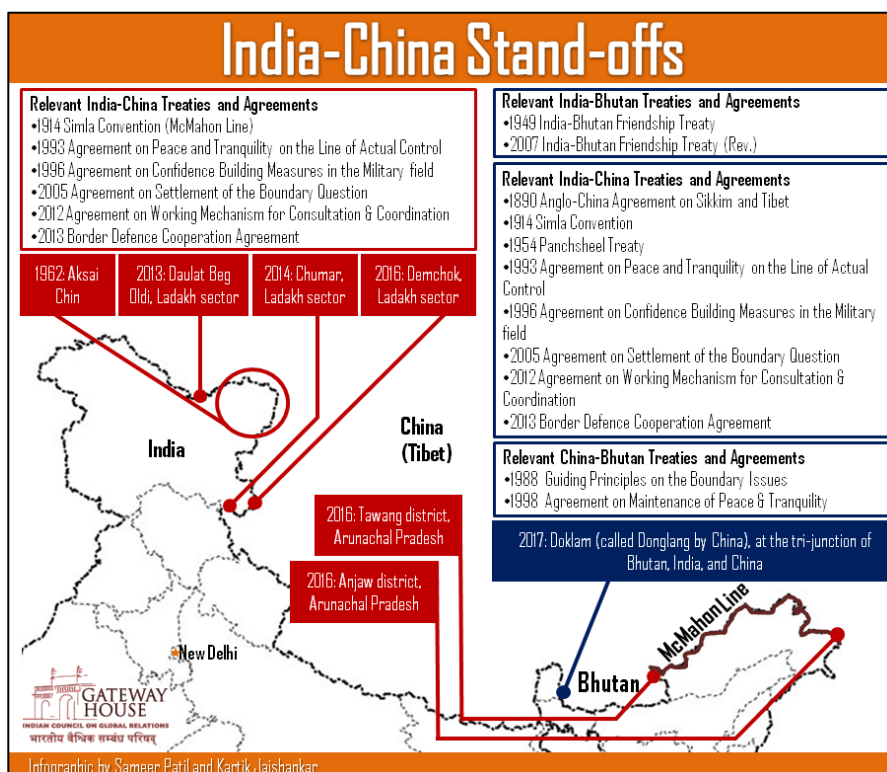
Border disputes (e.g., Galwan 2020), slow disengagement, and mutual suspicion define the relationship, with India wary of China's intentions despite diplomatic summits and calls to Panchsheel principles.

2. Geopolitical Realignment:

India's increasing role in groupings like the QUAD (with the US, Japan, and Australia) and China's closeness to Russia complicate bilateral ties, influencing India's maneuvering in platforms like BRICS and SCO.

3. Economic Imbalance and Dependence:

A growing trade deficit (over \$100 billion in 2023), restrictions on Chinese tech investment post-Galwan, and regulatory hurdles show economic ties are fraught and asymmetrical.



4. **Diplomatic Complexity and Duality:** Despite collaborations on platforms like BRICS and climate talks, substantial differences persist, and India is constantly managing a multi-vector foreign policy with China, the US, Russia, and ASEAN members.
5. **Fragmented Crisis Management:** Border Personnel Meetings and summits help contain crises, but underlying issues remain unresolved, necessitating strategic caution and agile diplomacy.

Persistent Border Disputes	Trade Partnership
1. LAC (3,488 km) remains undefined → frequent incursions, patrol clashes, and infrastructure buildup. 2. Territorial Claims: ➤ China occupies 38,000 sq km in Aksai Chin. ➤ Claims 90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh (as “South Tibet”). 3. Tactics: Dual-use “border villages” → salami-slicing strategy for gradual encroachment. 4. Verification Issue: No mutually agreed maps → complicates patrol coordination. 5. Friction Points: Depsang and Charding-Ninglung Nala unresolved.	1. China = one of India’s largest trading partners. 2. Bilateral trade (2023-24): USD 118.4 billion. 3. Import dependence: Telecom equipment, APIs (pharma raw materials), electronics → reflects manufacturing & supply chain interdependence. 4. Export profile: India exports mainly iron ore, organic chemicals, raw materials → resource-driven & low-value compared to imports.

Global Practices

Country/Bloc	Approach
US-China	Strategic engagement with firm red lines, managed competition
EU-China	Selective cooperation and regulatory autonomy
Japan-China	Economic cooperation within the framework of US-aligned security
Australia-ASEAN	Flexible balancing, multi-vector engagement
Russia-EU	Rapid realignment and diversification post-crises

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Recommendation
NSAB, MEA	Multi-vector foreign policy, regular risk review
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Strategic autonomy, border security, proactive crisis management
Economic Advisory Council	Monitor trade/tech asymmetry, promote domestic strength
Defence Committees	Modernize border infrastructure, deepen joint exercises

Way Forward

1. **Pursue Incremental, Interest-Based Engagement:** Cooperate on trade, climate, and multilateral issues while drawing red lines on sovereignty and national security.
2. **Maintain Strategic Autonomy and Flexibility:** Balance ties with China, US, Russia, and others, revisiting policies as contexts evolve, ensuring independent decision-making.
3. **Institutionalize Robust Crisis Diplomacy:** Leverage summits, back-channels, and personnel meetings for swift de-escalation and continued communication.

4. **Rebalance Economic and Technological Ties:** Promote Indian exports, diversify investment scrutiny, and build supply chain resilience to reduce dependence on Chinese imports.
5. **Reinforce Inclusive, Multifaceted Diplomacy:** Nurture educational, cultural, and business ties selectively, safeguarding critical sectors and promoting broader global engagement.

Conclusion

India-China relations are characterized by flux, competition, and selective partnership. Successful management requires realistic expectations, strategic vigilance, and policy agility—eschewing search for “ideal” relations in favor of pragmatic and adaptable engagement.

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Major power relations, such as India-China, are managed through continual adaptation, not idealism. Critically discuss key challenges, global models, and reform pathways for India in navigating this complex relationship."

Student Notes 

India needs more women judges in the Supreme Court

Source: The Hindu Author: Jayna Kothari

UPSC Relevance:

1. GS Paper 2: Polity (Judiciary, Gender Justice, Judicial Appointments, Representation)
2. GS Paper 1: Society (Women's Issues, Diversity) Essay

Introduction

Despite decades of progress and recent vacancies, **India's Supreme Court remains overwhelmingly male, with only one woman among 34 judges as of August 2025.** The editorial highlights the persistent gender imbalance, limited diversity, and exclusionary appointment criteria, arguing that increased representation of women in the judiciary is critical for fair, balanced justice and the advancement of gender equity.

WOMEN IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

THE NEED FOR GENDER REPRESENTATION



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN IN THE SUPREME COURT

Since 1950, only 11 women judges have been appointed out of 287 judges (3.8%)



Collegium System in the Indian Judiciary

What is it?

1. A system for **appointment and transfer of judges** in the **Supreme Court and High Courts**.
2. **Not in the Constitution** – it evolved through **Supreme Court judgments (Three Judges Cases)**.

Composition

1. **Supreme Court Collegium:**
 - **CJI + 4 senior-most SC judges** → recommend appointments & transfers.
2. **High Court Collegium:**
 - **Chief Justice of HC + 2 senior-most HC judges.**

Process

1. Collegium recommends names → sent to Government.
2. Government can **raise objections/seek clarifications**.
3. If Collegium **reiterates** the same names, Government is **bound to appoint**.

Constitutional Provisions

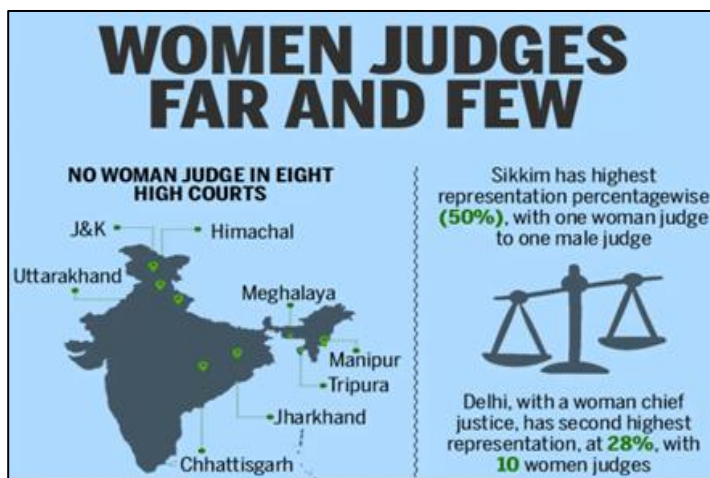
Article	Provision
Article 124	SC judges appointed by President, after consultation with CJI & relevant judges.
Article 217	HC judges appointed by President, after consultation with CJI, Governor, and Chief Justice of that HC.

The **Collegium System**, not mentioned in the Constitution, evolved through Supreme Court judgments.

1. In the **First Judges Case (1981)**, the Court gave primacy to the Executive, holding that "consultation" ≠ "concurrence."
2. The **Second Judges Case (1993)** overturned this, making the **CJI's advice binding** (after consulting two senior-most judges).
3. The **Third Judges Case (1998)** expanded the Collegium to **CJI + 4 senior-most judges**, ensuring collective consultation.
4. In 2014, the **NJAC Act** attempted to replace the system, but in 2015 it was struck down as unconstitutional for undermining **judicial independence**. Thus, the Collegium remains the mechanism for appointing SC and HC judges, though criticized for **opacity and lack of accountability**.

Key Issues

1. **Severe Underrepresentation:** Only 11 women have ever been appointed as Supreme Court judges since 1950—just 3.6% of all seats—reflecting systemic exclusion across decades.
2. **Opaque and Seniority-Dominated Criteria:** Appointment processes often prioritize seniority and subjective assessments, which, in practice, disadvantage women and other minorities. Collegium choices rarely explicitly address gender diversity.
3. **Limited Promotion from the Bar:** Out of the many lawyers directly elevated to the bench from practice, only one woman (Justice Indu Malhotra) has reached the Supreme Court, while numerous men have been elevated via this route.
4. **Persistent Discrimination and Lack of Institutionalization:** Gender is not yet institutionalized as a criterion for judicial appointments, while considerations like caste, religion, and region often are. This results in a glaring gap even as more women enter the legal profession.
5. **Short Tenure and Incomplete Inclusion:** When appointed, women's terms are often shorter due to age and procedural delays; few achieve the highest senior appointments (e.g., Chief Justice).



Global Practices

Country/Region	Judicial Gender Representation
United Kingdom	Proactive targets for gender diversity in Supreme Court; regular appointments of women judges.
Canada	Transparent appointment commissions, explicit gender balance benchmarks.
South Africa	Constitutional Court reviews with diversity as a central criterion; open nominations.
USA	Historic appointments of multiple women justices; strong public accountability and debate.
Australia	Regular appointments and retention of women in high courts; data transparency on diversity.

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
Law Commission of India	Recommend clear inclusion of gender as a factor in judicial selection, publish annual diversity reports.
Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women	Institutionalize gender diversity in appointments; regular audit of representation in higher judiciary.
National Judicial Appointments Commission (proposed)	Transparent selection with diversity parameters; open collegium records for review.
Supreme Court Gender Sensitization Committee	Advocate increased appointments, mentorship, career support for women lawyers.

Way Forward

1. **Institutionalize Gender Criteria:** Explicitly include gender representation as a formal criterion in the collegium and future appointment commissions; set targets for minimum numbers of women judges.
2. **Transparent and Inclusive Processes:** Open up the Collegium and appointments to public scrutiny, with periodic publication of diversity data and rationale for selection.
3. **Mentorship, Promotion, and Bar Inclusion:** Encourage mentorship programmes and career advancement for women lawyers, and promote more direct elevation from the Bar, including senior advocates.
4. **Longer Tenure and Succession Planning:** Actively plan appointments to ensure longer tenure for women judges, enabling a pipeline for leadership roles such as Chief Justice.
5. **Institutional Audits and Public Engagement:** Mandate regular independent audits of judicial appointments for diversity and inclusion; foster dialogue within the legal community on gender justice in the judiciary.

Conclusion

Increasing women's representation in the Supreme Court is vital not just for gender justice but for deepening the public's trust and legitimacy in India's highest judicial institution. Only transparent, accountable, and diversity-conscious reforms can break historic exclusion and create a court truly reflective of all Indians.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following reforms will most effectively increase women's representation in India's Supreme Court?

1. Explicit gender criteria in judicial appointments
2. Transparent appointments and diversity data publication
3. Proactive mentorship and bar elevation
4. Institutional diversity audits

Options:

- a) 1, 2, 3, and 4
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 2, 3, and 4 only
- d) 1 and 3 only

Answer: A) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Despite rising numbers of women lawyers, India's Supreme Court remains male-dominated. Critically assess barriers and reforms for gender equity in judicial appointments, with global and committee perspectives."

Student Notes

Unmistakable shift — India signalled a change in foreign policy stance at the SCO Summit

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Relevance:

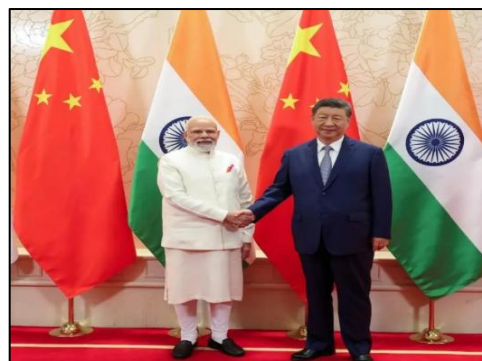
- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (India-China, India-Russia, SCO, Multilateral Forums)
- **GS Paper 3:** Security (Geopolitics, Foreign Policy, Diplomatic Strategy)

Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to attend the 25TH **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in China in 2025** marks a vital shift in India's foreign policy posture. Seven years after his last visit to China and with military standoff since 2020, Modi's presence signaled both a willingness for bilateral engagement and strategic recalibration in a rapidly changing world.

Key Issues

1. **Revival of India-China Diplomacy:** The summit saw the first Modi-Xi bilateral engagement since the 2020 border standoff, signaling a thaw and “unmistakable shift” in India's approach toward negotiation and regional stability. The emphasis was on “talking forward trade” and “sensitivity.”
2. **Multi-vector Strategic Alignment:** India balanced ties with China and Russia at the summit, navigating both antagonisms (past military tensions) and cooperation (trade, multilateral negotiation on issues like border resolution and connectivity).
3. **Active Stake in Multilateral Processes:** India, along with China and Russia, backed memoranda like the Russian-India-China trilateral and fast-tracked the boundary resolution process through Special Representatives talks, reflecting its matured role in conflict management.
4. **SCO Declaration and Global South Priorities:** The summit declaration included strong statements on terrorism, cross-border security, and sovereignty. India ensured explicit inclusion of its stance against Pakistan's support for terrorism.
5. **Absence from ‘SCO Plus’ Engagements:** Notably, India skipped the “SCO Plus” and “SCO Global South” meetings, asserting autonomy and selectivity in engagement as regional tensions and uncertainty grow, especially amidst Russia-West and U.S.-Asia rivalries.



ABOUT SCO

1. **Formation & Purpose:** Established in **2001 in Shanghai**, evolved from the **Shanghai Five (1996)** – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan – to promote **regional security, political stability, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange**.
2. **Global Significance:** Represents **~40% of global population** and **~25% of global GDP**, giving it **major geopolitical and economic influence**.
3. **India's Engagement:** Indian PM attended the **25th SCO Summit 2025** in Tianjin, marking active participation amid global geopolitical shifts
4. **Founding Members (2001):** China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.
5. **Later Full Members:** India and Pakistan (joined 2017), Iran (2023), Belarus (2024).
6. **SCO Partners:** Observer States and Dialogue Partners merged in 2025 into **17 SCO Partners**, with **Laos** being the latest addition.

Global Practices

Country/Forum	Strategic Approach
China (Belt & Road, SCO)	Focus on regional multilateralism, diplomatic balancing, episodic thaw/freeze in partnerships.
Russia (SCO, Central Asia)	Flexible engagement in Eurasia, pragmatic conflict management, focus on energy and security.
EU (OSCE, G20)	Active support for dialogue, cross-border cooperation, periodic recalibration post-crises.
USA (Quad, ASEAN+)	Issue-based coalitions, selective participation, hedging against core adversaries.
ASEAN	Network diplomacy, rotating memberships, insistence on “ASEAN centrality.”

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), MEA	Multi-vector diplomacy, prioritize conflict sensitivity and engagement at multilateral fora.
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Leverage global institutions for strategic autonomy, periodically review ties with major powers.
NITI Aayog, RIS, Think Tanks	Balance regional interests (South Asia, SCO, G20) with pursuit of security and economic opportunity.
Prime Minister's Policy Advisory Council	Use selective summit diplomacy to reinforce sovereignty and align with national priorities.

Way Forward

- Sustain Balanced Multi-vector Diplomacy:** Continue engaging all major powers while maintaining India's strategic autonomy and prioritizing issue-based alliances over rigid blocs.
- Assertiveness in Multilateral Forums:** Shape declaration language on terrorism, sovereignty, and cross-border threats, leveraging India's influence for regional security.
- Selective Participation and Autonomy:** Choose meaningful engagements, skip those conflicting with national priorities or jeopardizing security interests, as done by missing 'SCO Plus' meets.
- Conflict-Sensitive Engagements:** Fast-track boundary and security talks through special envoys and trilateral mechanisms, replicating the effective dialogue process seen at the summit.
- Promotion of Global South Interests:** Continue to articulate and advocate consensus positions—especially on development, terrorism, and economic connectivity—in regional and global forums.

Conclusion

India's participation at the 2025 SCO Summit marks a strategic recalibration in foreign policy—balancing dialogue, autonomy, and assertiveness amid shifting global alliances. Engagement, without compromise on core security and sovereignty issues, is essential for navigating today's multipolar world.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following approaches best reflect India's foreign policy stance at the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) Summit?

- Multi-vector diplomatic engagement
- Issue-based participation and strategic autonomy
- Assertive role in multilateral forums

4. Passive alignment with dominant powers

- a) 1 and 2 only b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1, 2, and 3 only d) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Answer: C) 1, 2, and 3 only

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "India's participation in the 2025 SCO Summit reflects a shift in foreign policy priorities. Critically analyze the challenges, global parallels, and reforms for effective multilateral engagement in a changing world order."

Student Notes 

Rain and Repeat – Excess Rain Is No Excuse for Damage Caused by Neglect of Sluices

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper 1:** Geography (Monsoon, Floods, Urbanisation)
- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Disaster Management, Urban Administration)
- **GS Paper 3:** Environment (Water Management, Climate Adaptation, Infrastructure)

Introduction

The recent monsoon in **Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (2024-25)** saw **devastating floods that underline how extreme rainfall exposes persistent governance failures**. The editorial argues that repeated flood damage is due less to rain and more to neglected sluice management, unfinished infrastructure, and poor urban planning—challenges which recur year after year despite large institutional spending.

Key Issues

1. **Extreme Rainfall and Changed Patterns:** In 2024, **Andhra Pradesh received 27% of its annual rain in just two days; Vizianagaram logged 46% excess in August**—with some districts recording up to 90% excess. This concentration tests the limits of traditional water management and requires urgent adaptation.
2. **Faulty Sluice and Reservoir Operations:** Flood and barrage systems failed to manage inflows as Srisailem (94% full) and Nagarjuna Sagar (96% full) left little margin for incoming water. The lack of timely sluice release and desilting led to spillovers and disastrous flooding.
3. **Urban Planning Deficits:** Budameru river (capacity: 7,000 cusecs) received 35,000 cusecs, flooding Vijayawada; urban areas suffered due to encroached, silted stormwater drains and concretized surfaces that restrict absorption and escalate waterlogging.

What is Rainfall?

1. Rainfall is **precipitation of water droplets** from clouds to Earth's surface.
2. Forms when **moist air rises, cools, and condenses** into droplets that fall under gravity.
3. **Importance:** Replenishes freshwater, supports agriculture, maintains ecosystems, and drives the **water cycle**.
4. **Variations:** Amount, intensity, and frequency depend on **geography, climate, and season**.

Types of Rainfall

1. **Convictional Rainfall:** Caused by **heating of ground → warm air rises → condensation → rain**.
Example: Tropical summers; produces **intense, localized storms**.
2. **Orographic Rainfall:** Caused by **moist air rising over mountains**; cools and precipitates.
Example: Western Himalayas; leads to **rain shadows** on leeward side.
3. **Frontal Rainfall:** Occurs when **warm and cold air masses meet**, warm air rises and cools.
Example: Temperate regions in winter; produces **widespread, steady rain**.
4. **Cyclonic Rainfall:** Associated with **low-pressure systems**, air rises over cold air.
Example: Tropical & extratropical cyclones; can cause **intense storms and flooding**.

4. **Unfinished Mitigation Infrastructure:** Emergency relief funds were quickly spent, but floodbanks, drainage upgrades, and long-term projects were neglected, leaving districts exposed during major rain events.
5. **Poor Disaster Management Coordination:** Repeated protests over incomplete works, delayed relief, and the lack of integrated flood forecasting highlight institutional weakness in reducing risk, despite annual allocations.

Global Practices

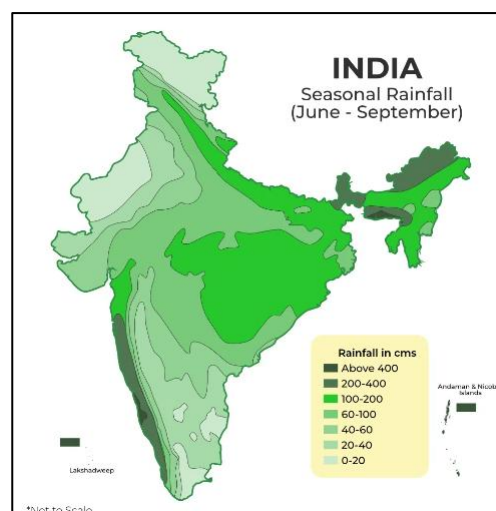
Country/Region	Practice/Approach
Netherlands	Advanced river basin modelling, robust sluices, and planned flood plains.
Japan	Real-time rainfall and river monitoring, dynamic dam and sluice operations, urban drainage integration.
UK	Sustainable urban drainage systems, rapid desilting, permeable infrastructure, floodbank maintenance.
USA	Preemptive reservoir drawdown, local-federal flood modelling, resilient asset planning.
Bangladesh	Community warning systems, embankment networks, distributary flood relief.

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Recommendations
NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority)	Integrated flood early warning, real-time reservoir monitoring, multi-agency disaster response.
Central Water Commission	Annual desilting, dynamic hydrological modelling for water release and cushion creation.
Ministry of Urban Development	Stormwater network upgrades, zoning rules for permeable surfaces, regular maintenance of drains.
State Disaster Management Authorities	Finish and audit all mitigation works, accelerate infrastructure delivery, engage local communities.
15th Finance Commission	Tie disaster compensation to investment in preparedness and infrastructure.

Way Forward

1. **Adopt Real-Time Flood Monitoring and Modelling:** Install continuous rainfall, reservoir, and basin monitoring for predictive water release and management.
2. **Upgrade Urban Drainage and Permeable Surfaces:** Remove encroachments, restore and desilt urban drains, prioritize permeable zones for rain absorption.
3. **Finish and Audit Critical Infrastructure:** Ensure pending floodbanks and sluice projects are completed and subject to transparent, yearly audits.
4. **Integrate Disaster Planning Across Government:** Establish robust coordination between local, state, and central agencies for early warning, relief, and evacuation.
5. **Promote Accountability and Citizen Participation:** Regularly publish preparedness reports, involve communities in monitoring, and demand transparency for infrastructure funds.



Conclusion

Flood disasters in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are a governance failure, not just a rainfall crisis. Without reform in sluice management, infrastructure delivery, and urban planning, annual rainfall will continue to expose vulnerabilities—making risk fatal, not just cyclical.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which reforms will most effectively mitigate flood damage in high-rainfall Indian states?

1. Real-time hydrological modelling and dynamic sluice operations
2. Upgraded urban drainage networks and restored permeable land
3. Episodic emergency relief without infrastructure reform
4. Integrated disaster planning and regular project audits

Select the correct answer:

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 1, 2, and 4 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

Answer: C) 1, 2, and 4 only

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "In India, recurring flood disasters show that rainfall is rarely the sole cause—governance and infrastructure failures dominate. Analyse this challenge with global parallels and suggest comprehensive reforms for long-term flood resilience."

Student Notes 

India's recent maritime reforms need course correction

Source: The Hindu Author: Abhijit Singh

UPSC Relevance:

1. **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Legislation, Centre-State Relations, Regulatory Frameworks)
2. **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Ports, Shipping, MSMEs, Trade), Security (Maritime Safety)

Introduction

1. The Indian Ports Act, 2025 replaces **outdated provisions** of the Indian Ports Act, 1908, with **modern & contemporary regulations**.
2. The Act establishes **Maritime State Development Council (MSDC)** as a statutory consultative body to **coordinate** between Centre and coastal States.
3. The legislation mandates **Global Green Norms**, Disaster Readiness for Indian Ports.
4. It simplifies port procedures & digitalise operations to enhance **Ease of Doing Business (EODB)**. (Source PIB)



Key Issues

1. **Progress with Pitfalls:** Recent reforms finally enable comprehensive modernization, aiming for improved competitiveness and governance. Yet, over-centralization and uniform regulation threaten flexibility required at local/state levels, and risk crowding out diversity and innovation across Indian ports.
2. **Centre-State Imbalance:** State Maritime Boards lose autonomy to new centralized authorities and complicated council structures. This risks friction, delays in local development, and reduced responsiveness to unique regional challenges.
3. **Harsh Registration Mandates:** The Merchant Shipping Act, 2025 requires registration of all vessels, regardless of size or provision, imposing paperwork and compliance costs even on small craft and fishing boats. Overregulation risks pushing informal and MSME players out of business.
4. **Regulatory Burdens on Small Players:** Smaller stakeholders, who lack resources for costly registration and compliance, may be forced out, threatening employment and traditional maritime livelihoods. India's long-term maritime security and trade capacity could suffer if diverse ecosystem is not preserved.



5. **Course Correction Needed:** The current approach risks excessive uniformity and bureaucracy. More consultative regulation, regionally adapted frameworks, and targeted exceptions for small and local operators are needed to support both safety and sector growth.

Global Practices

Country	Maritime Reform/Regulation Approach
Singapore	Decentralized port management, regular stakeholder consultations, smart facilitation for MSME inclusion
UK	Targeted vessel regulations based on size/type, support for coastal communities, streamlined documentation
Netherlands	Regional zoning, digital registration systems for small/large craft, flexible enforcement
USA	Federal vs. state maritime responsibilities clearly divided, with local autonomy for smaller operators
Japan	Proactive support for fishing and coastal sector, tech-enabled safety standards

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
National Maritime Development Board	Policy flexibility for states, promote MSME/traditional shipping
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport	Reduce compliance burden for small vessels, consult sector experts
Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways	Digitalize procedures, pilot exemptions for unique cases, preserve innovation
NITI Aayog, RIS	Promote regional maritime hubs, link reforms with ease-of-doing-business rankings

Way Forward

1. **Consultative, Regionally Adapted Reforms:** Empower state maritime boards and local authorities to adapt rules, provide input, and address regional needs.
2. **Ease Registration for MSMEs and Small Boats:** Exempt or simplify compliance for low-risk vessels and fisheries, adopt digital platforms to cut bureaucracy.
3. **Smart Stakeholder Engagement:** Regularly consult port users, small operators, and coastal communities; establish working groups for feedback before major changes.
4. **Balance Safety with Growth:** Maintain core safety standards, but avoid one-size-fits-all burden; incentivize innovation and competitiveness in port clusters.
5. **Continuous Impact Assessment:** Monitor the effects on jobs, local economies, and trade; revise policies regularly to foster balanced maritime expansion.

Conclusion

India's ambitious maritime reforms can modernize the sector only if they protect diversity, regional autonomy, and MSME interests. Adaptive regulation, reduced compliance burdens, and ongoing stakeholder engagement are essential for building resilient, competitive blue economy.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which policy moves would most facilitate balanced maritime reforms in India?

1. Empowering state boards to adapt port rules
2. Exempting small craft from burdensome registration
3. Centralizing all maritime regulation without exceptions
4. Regular stakeholder consultation and flexible compliance

Select the correct answer:

- a) 1, 2, and 3 only
- b) 1, 3, and 4 only
- c) 1, 2, and 4 only
- d) 2 and 3 only

Answer: C) 1, 2, and 4 only

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "India's new maritime laws aim big but risk over-centralization and exclusion of small players. Analyse major challenges, global lessons, and reform pathways for inclusive, competitive blue economy growth."

Student Notes 

India's strategic autonomy in a multipolar world

Source: The Hindu Author: Shashi Tharoor

UPSC Relevance:

1. **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (Foreign Policy, Strategic Autonomy, Multipolarity)
2. **GS Paper 2 (optional):** Governance (Decision-making, Institutional Dynamics)

Introduction

Strategic autonomy, once considered a niche concept, has now become the cornerstone of India's foreign policy in an increasingly **multipolar global order** marked by **fragmenting alliances**. India's diplomatic approach reflects a careful **balancing of relationships** with powers such as the **United States, Russia, and China**, asserting that **true autonomy** lies in pursuing **national interests independently**, while remaining **flexible and adaptive** to the constantly **shifting geopolitical landscape**

Key Issues

1. Balancing Multiple Powers:

- India's foreign policy must navigate between the interests and pressures of **competing giants (US, China, Russia)**, without being trapped by bloc politics or compromising sovereign choices.
- *Example: India's response to US pressure on Russian energy, defense deals, and sanctions, while still participating in Quad and maintaining BRICS engagement.*

2. Non-Alignment and Sovereign Decision-making:

- Strategic autonomy is distinct from isolation or neutrality; it requires maintaining independence and refusing subordination, as India has done since Nehru's era and now through "multi-alignment."
- *Example: India refused to join the "West versus anti-West" camps during global forums, keeping national interest paramount.*

3. Contesting Technological and Economic Pressures:

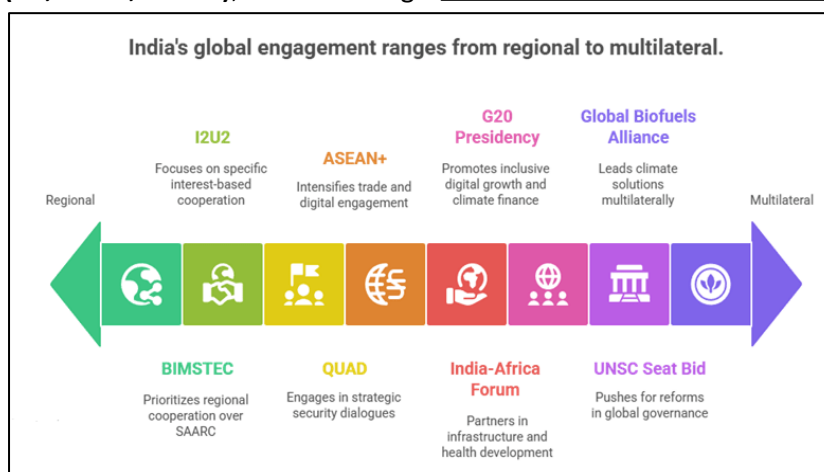
- India faces demands for technological alignment (e.g., digital infrastructure, AI, supply chains) and economic standards (trade agreements, sanctions), threatening policy freedom.
- *Example: US-China tech war impacts India's telecom, AI, and chip supply outlook, requiring nuanced engagement.*

4. Navigating Tensions with China:

- Border clashes (2020) and deepening competition put stress on ties, but India still pursues dialogue and regional engagement through platforms like BRICS and SCO, balancing deterrence and cooperation.

Know the term

- **Strategic autonomy:** Denotes the ability of a state to pursue its **national interests** and adopt its **preferred foreign policy** without being constrained in any manner by other states user.
- **Global South:** Generally, refers to countries described as "**developing**," "**less developed**" or "**underdeveloped**."
- The concept originated from the **Brandt report** which distinguished between those countries with comparatively higher **GDP per capita** (mostly concentrated in the Northern



5. Domestic Debate and Democratic Legitimacy:

- India's plural and democratic institutions shape its ability to adapt, assert autonomy, and command legitimacy for foreign policy actions—ensuring that decisions reflect civilizational and popular aspirations, not just elite bargains.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Model/Principle
France	Assertive foreign policy, autonomy from US/EU positions, protection of national interests
Turkey	Strategic balancing in NATO and Eurasian affairs, independent regional initiatives
Indonesia	"Free and Active" foreign policy, multipolar alignment, refusal to join rigid blocs
Brazil	Flexibility in regional and global forums, leadership in G20 and BRICS
UAE, Saudi Arabia	Multi-directional diplomacy, pragmatic partnerships with rivals and allies

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Recommendations
National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), MEA	Prioritize sovereign goals, enhance institutional flexibility in decision-making
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Regularly review global entanglements, maintain autonomy in strategic choices
NITI Aayog, RIS, related think tanks	Assess risks of technological/economic dependency, promote innovation and indigenous capabilities
Policy Planning Division, PMO	Develop scenario planning on alliances, update "multi-alignment" doctrine, consult strategic experts

Way Forward

- Strengthen Institutional Autonomy:** Enhance flexibility and capacity within MEA, NSAB and other bodies to assess, debate, and enact sovereign foreign policy decisions.
- Regular Strategic Reassessment:** Periodically review all major alliances and commitments, prioritizing India's long-term national interests and economic resilience.
- Invest in National Capabilities:** Accelerate innovation, digital infrastructure, and defense self-reliance to minimize external dependency and bargain confidently in global forums.
- Cultivate Multi-Platform Engagement:** Maintain diversified memberships in forums (G20, BRICS, SCO, Quad), defending space for independent actions and voice in global South leadership.
- Deepen Democratic Legitimacy:** Ensure foreign policy decisions are consultative, transparent, and sensitive to public and parliamentary debate, keeping civilizational pluralism as a strength.

Conclusion

India's strategic autonomy is not just a slogan—it's the bedrock for navigating a complex, competitive multipolar world. Through flexible, principled, and democratic decision-making, India asserts its place as a leading sovereign power, adapting wisely to the rapid changes of the 21st century.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which reforms and strategies most effectively strengthen India's maritime security and Blue Economy goals?

1. Expansion of coastal radar and surveillance networks
2. Promotion of indigenous shipbuilding and naval technology
3. Strengthening regional cooperation through IORA and SAGAR vision
4. Exclusive reliance on foreign naval bases for security support

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (c) 1, 2 and 3 only

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "In a multipolar world, India's strategic autonomy faces both opportunities and threats. Critically evaluate the challenges, global models, and reform pathways for maintaining India's independent foreign policy."

Student Notes 

A new leaf – Environmental compliance needs to be monitored at all levels

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Relevance:

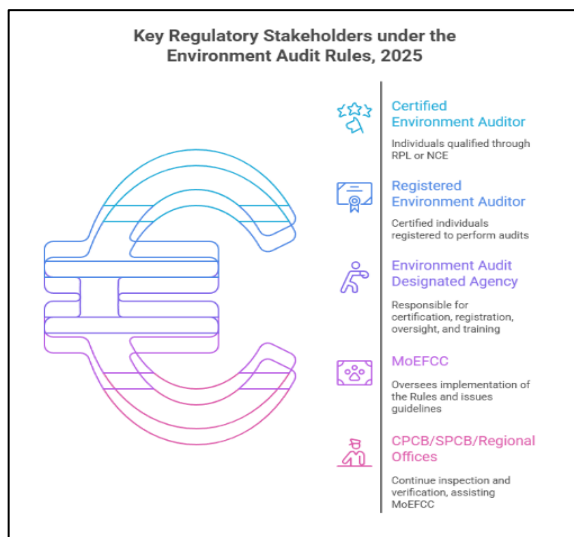
- **GS Paper 3:** Environment (Regulation, Governance, Pollution, Compliance)
- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Institutional Reform, Centre-State Relations, Accountability)

Introduction

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has introduced the **Environment Audit Rules, 2025**, significantly expanding environmental compliance monitoring beyond the limited remit of **State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)**. The new rules require industry-wide scrutiny, cross-level reporting, and empower private agencies to conduct accredited audits—marking a major step in holistic, accountable environmental regulation across India.

Key Issues

1. **Capacity and Resource Gaps:** SPCBs and regional offices struggle to comprehensively monitor the huge number of projects and units due to limited staff, inadequate infrastructure, and technical constraints.
2. **Implementation Bottlenecks:** Delays in environmental clearances and chronic backlogs persist due to fragmented management, slow reporting, and regulatory hurdles, undermining effective enforcement.
3. **Inadequate Use of Technology:** Manual and paper-based monitoring is still dominant, restricting timely data-driven interventions; lack of real-time record keeping and analytics compromises regulatory responsiveness.
4. **Limited Accountability and Transparency:** Poor audit processes and lack of independent review have led to weak enforcement, frequent violations, and erosion of public trust in authorities.



Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

Establishment:

1. Statutory body constituted in **September 1974** under the **Water (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1974**.
2. Later empowered under the **Air (Prevention & Control of Pollution) Act, 1981** and provides technical support under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.

Powers & Functions:

1. **Water Pollution Control:** Promote cleanliness of **streams, wells**, and other water bodies; prevent, control, and abate water pollution.
2. **Air Pollution Control:** Improve air quality; prevent, control, and abate air pollution nationwide.
3. **Advisory Role:** Advise **Central Government** on pollution control policies and strategies.
4. **Coordination:**
 - Coordinates **State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)**.
 - Provides guidance, technical assistance, and helps resolve inter-state conflicts.
5. **Delegation:** Powers under relevant Acts (Water Cess Act 1977, Water & Air Acts) delegated to **regional administrations in Union Territories**.

- Financial Strain and Over-dependence:** SPCBs bear most compliance responsibility, with minimal support from polluters; audit fees and costs remain high, deterring smaller units and expanding gaps in implementation.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Best Practice
UK	Third-party accredited audits; digital monitoring; regular public reporting
USA	EPA uses automated data systems; mandatory self-reporting and auditing; heavy financial penalties for non-compliance
EU	Regular cross-agency inspections; transparent online records; citizen complaint portals
Australia	Independent environmental auditors; standardized assessment for all units; high public accountability
Japan	Integrated digital environmental management; strict third-party compliance

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Recommendations
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment	Expand technical staff, leverage digital audits, strengthen penalties for violations
Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)	Train SPCBs, incentivize self-audits, increase transparency and online disclosures
NITI Aayog, Expert Environment Task Forces	Encourage private sector participation, monitor audit agencies, ensure effective grievance redressal
Finance Commission (Environment Grants)	Tie grants to adoption of robust compliance, reward evidence-based monitoring

Way Forward

- Expand Accredited Environmental Audits:** Promote use of private and independent accredited audit agencies to supplement government oversight and fill monitoring gaps.
- Digitize and Automate Compliance Systems:** Adopt real-time, integrated environmental data platforms to enable faster reporting, analytics, and cross-agency tracking.
- Strengthen Financial and Technical Capacity:** Increase funding and technical staff for SPCBs; lower barriers for smaller units to access cost-effective auditing services.
- Boost Transparency and Public Reporting:** Mandate online publication of audit results, regular public disclosures, and easy access to citizen complaints and feedback.
- Enforce Stronger Penalties and Accountability:** Align penalties with global standards, introduce regular independent reviews, and ensure swift action against violations.

Conclusion

Environment Audit Rules, 2025 represent a significant upgrade in India's compliance regime—offering scalable, accountable, and technology-driven oversight. For success, reforms must focus on capacity-building, transparency, and robust enforcement at every administrative level.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following reforms are most effective for strengthening environmental compliance in India?

1. Accredited private and third-party audits
2. Real-time digital compliance platforms
3. Enhanced technical staff and capacity in State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)
4. Transparent online reporting

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Environmental compliance in India suffers from capacity, transparency and enforcement gaps. Critically assess new monitoring rules, global models and reform pathways for accountable, resilient regulation."

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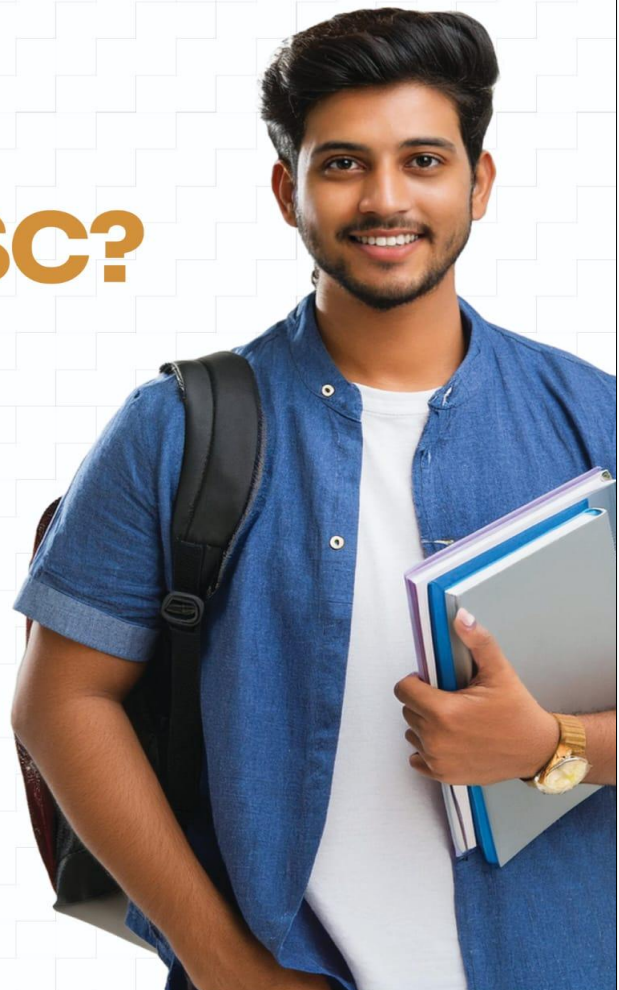
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An opening in Manipur

Source: The Indian express

UPSC Relevance:

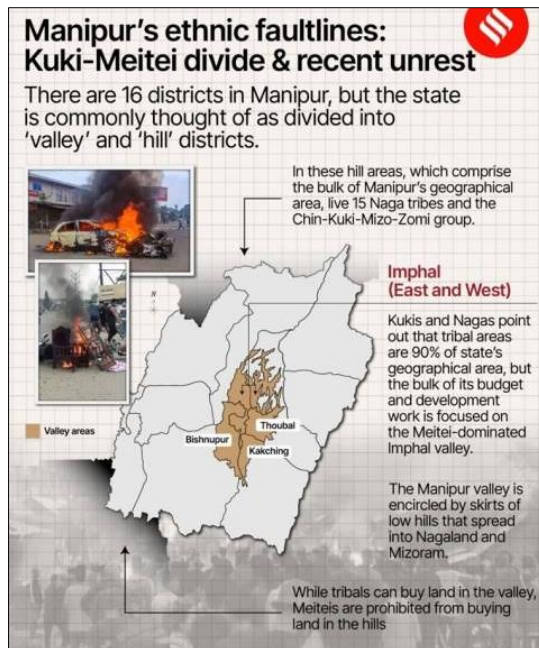
- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Centre-State Relations, President's Rule, Conflict Resolution)
- **GS Paper 3:** Internal Security (Peace Agreements, Ethnic Conflict, Insurgency)

Introduction

Prime Minister Modi's proposed visit to Manipur comes at a crucial time for the state, **plagued by deep-rooted ethnic conflict between Meiteis and Kukis**. The editorial recognizes both the persistent challenges—segregation, militarisation, and fragile peace processes—and the recent signs of progress, arguing that lasting resolution is possible only if the present opportunity is swiftly and strategically seized.

Key Issues

1. **Ethnic Segregation and Buffer Zones:** Manipur remains divided via buffer zones between Meiteis and Kukis, guarded by central forces and restricting free movement across the state, perpetuating mistrust and tension.
2. **Escalated Militarisation:** Both communities have ramped up military postures, and the administration under President's Rule faces difficulties curbing violence given the proliferation of armed groups and camps.
3. **Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement Complexity:** The renewed SoO pact requires mutual ceasefire and monitoring of militant camps, but previous efforts have collapsed due to verification delays, divergent interests, and frequent breakdowns in discipline.
4. **Disunity Among Stakeholders:** Recent developments have not eased all concerns—**Meiteis and Kukis continue to question the terms of**



Ethnic Violence in Manipur: Kuki-Zo vs Meitei

1. **Displacement and Living Conditions:**
 - Widespread violence has forced many into relief camps, with disrupted livelihoods.
 - Residents like Kundram Memori experienced up to 80% drop in income; medical facilities and privacy are inadequate.
2. **Demographic and Political Dynamics:**
 - Valley (10% land): Predominantly Meitei, over 64% of population.
 - Hills (90% land): Inhabited by Kuki-Zo and Naga communities, represented by only 20 MLAs.
 - Political instability led to President's Rule.
3. **Security Measures and Buffer Zones:**
 - Buffer zones secured by Army and CAPF in mixed-population areas.
 - 450–500 bunkers dismantled to reduce clashes.
4. **Government and Security Response:**
 - 13-point roadmap: disarmament, arrest of miscreants, rehabilitation of displaced persons.
 - Highways reopened; Anti-Extortion Cell set up to protect traders.

buffer zone maintenance, free movement, and camp monitoring, with added friction from Naga groups on border protocols.

5. **Implementation Challenges and Monitoring:** For peace, transparent camp verification, documentation (ID cards, policing), and procedures for cadres leaving camps are essential; previous efforts have suffered from weak follow-through and incomplete stakeholder engagement.

Global Practices

Region/Country	Conflict Resolution Approach
Northern Ireland	Multi-party peace deal, phased demilitarisation, regular verification, and use of international monitors
Colombia	Monitored demobilization camps, phased reintegration, transparent ID processes, and localized policing reforms
Philippines (Mindanao)	Camp-based ceasefire, inclusive dialogue, strict monitoring, and phased disarmament
South Sudan	International monitoring, community engagement, robust verification and grievance redressal mechanisms
Nepal	UN-backed disarmament/reintegration, joint committees for camp monitoring and identity verification

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Key Recommendations
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs	Anticipate verification delays, strengthen camp monitoring, build local administrative capacity
Ministry of Home Affairs	Transparent documentation, phased access restoration, empower local policing, periodic review
North-East Peace Task Forces	Involve civil society, transparent ID and camp verification, phased reintegration
NITI Aayog	Invest in economic development for trust-building, support community-level mediation

Way Forward

1. **Improve Camp Monitoring and Documentation:** Adopt technology-enabled, transparent systems for verifying camp compliance and ID issuance, guided by neutral observers and government oversight.
2. **Phase Restoration of Free Movement and Public Access:** Gradually reopen buffer zones and roads (NH-02), backed with community dialogue and strengthened local policing.
3. **Deepen Civil Society Engagement:** Expand channels for local mediation and grievance redress, include community groups in peace talks and verification procedures.
4. **Maintain Buffer Safety While Progressing Peace:** Balance security protocols with staged reductions as trust builds, using joint committees and multi-stakeholder oversight mechanisms.
5. **Institutionalize Regular Assessment:** Implement frequent, multi-level reviews of agreement success, readiness for next phase, and rapid response for breakdowns, adapted from best practices globally.

Conclusion

Manipur's current peace prospects will fade without strategic action to bridge old divisions and new procedural hurdles. Real resolution requires sincere, adaptive engagement from government, communities, and mediators—making this opening a test not just for Manipur but for conflict resolution in India.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following reforms will most effectively support durable peace in Manipur?

1. Transparent camp monitoring and identification verification of displaced persons
2. Gradual restoration of free movement and reopening of public roads
3. Strong engagement of civil society groups in dialogue and peacebuilding
4. Establishment of multi-level institutional review committees for conflict resolution

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

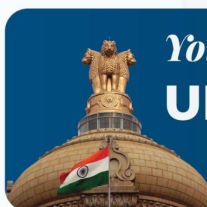
- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: D) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Persistent ethnic conflict in Manipur hinges on segregation, militarisation, and fragile peace protocols. Analyse these challenges and outline a phased roadmap for conflict resolution, drawing on global and Indian committee experiences."

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The Conscience Keeper – Judiciary’s role is not to be popular, but to be principled

Source: The Indian Express Author: Guru Prakash

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Polity (Judicial Independence, Rights, Constitutional Morality)
- **GS Paper 4:** Ethics (Integrity, Justice, Principle vs. Popularity)

Introduction

The editorial analyzes the Delhi High Court’s bail order for **Umar Khalid and others in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case**, emphasizing that **judicial duty is to uphold principles**, not to seek popularity. The judiciary’s legitimacy derives from steadfast adherence to the Constitution and protection of rights, even when such decisions invite criticism or challenge public sentiment.

Key Issues

- Judiciary’s Duty to Principles, Not Popularity:** Courts must evaluate cases based on **law and constitutional guidelines**, resisting pressure from majoritarian opinion and public outrage. Their **actions should be guided by justice rather than the pursuit of popularity** or political endorsement.
- Safeguarding Rights and Civil Liberties:** Judicial decisions protect both individual liberty and the rights of **minorities—even when such protection opposes government action or mass sentiment**. Bail and fair trial rights are essential fragments of the rule of law.
- Respect for Constitutional Morality:** Drawing upon B R Ambedkar’s final speech to the Constituent Assembly, the editorial reminds that constitutional morality must be cultivated and not displaced by political goals or expediency.
- Institutional Integrity in Contentious Cases:** The piece underlines several Supreme Court judgments, including the SC’s Ayodhya verdict, which were accepted peacefully even amid controversy—demonstrating the judiciary’s role in maintaining public trust through principled judgment.
- Limits of Political and Social Critique:** While public and political figures may debate outcomes of judicial decisions, it is critical that courts remain immune to **“pressure tactics”** and populist attacks, upholding due process without fear or favour.

High Courts in India: Constitutional Provisions

1. Articles & Scope:

- **Articles 214–231 (Part VI)** deal with High Courts.
- Cover **organization, independence, jurisdiction, powers, and procedures**.
- Both **Parliament and State Legislatures** can regulate related provisions.

2. Territorial Jurisdiction:

- **Each State** has a High Court.
- **7th Constitutional Amendment (1956):** Parliament can establish a **common High Court** for multiple States or States + Union Territories. Example: **Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh** share a High Court.
- High Court jurisdiction is **co-terminus with the State/UT territory**.
- Parliament can **extend or exclude jurisdiction** for any Union Territory.

3. Composition of Judges:

- Constitution does **not fix the number of judges**.
- Each High Court has a **Chief Justice + other judges**, strength determined by the **President** based on workload.

Global Practices

Country	Judicial Principle/Practice
USA	Judicial review ensures checks and balances, protects minority rights, guides principled constitutional interpretation
UK	Strong traditions of impartiality, judicial precedent, and resistance to short-term populism in judicial decisions
Germany	Federal Constitutional Court explicitly upholds rights, emphasizes constitutional values in controversial social cases
Canada	Supreme Court championing equality and openness, defending rights through landmark rulings
South Africa	Courts actively pursuing rights and constitutional justice, often upholding unpopular but principled positions

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
Law Commission of India	Strengthen independence, ensure transparency of reasoning in all judgments, support judicial education in constitutional morality
Parliamentary Committee on Law and Justice	Advocate for public legal education, institutional respect for the judiciary, regular review of judicial accountability
National Human Rights Commission	Prioritize fair trial, protect due process rights, consistently audit pretrial detentions
Supreme Court (multiple benches)	Uphold bail as a norm, reinforce judicial courage in upholding rights against state and popular pressures

Way Forward

1. **Prioritize Constitutional Morality and Integrity:** Courts must consistently uphold the principles enshrined in the Constitution, reinforcing independence and resisting expedient or popular shortcuts.
2. **Strengthen Public Trust Through Transparent Judgments:** Ensure reasoning and process in judgments are clear and accessible, helping citizens understand that justice is principled, not populist.
3. **Resist Political and Social Pressure:** Judicial education and continued legal training should reinforce the importance of impartiality, with institutional safeguards against external influence.
4. **Champion Individual Rights and Due Process:** Robustly protect bail, fair trial, and minority rights even when these run counter to popular sentiment or government preference.
5. **Foster Legal Literacy and Civil Discourse:** Educate the public and political class about the role and limits of courts, fostering a spirit where criticism is reasoned, not hostile.

Conclusion

India's judiciary must remain the conscience keeper of democracy—anchored in principle, constitutional morality, and fearless independence. Only by resisting popularity in favour of justice can courts sustain public trust and fulfill their highest duty.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following reforms best safeguard the judiciary's role as a principled and independent institution?

1. Strengthening judicial independence and upholding constitutional morality
2. Ensuring transparent reasoning in judgments and promoting public legal education
3. Protecting fundamental rights through liberal bail norms and fair trial procedures
4. Resisting political and populist pressures in adjudicating contentious cases

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: D) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Judges must be conscience keepers—principled, not popular. Critically discuss the role of constitutional morality, institutional independence, and judicial courage in India with global examples and committee advice."

Student Notes 

Ranking pitfalls – NIRF should help improve both quality and equity in higher education

Source: The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Education Policy, Institutional Reform, Equity, Accountability)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Skill Building, Higher Education Ecosystem)

Introduction

The release of **India Rankings 2023** under the **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** has added transparency and competition to higher education, but persistent flaws remain. NIRF is now in its eighth year and widely used for comparing institutions; however, its methodology and practical impact require scrutiny to ensure that rankings drive not only prestige but genuine improvements in quality and equity.

Key Challenges

1. **Bias Toward Established Institutions:** NIRF's metrics typically favor large, well-funded central and prestigious institutes, while **smaller state, private, and rural colleges are disadvantaged** due to resource and legacy gaps.
2. **Flawed Data and Reliance on Self-Reporting:** Many institutions self-report metrics, risking partial or inaccurate representations of outcomes; **lack of independent audits raises concerns about gaming and data reliability.**
3. **Neglect of Equity and Diversity Metrics:** Parameters for diversity, representation of marginalized groups, and regional inclusion in NIRF are **weak, under-emphasizing social justice and access.**
4. **Overemphasis on Research Output:** Heavy focus on publications and funding draws attention away from **teaching quality, skill-building, and actual student learning outcomes.**
5. **Limited Policy and Student Utility:** While rankings boost institutional branding, they are **less effective in improving student choices or driving targeted policy reforms**, risking superficial competition over deep structural change.

Development of Education in India

1. Administrative Structure:

- Managed by the **Ministry of Education**, working through:
 - ✓ **Department of School Education and Literacy**
 - ✓ **Department of Higher Education**
- Implements various **schemes, programmes, and policies** across education levels.

2. Right to Education & Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):

- **Article 21-A** → **RTE Act, 2009** (operative 2010) guarantees **free and compulsory elementary education (6–14 years).**
- States/UTs have notified their **state RTE rules.**
- **SSA** supports states/UTs in implementing RTE.

3. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

- Approved to **revamp school-to-college education** and make India a **global knowledge superpower.**
- Ministry renamed from **MHRD** → **Ministry of Education.**
- NEP 2020 is the **third major education policy** after 1968 and 1986.

3. **Article 21A:** Fundamental Right to Education (though up to 14 years, but sets the foundation for higher education reforms).

4. **UGC Act, 1956:** Grants UGC authority to regulate higher education quality; NIRF is aligned with UGC monitoring.

5. **RUSA (2013):** Aims to improve quality of state institutions; links funding to performance.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Best Ranking Practices
UK, USA	Mixture of independent data audits and self-reporting; include diversity, graduate outcomes, and transparency
Australia	Equity-oriented tracks and regional inclusion in ranking system
EU	Public release of audit data and feedback loops for policy impact
Canada	Benchmarking for indigenous and disadvantaged student representation
Scandinavia	Focused inclusion of quality, diversity, and social mobility indicators

Indian Committee Suggestions

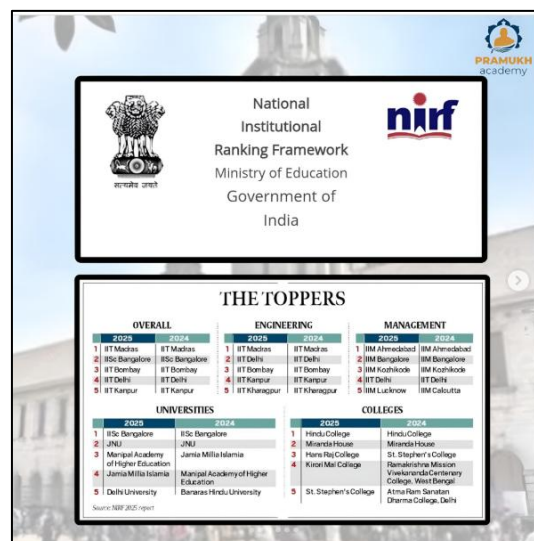
Body	Recommendations
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education	Third-party verification of NIRF data; raise diversity, outreach and local impact metrics
NITI Aayog	Create National Student Outcome Database linked to NIRF; inform grants/support by equity rankings
University Grants Commission (UGC)	Tie grants/capacity-building to ranking improvement; incentivize rural and underrepresented colleges
RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan)	Integrate ranking with accreditation; regular feedback to institutions

Way Forward

- Strengthen Third-party Audits and Verifications:** Link NIRF rankings to independent site visits and institutional audits, minimizing data manipulation and gaming.
- Expand Equity and Diversity Indicators:** Raise the weight of metrics tracking gender balance, marginalized group presence, and regional participation, in line with UGC and NEP guidance.
- Align Rankings to Real Student Outcomes:** Map NIRF scores to employability, skill-building, and local impact, making rankings actionable for policy makers and students.
- Mandate Public Data Sharing:** Require publication of raw metrics and audit findings, promoting transparency and allowing stakeholder scrutiny.
- Support Disadvantaged Institutions:** Adjust funding and incentives to assist lower-ranked colleges in resource-poor areas, ensuring reforms close the quality and equity gap.

Conclusion

NIRF has ushered in a culture of benchmarking, but its true value lies in fostering genuine quality and equitable access, not just institutional prestige. Reforming ranking methods and linking them to accountability, diversity, and public good will ensure that higher education serves both social and national growth.



National Institutional Ranking Framework			
Ministry of Education, Government of India			
THE TOPPERS			
OVERALL		ENGINEERING	
2025	2024	2025	2024
1 IIT Madras	1 IIT Madras	1 IIT Madras	1 IIT Madras
2 IISc Bangalore	2 IISc Bangalore	2 IIT Delhi	2 IIT Delhi
3 IIT Bombay	3 IIT Bombay	3 IIT Bombay	3 IIT Bombay
4 IIT Delhi	4 IIT Delhi	4 IIT Kharagpur	4 IIT Kharagpur
5 IIT Kharagpur	5 IIT Kharagpur	5 IIT Kharagpur	5 IIT Kharagpur
UNIVERSITIES		COLLEGES	
2025	2024	2025	2024
1 IISc Bangalore	1 IISc Bangalore	1 Hindu College	1 Hindu College
2 JNU	2 JNU	2 Miranda House	2 Miranda House
3 Manipal Academy of Higher Education	3 Manipal Academy of Higher Education	3 Hans Raj College	3 St. Stephen's College
4 Jamia Millia Islamia	4 Jamia Millia Islamia	4 Kirti Mahi College	4 Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College
5 Delhi University	5 Barabani University	5 St. Stephen's College	5 Anuram Sundari College, West Bengal

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following BEST addresses a ranking system's ability to improve equity in higher education?

- a) Giving maximum weightage to research publications
- b) Linking rankings to third-party audits, equity indicators, and targeted grants
- c) Limiting rankings to self-reported institutional data
- d) Making rankings optional for participation

Answer: B) Linking rankings to third-party audits, equity indicators, and targeted grants

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "NIRF rankings have increased transparency and competition in Indian higher education, but suffer from flaws in equity, data reliability, and policy relevance. Critically evaluate these pitfalls and suggest robust solutions, with reference to global and Indian committee recommendation



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Siege and status quo – Manoj Jarange’s latest fast for Maratha quota drew attention, but not answers

Author: Girish Kuber, **Source:** The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Polity (Reservation, Social Justice, OBC Policy, Pressure Groups)
- **GS Paper 1:** Society (Social Movements, Identity Politics, Maharashtra)

Introduction

The editorial reflects on the recent Maratha agitation, led by **Manoj Jarange** and marked by a hunger strike in Mumbai, to press demands for **Maratha reservation under the OBC category**. While the protest garnered widespread attention and ended with celebration, the underlying issues of quota policy, stakeholder consensus, and political strategy remain unresolved—highlighting the complex status quo in Maharashtra’s approach to affirmative action.

Key Challenges

1. **Complexity of OBC Claims and Classification:** Jarange’s agitation aimed to have Marathas recognized under the OBC quota, but existing **OBC subgroups and community divisions** make inclusion contentious and difficult to implement, resulting in policy stagnation.
2. **Political and Social Fragmentation:** Reservation demands are complicated by **social heterogeneity and regional power structures**: OBCs are not a homogenous block,

Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and NCBC

1. Definition and Lists:

- **OBCs/SEBCs:** Socially and educationally backward classes; no fixed constitutional definition.
- **Central OBC List:** Article 342A(1) → President specifies list (in consultation with State Governor); modifications require **Parliament approval**.
- **State OBC List:** Article 342A(3) → States/UTs maintain separate lists for their own purposes.

2. Reservation for OBCs:

- Articles **15 & 16** → Reservation in education and public employment.
- **27% reservation** implemented in 1990 (Mandal Commission); upheld by **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)** with **creamy layer exclusion**.

3. Commissions for OBC Upliftment:

- **Article 340** → President may appoint commissions to examine conditions of SEBCs.
- Key commissions:
 - ✓ **Kalelkar Commission (1953)** – recommendations not implemented.
 - ✓ **Mandal Commission (1979)** – led to 27% reservation.
 - ✓ **Justice Rohini Commission (2017–2023)** – sub-categorisation of OBCs for equitable reservation; report yet to be implemented.

4. National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC):

- **Constitutional body** under **Article 338B** (102nd Amendment, 2018).
- **Composition:** Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, 3 members (appointed by President).
- **Functions & Powers:**
 - ✓ Consulted on all major policy matters affecting OBCs.
 - ✓ Powers of a **civil court**.
 - ✓ Reviews **state OBC lists**, ensures **50% reservation cap**, and monitors ineligible entries.

with over 300 subgroups and significant local variations, especially in western Maharashtra and Marathwada.

3. **Pressure Group Dynamics and Policy Paralysis:** Agitations draw in multiple stakeholders—including party cadres, local leaders, and rival organizations—often ending in symbolic gestures without real solutions, due to fear of alienating existing OBC groups.
4. **Party Politics and Strategic Calculations:** The editorial points out the **BJP's electoral dilemma** in Maharashtra: balancing support from Marathas against the need to prevent backlash from Congress-supported OBC subgroups and the Muslim-Christian-Dalit coalition.
5. **Absence of Sustainable Reform:** Despite consecutive protests and political maneuvering, **no durable framework for reservation or social justice emerges**, leaving communities dissatisfied and governments vulnerable to further agitation.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Relevant Practice
Brazil	Quota systems in higher education with periodic review, stakeholder consultations, targeted affirmative action
South Africa	Complex multi-ethnic affirmative action based on historic disadvantage, regular social dialogue
USA	Race-conscious policy challenged and adapted by the courts, shifting from blanket quotas to holistic admissions
Malaysia	Bumiputera policy involving periodic adjustment and inclusion of regional realities
Country/Region	Relevant Practice
France	Minority representation addressed through both quota and economic policy, reflecting demographic diversity

Indian Committee Suggestions

Body	Recommendations
National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)	Rigorous and periodic review of backward class lists, more transparent inclusion criteria, community consultation
Maharashtra Backward Class Commission	Field-based surveys, engagement with affected communities, consensus-building for quota inclusion
Parliamentary Committee on Social Justice	Regular equity audits, dialogue across castes and regions, balancing majority and minority interests in policy
Law Commission of India	Proposed rationalization of reservation policy, harmonization with Supreme Court directives (Indra Sawhney judgment and others)

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Data-Driven Classification:**
Enact regular, comprehensive surveys to accurately reflect backwardness and community needs, aligning quota policy to empirical evidence.
➤ **Institutionalize Stakeholder Consultation:** Build inclusive processes for community representation, balancing the voices of OBC, Marathas, and other subgroups in quota decisions.
2. **Depoliticize Reforms through Transparent Criteria:**

Adopt clear, transparent rules for inclusion/exclusion in reservation lists, minimizing opportunistic expansions and maintaining legal scrutiny.

3. **Periodic Equity Audits and Policy Review:** Mandate regular audits of reservation impact, adjusting policy for observed demographic and socio-economic shifts in Maharashtra and beyond.
4. **Promote Social Harmony and Avoid Fragmentation:**
Advance reforms that seek broad consensus, reduce antagonism among castes and communities, and protect the spirit of social justice.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- Article 45 (Directive Principles) → Provision for free and compulsory education until age 14 (later extended under RTE Act, 2009).
- Article 46 (DPSP) → Promotion of educational and economic interests of SCs, STs, and other weaker sections, relevant to equity in higher education.
- Article 15(4) & 15(5) → Enable special provisions for advancement of socially/economically backward classes in education.

Conclusion

While agitations like the Maratha protest draw attention to longstanding injustices, true solutions require rigorous data, transparent processes, and collaborative policymaking. Consensus-driven, legal, and equitable reforms are vital for social harmony and justice in Maharashtra and India as a whole.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which measure would best support sustainable and equitable reservation policy in Maharashtra?

- a) Reliance only on political negotiation
- b) Data-driven classification, transparent criteria, and regular equity audits
- c) Inclusion based on pressure group demands
- d) Sporadic reforms without community consultation

Answer: B) Data-driven classification, transparent criteria, and regular equity audits

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Maharashtra's reservation issue, as shown by the latest Maratha agitation, reveals pitfalls of pressure group politics, policy fragmentation, and lack of consensus. Critically analyze the challenges and outline sustainable reform pathways, citing committee recommendations and global practices"

Student Notes

Who wants to live forever? – Social consequences of longevity research could be profound

Author: C. Raja Mohan **Source:** The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Social Impact, Ethics, Governance
- **GS Paper 3:** Science & Technology (Biotechnology, Gerontology, Demography)

Introduction

Breakthroughs in **biotechnology, medicine, and genetic engineering** have **made the quest for longer lifespans and slowed ageing increasingly realistic**. The prospects of radical longevity—once the stuff of science fiction—now threaten to **reshape societies, economies, and ethical norms**. The editorial explores how extending human lifespans could produce older but more active populations, with far-reaching consequences for social structures and governance worldwide.

Key Challenges

1. **Transforming Social Structures:**
Longer, healthier lifespans would require fundamental changes to retirement, education, and intergenerational roles. **Birth rates are collapsing globally**, shifting the age pyramid and challenging established ideas about work, family, and welfare.
2. **Ethical and Equity Dilemmas:**
Advanced longevity treatments may be available only to those who can

UPSC Fact: India's **demographic dividend** is projected to peak by 2045; by then, longevity advances could shift patterns of dependency, labor, and retirement entirely.

India's Demographic Transition and Dividend

1. **Transition Overview:**
 - Shift from **high fertility–high mortality** to **low fertility–low mortality**.
 - Alters **age structure**, increasing the **working-age population** share.
2. **Age Profile (2011 Census):**
 - **Working-age (15–59 years):** ~48%
 - **Children (<14 years):** ~31%
 - **Elderly (60+ years):** ~9%
 - **Dependency ratio:** Declined from 64% (2001) → 55% (2011)
3. **Demographic Dividend:**
 - Lower dependency ratio indicates potential **economic benefits**.
 - Economic Survey 2018–19: Dividend expected to **peak around 2041**, with **20–59 years** population at 59%.
 - India's **median age:** 28 years → one of the youngest populations globally.
4. **Implication:** Youthful population offers **economic growth potential**, but **policy measures in education, skill development, and employment** are crucial to harness it effectively.

Factors Behind India's Demographic Transition

1. **Falling Fertility Rates:**
 - Total Fertility Rate (TFR) declined from **5.9 (1951) → 2.0 (NFHS-5)**, below replacement level (2.1).
 - Driven by **modern contraceptive use, rising age at marriage, and higher female education**.
2. **Increasing Life Expectancy:**
 - Improved **nutrition, healthcare, and income levels** raised life expectancy from **37 years (1951) → 70 years (current)**.
3. **Reduced Infant & Child Mortality:** Under-five mortality decreased from **379/1000 (1951) → 35/1000** due to better **maternal and child health care**.

afford them, **risking deepening social inequality** and new forms of class division. Political and ethical questions about "who gets to live longer" will proliferate.

3. **Strain on Healthcare and Policy:** More aged but active individuals will upend health, pension, and economic models. Governments will need to **invest in preventive health, life-long education, and support systems**—redefining what it means to age in the 21st century.
4. **Technological Overlap and Control:** Integration of biotechnology, AI, neuroengineering, and genetic modification will require robust governance mechanisms against misuse, exploitation, and loss of individual autonomy.
5. **Unpredictable Social Impact:** Valley billionaires and Silicon Valley research may drive the agenda, but unintended cultural, spiritual, and demographic effects could reshape politics and international relations.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Practice/Policy
Japan	Active ageing policies, robotics in elder care, pension reform in response to long lifespans
USA	Private investment in biotech, ethical regulation of gene editing, expanding healthcare innovation
EU	Cross-national ethical panels, subsidized preventive medicine, age-friendly urban planning
Singapore	National campaigns for active ageing, life-long learning, and intergenerational mentoring
China	Rapidly scaling geriatric healthcare, pilot projects in biotech-driven longevity

Indian Committee Suggestions

Body	Recommendations
Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)	Develop a national bioethics committee, regulate new treatments, encourage healthy ageing research
NITI Aayog	Study demography-longevity interactions, recommend social welfare reforms, forecast economic impact
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare	Develop preventive geriatric care programs, pilot life-long education models, expand pension and insurance coverage for older populations
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science & Technology	Institute robust oversight of biotechnology and AI convergence, protect rights and consent for citizens

UPSC relevant Fact:

The National Programme for Healthcare of the Elderly was launched by India's government in 2010, with expansion recommended to address future longevity trends.

1. Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty → expanded by SC to include Right to Health. Longevity debates are anchored here.
2. Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):
3. Article 41 – State to provide public assistance in old age.
4. Article 47 – Duty of the State to raise nutrition and standard of living and improve public health.
5. National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (2010) – Specialized geriatric care at district & tertiary level.

Way Forward

1. **Invest in Preventive Health and Lifelong Learning:** Shift policies toward promoting well-being, productivity, and adaptation throughout longer lifespans.
2. **Redesign Pension and Social Security Models:** Incorporate extended working years, mixed-age education, and intergenerational support structures.
3. **Regulate Biotech and Ethical Governance:** Expand national oversight on genetic, AI, and neuro-technology research; promote inclusive and affordable access.
4. **Prioritize Equity and Social Inclusion:** Ensure new longevity treatments and benefits reach marginalized groups; guard against new forms of inequality.
5. **Promote Global and Regional Dialogue:** Lead international cooperation and ethical debate on managing the profound political, philosophical, and cross-cultural implications of radical longevity.

Conclusion

The promise of living much longer and healthier challenges every assumption about ageing, family, work, and justice. India—and the world—must act with wisdom, equity, and vision to plan for extreme longevity, ensuring that innovation serves all, not just the privileged few.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following Acts provides for the legal obligation of children to maintain their parents?

- a) Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund Act, 2012 b) Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
c) Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana Act, 2017 d) National Health Mission Act, 2005

Answer: B) Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Radical advances in longevity research could transform social structure, equity, and governance worldwide. Critically analyse the challenges and outline the preparations India should make, citing committee recommendations and global approaches."

Student Notes

Listen to Gen Z next door – India should appear reassuring to Nepal’s protesters, and support governance reform discreetly

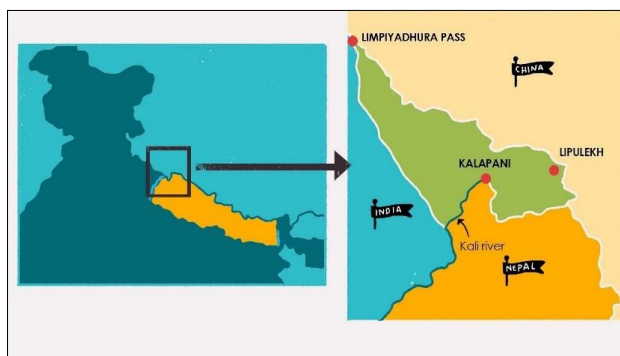
Author: Amitabh Mattoo **Source:** The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (India-Nepal, Neighbourhood Policy, Cross-Border Dynamics, Diplomacy)
- **GS Paper 1:** Society (Youth Movements, Social Change)

Introduction

Nepal is witnessing a youth-driven protest wave against entrenched dysfunction in government and economic distress. Amid this volatility, India faces strategic choices: supporting reform without appearing intrusive, and managing cross-border fallout in a region bound by shared history, migration, and security. The editorial cautions that real change in Nepal depends on discreet Indian encouragement, sustained partnership, and empathy for the aspirations of its Gen Z protesters.



Key Challenges

1. **Entrenched political gridlock:** Protests reflect frustration with unresponsive governance, slow reforms, and corruption. **Nepal’s “Gen Z” seeks accountability and renewal, but the old establishment resists change.**
2. **Cross-border repercussions:** Instability in Kathmandu can rapidly spill into India’s border states—Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand—through migration, violence or political contagion.
3. **Ethnic and historical sensitivities:** Perceptions of Indian “overbearing” in Nepali affairs can quickly provoke resistance or anti-India sentiments, especially if support is seen as interfering rather than reassuring.
4. **Fragmented polity and social mistrust:** Competing parties (Congress, UML, Maoist Centre) and internal factionalism make sustained reform difficult. **Nepal’s youth movement is united by anger, yet risks splintering without inclusive platforms.**
5. **Managing reform without alienation:** Overreach by New Delhi risks deepening hostility, but disengagement risks missing an opportunity for regional stability and good neighborliness.

1. **Nepal Constitution 2015** – federal democratic republic, but ethnic dissatisfaction persists.
2. **Open Border:** India–Nepal have 1,751 km open border → key for migration, trade, & unrest spillover.
3. **BADP coverage:** 464 border blocks in 117 districts across 16 states of India.
4. **Article 51(c)** – Directive principle: State shall foster respect for international law & treaty obligations (relevant for India’s conduct with neighbours).

Global Practices

Country/Region	Related Approach
Bangladesh-India	Quiet support for anti-autocracy protests, robust partnership post-reform

USA-Canada-Mexico	Joint educational/cultural initiatives to foster youth activism, discourage insularity
EU-Ukraine	Calibrated democracy support, soft encouragement via academic/student partnerships
Thailand-Malaysia	Non-interference paired with civil society capacity-building, youth exchanges
Korea-Japan	Friction management through collaborative platforms, early warning dialogue during unrest

Indian Committee Suggestions

Body	Recommendations
Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs	Encourage discreet support for democracy, youth movements, avoid overt political intervention
NITI Aayog / Ministry of External Affairs	Build grassroots partnership in education, health, and entrepreneurship with Nepal's youth
Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)	Monitor cross-border impact, enhance migration management, use cultural ties for empathy-building
Border Area Development Programme (BADP)	Strengthen local community resilience, reinforce border infrastructure to manage spillovers

Way Forward

- Reassure, not dominate:** India should provide empathetic, behind-the-scenes encouragement, signal openness to Nepal's Gen Z concerns, and avoid politicized overreach.
- Expand educational and cultural partnerships:** Encourage university exchanges, scholarships, and collaborative platforms for Nepali youth—building future-oriented bridges and soft power.
- Strengthen border management and local Indian resilience:** Invest in infrastructure, migration management, and early warning systems for social and economic spillovers from Nepal.
- Empower civil society and reformers in Nepal:** Support grassroots efforts around governance, transparency, and entrepreneurship, ensuring reforms reach marginalized groups.
- Maintain regional stability through multilevel dialogue:** Engage Nepali leaders and youth across party lines; adapt India's policy to stay flexible and responsive, positioning as a trusted neighbor.

UPSC Fact: The Border Area Development Programme (BADP) facilitates India's efforts to manage spillovers from neighboring instability through local engagement and infrastructure funding.

Conclusion

Nepal's youth-driven ferment presents both risks and opportunities for India: discreet support, empathetic partnership, and regional stability are essential. India must combine reassurance with humility—listening to Gen Z next door while fostering shared prosperity and good governance.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Match the following global practices in longevity adaptation:

- Japan – (a) Robotics in elder care
- Singapore – (b) Life-long learning & intergenerational mentoring
- EU – (c) Ethical panels & preventive medicine

- a) 1-a, 2-b, 3-c b) 1-b, 2-a, 3-c
c) 1-c, 2-a, 3-b d) 1-a, 2-c, 3-b

Answer: A) 1-a, 2-b, 3-c

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Nepal's youth-driven protests reveal the limits of status quo governance and the risks for India's regional stability. Critically analyze the challenges and outline a calibrated strategy for India with global and committee perspectives."



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Student Notes 

The GST Template – GST Council’s Recent Decisions Provide a Model for Consensus-Building

Author: N. K. Singh

Source: The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Fiscal Federalism, Intergovernmental Relations, Cooperative Federalism)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Taxation, GST, Fiscal Reforms, Formalization)
- **Essay**

Introduction

India’s ambitious journey towards streamlined taxation reached a new landmark with recent GST Council reforms. These decisions mark the most comprehensive recalibration of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) since its inception in **July 2017**, setting powerful precedents for consensus-building, rate simplification, and state-centre cooperation in fiscal policymaking. The editorial, written by a former chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, presents GST’s evolution as a template for future reforms in India’s complex federal structure.

UPSC Fact: The GST Council, as per Article 279A of the Constitution, is an institutional innovation enabling both centre and states to take tax rate and structure decisions jointly by consensus.

Key Challenges

1. **Historic Tax Fragmentation and Complexity:** Before GST, India’s taxation was fragmented by taxes such as VAT, excise, service tax, and octroi, resulting in **dual taxation, cascading effects, and high compliance burdens**.
2. **Limited Fiscal Autonomy and Revenue Concerns for States:** States were concerned about loss of fiscal sovereignty, especially as GST required uniform rates and central supervision, while guaranteeing only five years of compensation for potential revenue shortfall.
3. **Rate Rationalization and Multiple Slabs:** Reconciling economic diversity and political priorities across states led to **multiple GST slabs** and sectoral exceptions, complicating compliance and often confusing investors and businesses.
4. **Consensus Amid Diversity:** Bringing 29 states and 3 Union Territories together for uniform tax decisions required transparent deliberation, real-time data, and strong leadership.
5. **Technology and Administration Hurdles:** Initial issues faced with GSTN portal, sluggish refunds, and digital compliance posed challenges especially for MSMEs.

Recent Achievements and Reforms

1. **Deep Rate Rationalisation and Slab Simplification:** The **56th GST Council meeting** endorsed a more streamlined structure, reducing GST's complexity and anomalies, and moving towards the ultimate goal of a few standard rate slabs for simplicity.
2. **Compensation and Fiscal Sustainability:** The Council settled on a **formula-based, time-bound compensation exit**, enhancing trust in the process and allaying states’ fears regarding fiscal unpredictability.
3. **Inclusive, Transparent, Data-Driven Governance:** Recent reforms featured joint sectoral consultation, evidence-backed negotiations, and routine process review, strengthening both public trust and policy effectiveness.

4. **Resilience in Crisis:** GST's flexible architecture allowed rapid adjustments during the COVID-19 crisis, preserving state revenues and allowing for fiscal stimulus under stress.

Global Practices

Country	Best Practice Model
Australia	Single GST rate, revenue sharing, national review council, and federal formula periodic review
Canada	Federal-provincial harmonized sales tax with staged adoption and opt-ins, reflecting fiscal cooperation
Germany	Fiscal equalization, strong state role in tax setting and revenue sharing; disputes settled by constitutional courts
EU	Harmonized Value Added Tax (VAT), negotiation-based country opt-outs, includes rigorous stakeholder dialogues

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Key Suggestions
15th Finance Commission	Boost fiscal flexibility, promote revenue buoyancy, routine central-state dialogue
Kejriwal Task Force (2002)	Urged simplification, harmonization, and robust technology adoption
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance	Institutionalize frequent rate reviews, established grievance redress, and industry consultation
NITI Aayog	Deploy e-governance in tax administration, continuous reform audits, MSME support

UPSC Fact:

GST Compensation to States Act, 2017, ensured states five years of support for revenue loss—a rare federal commitment fostering trust during transition.

Way Forward

1. **Sustain Consensus-Driven Federalism:** Regularize open GST Council consultations, data-driven negotiation, and transparent decision-making, empowering both states and centre equally.
2. **Advance Slab Simplification and Digitalization:** Move towards minimal slabs and robust digital compliance to ensure hassle-free business and error-free recordkeeping, especially helping MSMEs.
3. **Proactive Grievance Redress and Sectoral Input:** Institute rapid stakeholder feedback and rate review cycles to promptly address sectoral concerns and technical glitches.
4. **Leverage GST Template for Other Sectors:** Adapt the cooperative federal model of GST Council for complex reforms in health, education, and digital policies.
5. **Strengthen Predictable Communication:** Timely public updates on Council decisions, roadmaps for implementation, and business-friendly information dissemination foster confidence and stability.

Conclusion

The evolution of GST stands as a beacon for transparent and consensus-based policy reform in India's federal union. Its latest reforms solidify GST as not just a fiscal tool but also a model for building cooperative, resilient governance frameworks across diverse domains. Continued simplification, stakeholder engagement, and institutional trust are vital to sustain and expand India's reform momentum.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following MOST distinguishes the GST Council's approach to fiscal policy in India?

- a) Unilateral rate decisions by the central government
- b) Exclusive technology adoption without sectoral consultation
- c) Transparent, consultative, and consensus-based centre-state policymaking
- d) Keeping multiple slabs regardless of review or feedback

Answer: C) Transparent, consultative, and consensus-based centre-state policymaking

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "The GST Council's process exemplifies best practices in cooperative federalism, transparency, and inclusive reform. Critically assess the evolution of the GST Council and its value as a model for policymaking across complex sectors, with global and committee-based perspectives."

Student Notes 

The Return of Chindia – Modi-Xi Meeting Hints at a New Chapter after Years of Silence, But Old Mistrust and New Asymmetries Persist

Author: Shashi Tharoor

Source: The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (India-China, Bilateral Summits, Geopolitics, Border Issues)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Trade Policy, Investment, Technology Asymmetry)
- **Essay**

Introduction

Amid shifting global equations, the recent meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit signals a cautious thaw after years of diplomatic pause. The editorial unpacks how this encounter could open a new phase in India-China engagement, while highlighting persistent mistrust, unresolved border disputes, and deepening economic and strategic asymmetries.

UPSC Fact: India-China border is the world's longest disputed frontier (~3,488 km), with unresolved sections in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim areas.

Key Challenges

1. **Diplomatic Deficit and Prolonged Estrangement:** For nearly three years, high-level channels between India and China were effectively frozen in the shadow of the 2020 Galwan border crisis and continuing standoffs. Mistrust runs deep, amplified by aggressive patrolling, military build-up, and a cycle of public rhetoric on both sides.
2. **Persistent Border Tensions:** While high-level talks reduce overt risk, the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains contested**, with past promises of “peace and tranquility” derailed by recurring incidents, and confidence-building mechanisms often failing in practice.
3. **Trade and Technology Imbalance:** China remains India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$135 billion (2023), but the deficit is overwhelmingly in China's favor. Additionally, **Chinese dominance in electronics, machinery, and critical supply chains exposes India to technological vulnerability and dependency risks.**
4. **Strategic Competition and Multipolar Diplomacy:** While India and China are both members of multilateral forums (SCO, BRICS), their rivalry shapes choices on regional security, infrastructure corridors, and alliances (India-US/Japan Quad, China-Pakistan “Iron Brothers”). Geopolitical maneuvers spill over into investment restrictions and technology decoupling.
5. **Internal Political and Societal Pressures:** Both governments face **domestic expectations and nationalist sentiment** that complicate any move toward true rapprochement or compromise—each side needs tangible progress to show domestically.

Evolving Engagement and Opportunities

1. **Symbolic Dialogue Restarts:** The Modi-Xi handshake at the SCO was cautiously welcomed as a necessary reopening of communication, even if substantive breakthroughs remain elusive.
2. **Economic Scope beyond Trade:** Despite the lopsided deficit, Chinese investment in sectors like infrastructure, green technology, and new economy (solar, EV, biotech) remains significant, though increasingly scrutinized after Galwan.

- 3. Regional and Multilateral Leverage:** Continued participation in SCO, BRICS, and climate diplomacy provides both countries with platforms to negotiate, shape regional stability, and express differences through dialogue rather than conflict.
- 4. Cultural and Historical Soft Power:** Shared civilizational exchanges, including ancient Buddhist connections and people-to-people diplomacy, still offer untapped avenues for confidence building.

Global Practices

Country-Pair	Relevant Pattern
USA-China	Competitive coexistence, dialogue with 'guardrails,' managed disputes alongside economic ties
Russia-China	Strategic partnership of convenience, regular summits to manage alignment, despite asymmetry
France-Germany	Historic adversaries using structured summits and economic interdependence for stability
South Korea-Japan	Periodic reset diplomacy despite recurrent public distrust and unresolved history
ASEAN-China	Issue-based engagement, maritime dialogue platforms, calibrated economic integration

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Main Recommendations
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Regular, structured high-level dialogue; clarity in border protocols; coordinated economic and technology policy with trusted partners
National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)	Enhance border management, early warning mechanisms, technology resilience, and crisis scenario planning
Ministry of Commerce & Industry	Reduce critical import dependency, incentivize domestic capability in electronics, pharma, and ICT sectors
NITI Aayog	Advance "China Plus One" manufacturing, develop resilient supply chains, and promote innovation-driven trade

Way Forward

- 1. Develop Issue-Based, Layered Engagement:** Engage China fruitfully in trade, climate, regional stability, and people-to-people exchanges even while asserting firm red lines on sovereignty and security.
- 2. Institutionalize Crisis Communication:** Set up direct military and diplomatic hotlines, periodic boundary meetings, and joint confidence-building measures to defuse border escalations early.
- 3. Pursue Economic Resilience:** Reduce overreliance on Chinese imports—via domestic manufacturing initiatives (PLI), technology partnerships, and encourage "China Plus One" strategies for global value chains.
- 4. Leverage Regional/Multi-Forum Diplomacy:** Utilize SCO, BRICS, G20, and bilateral summits for candid exchange, proactive agenda setting, and to balance rivalry through structured dialogue.

UPSC Fact: The Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020) confrontations spurred government reviews and recommendations for comprehensive LAC management and fast-tracked border infrastructure.

5. **Foster Public Trust and Strategic Patience:** Communicate transparently with domestic stakeholders on negotiation outcomes, progress, and ongoing challenges to build confidence and lower nationalist backlash.

Conclusion

The Modi-Xi meeting at the SCO marks the tentative return of 'Chindia' dialogue, but real normalization demands robust, issue-based engagement and the closing of old asymmetries. India's challenge lies in balancing competitive coexistence with strategic clarity and resilience—turning cautious rewiring into sustained partnership and regional stability.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which approach best captures India's current strategy for dealing with China post-SCO summit?

- a) Unilateral disengagement and economic decoupling
- b) Issue-based engagement, border firmness, supply chain resilience, and multi-forum diplomacy
- c) Exclusive dependence on multilateral diplomacy
- d) Cautious optimism, but policy confusion

Answer: B) Issue-based engagement, border firmness, supply chain resilience, and multi-forum diplomacy

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Recent India-China summitry hints at a cautious thaw but is constrained by mistrust, border disputes, and economic asymmetry. Critically examine key challenges, committee suggestions, and potential frameworks for sustainable engagement."

Student Notes 

A Sense of Drift – Democracy seems overtaken once more, like an exercise of agency to nowhere

Author: Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Source: The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Polity (Democracy, Institutional Decay, Political Accountability, Youth Movements)
- **GS Paper 1:** Society (Civil Movements, Social Change, Political Culture)

Introduction

Across the globe, major democracies—from Nepal and France to the US—are experiencing political crises marked by popular protests, youth disaffection, stagnant institutions, and pervasive frustration. The editorial contends that democracy today often appears to drift, lacking both substantive agency and effective public purpose, with traditional processes failing to channel popular resentment or inspire reform.

UPSC Fact: Nearly two-thirds of India's population is under 35, yet voter turnout data and civil participation indicate substantial youth disengagement and cynicism toward politics.

Key Challenges

1. **Crisis of Representation and Participation:** Political systems struggle to convert public outrage into meaningful policy. Elections and protests abound, yet many citizens, especially the youth, feel unrepresented and marginalized, seeing democracy as a hollow ritual rather than a pathway to justice or agency.
2. **Stalled Institutional Reform:** Even as new movements emerge—such as anti-corruption protests in Nepal, anti-pension reform protests in France, and activism in the US—these rarely yield lasting institutional innovation. **Institutions seem unable to deliver on basic promises or respond flexibly to modern demands.**
3. **Detachment of Elites and Corruption:** Ruling elites often capture institutions for private ends, leading to **deep public mistrust, endemic corruption, and a lack of accountability**—further alienating citizens from the democratic process.
4. **Unclear Political Alternatives:** While there is no serious alternative to democracy, the lack of meaningful opposition, credible party platforms, or shared visions for reform leaves societies rudderless, making change seem futile or cyclical.
5. **Youth Disillusionment:** Young people's protests, whether in mature democracies or emergent ones, **are often reactive and spontaneous, but rarely tied to concrete programmes or systemic transformation.**

Global Practices

Country/Region	Approach/Outcome
France	Robust but cyclical protest culture; mass mobilizations on pensions, immigration, and labor, often leading to policy stasis
USA	Grassroots activism (e.g., Bernie Sanders, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter) has driven some legislative debate, but institutional inertia persists
Tunisia, Egypt	Arab Spring uprisings highlighted limits of street activism without attached democratic roadmap

Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway)	Frequent participatory mechanisms, higher youth representation, and transparent institutions improve policy ownership
South Korea	Recent impeachment and mass protests combined with reform-oriented legislative action

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Key Suggestions
Law Commission of India	Propose deeper participatory reforms, such as direct democracy mechanisms, citizen juries, digital referenda
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice	Recommend steps for transparency in party funding and internal democracy
NITI Aayog	Stress on decentralization in governance, regular civic education, and youth leadership pipelines
Election Commission of India	Increase youth outreach and awareness drives, simplify registration for greater participation

Way Forward

- Revitalize Participatory Institutions:** Democratic procedures must be redesigned to enable genuine citizen agency; mechanisms such as e-petitions, town hall forums, and local referenda should bridge people-policy divides.
- Foster Inclusive, Accountable Leadership:** Encourage youth leadership, mandate transparent party structures, and institute norms for public consultation and review at every level.
- Strengthen Anti-Corruption and Oversight Mechanisms:** Ensure robust checks—from ombudsman offices to judicial oversight—so institutions retain public trust and serve their intended purposes.
- Link Protests to Programmatic Reform:** Channel public energy into structured, constructive platforms that articulate reform agendas, policy solutions, and sustained advocacy, beyond episodic outrage.
- Promote Civic Education and Social Trust:** Invest in education systems that prioritize democratic values, citizenship skills, and critical engagement with governance—reframing democracy as a lived, not procedural, ideal.

UPSC Fact: The 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission advocated “Social Audit” and “Citizen Report Card” methods to directly connect policy with citizen feedback loops.

Conclusion

Democracy is at a crossroads—without deeper reforms and renewed civic spirit, it risks drifting into ritualism and alienation. Only by restoring meaningful agency, fostering inclusive leadership, and directly engaging citizens in decisions can democratic societies rediscover direction and public faith.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which approach best addresses today’s drift and disillusionment in established democracies?

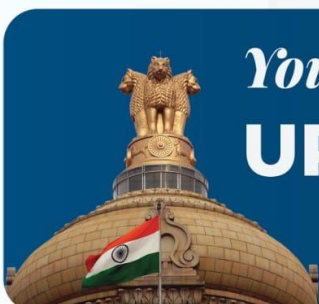
- Rely solely on periodic elections for public input
- Channel youth energy into participatory structures, transparent institutions, and targeted reforms
- Maintain elite control over policymaking
- Suppress public protests to ensure order

Answer: B) Channel youth energy into participatory structures, transparent institutions, and targeted reforms

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Globally, democracy faces a crisis of drift—youthful protest, institutional inertia, and leadership failures abound. Critically analyze these trends and suggest comprehensive reforms, with reference to Indian and international committee recommendations."

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A project of strategic and national importance

Author: Bhupender Yadav

Source: The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Environmental Regulation, Policy Implementation, Centre-State Relations)
- **GS Paper 3:** Security (Strategic Infrastructure, Maritime Security, Blue Economy), Economy (Ports, Islands), Environment (EIA, Island Conservation)

Introduction

The **Great Nicobar Island Project** stands as a flagship initiative to transform Great Nicobar into a strategic, economic, and maritime hub. The integrated plan involves a massive international transshipment terminal, modern township, airstrip, and power plants, serving both India's security calculus and its Indian Ocean connectivity ambitions. Yet, the scale of development also brings heightened scrutiny on environmental integrity and local community impacts.

Key Challenges

1. **Ecological and Biodiversity Risks:** The project is located within a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** and covers dense, biodiverse forests. Although only about **1.52% of Andaman and Nicobar forest area is up for diversion**, the risk to endemic species, coastal ecology, and tribal habitat is a major concern.
2. **Multi-Stage Regulatory Compliance:** The project mandates **comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**, Forest and Wildlife clearances, and Coastal Regulation Zone adherence. The sequential nature of approvals and integration of real-time safeguards are arduous but necessary.
3. **Social and Tribal Impact:** The development area includes habitats of indigenous groups. Ensuring rehabilitation, fair compensation, employment opportunities, and the preservation of socio-cultural rights is essential for sustainable outcomes.
4. **Geostrategic and Maritime Importance:** Situated near crucial sea lanes, Great Nicobar's development enhances India's regional influence, supports logistics for the blue economy, and counters the growing presence of other powers in the Indian Ocean region.

UPSC Fact: The project is a pillar of the **Maritime India Vision 2030** and has been identified as "strategic infrastructure" in India's security and economic policy blueprints.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Practice/Insight
Singapore	Pre-project EIA, biodiversity offset schemes, robust compliance monitoring post-construction
Australia	Indigenous stakeholder consultation and impact assessment, adaptive project management
Seychelles/Mauritius	Balancing security and ports with marine conservation and strict global reporting
China (Hainan)	Massive port development with central controls, but under rising scrutiny for ecological impact
Japan (Okinawa)	Civic consultations and conservation zones around dual-use (civil-military) builds

Indian Committee Recommendations



Body	Recommendations
NITI Aayog, NIOT, MoEFCC Expert Groups	Staged, independent EIA; population and disaster risk studies; phased forest conversion
National Board for Wildlife	Regular corridor and biodiversity monitoring, transparent audits
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment	Social safeguard indicators, local employment focus, periodic public disclosure
Island Development Authority	Resilient, climate-adapted infrastructure, strong tribal inclusion measures

Way Forward

- Mandate Phased EIA and Public Review:** All work should adhere to a staged clearance process, with yearly independent ecological and social audits and transparency in compliance.
- Maximize Benefit Sharing and Social Safeguards:** Institutionalize robust frameworks to guarantee rehabilitation, skill training, and sustained employment for affected local and tribal communities.
- Embed Disaster and Environmental Resilience:** All infrastructure must incorporate earthquake, tsunami, and cyclone resistance, alongside robust compensatory afforestation.
- Enhance Cross-Ministerial Integration:** Policies for Defense, Tribal Welfare, Ports, and Environment ministries should be synchronized from planning through implementation and monitoring.
- Foster Transparency and Global Leadership:** Routine public updates and benchmarking against international best practices will build legitimacy and trust, positioning India as a leader in sustainable island development.

UPSC Fact: Forest/eco-sensitive area conversion projects above a certain threshold in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands require National Board for Wildlife approval.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar Project encapsulates India's aspirations for maritime strength, security, and economic progress. Its success depends on harmonizing strategic development with environmental stewardship and equitable social outcomes, setting a benchmark for large-scale projects in sensitive regions.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which is the most critical requirement for sustainable success in large-scale projects like Great Nicobar?

- Ignoring compliance to expedite strategic construction
- Phased, independent EIA and continuous stakeholder engagement with transparent audit and review
- Focusing only on transactional economic returns
- Minimizing involvement of local communities to speed up development

Answer: B) Phased, independent EIA and continuous stakeholder engagement with transparent audit and review

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Large-scale island infrastructure projects involve trade-offs between security, development, and ecosystem protection. Examine these challenges in the context of Great Nicobar, and suggest a balanced roadmap based on Indian committees and global experience."

Holding Back – Economy is in a sweet spot, and yet private sector is not picking up baton by investing and spending more

Source: The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 3:** Indian Economy (Investment, Private Sector Dynamics, Public Policy, Inflation, Banking)
- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Policy Environment, Economic Reforms)
- **Essay**

Introduction

The Indian economy is currently positioned in a “**sweet spot**” with supportive government policy, strong fiscal incentives, and record-low inflation. However, despite these favorable conditions, the private sector remains reluctant to boost investment and consumption, raising concerns about the sustainability of economic momentum.

Key Challenges

1. **Policy and Fiscal Push Not Matched by Private Response:** The government has aggressively rationalized GST rates, reduced corporate taxes, raised income-tax exemptions, and tripled public infrastructure spending since 2019. **Key flagship schemes like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) and India Semiconductor Mission have drawn global leaders like Apple and Samsung, but broader private sector investment and spending remain subdued.**
2. **Corporate Deleveraging and Risk Aversion:** Indian corporations—after years of deleveraging—now hold strong balance sheets with low debt and improved debt-equity ratios, yet remain hesitant to undertake capital expenditure and new investments.
3. **Weak Bank Credit offtake and Loan Demand:** Both net and gross non-performing assets (NPAs) are down, bank capital buffers are strong, and consumer price inflation is at historic lows (2.1% YoY, 0.7% for August). Even so, bank lending and major infra project investments are below expectations, as flagged by Reserve Bank of India studies.
4. **Persistent Uncertainty and Distrust:** The reluctance to invest seems tied to **lingering business uncertainty, global trade volatility (US-China tariffs), fears over demand, and job/income insecurity for households.** This undercuts the “animal spirits” essential for investment, job creation, and economic dynamism.

UPSC Fact: India’s Capex-to-GDP ratio remains below the desirable threshold, despite massive public investment, and credit growth in the private sector lags pre-pandemic highs.

Global Practices

Country	Approach/Trends
USA	Post-pandemic stimulus with strong public spending, gradual private capex recovery. Emphasis on long-term certainty over quick tax tweaks for business confidence.
China	Coordinated public-private industrial investments to spur recovery, government “guidance funds” for infrastructure.
Germany	Policy stability, skill reforms, and strong MSME credit facilities to revive investment confidence.

UK	Investment incentives paired with regulatory consistency and support for export-led sectors.
Japan	“Abenomics” mix of structural reforms, steady policy signaling, and BOJ monetary easing to encourage private sector revival.

Indian Committee/Expert Panel Suggestions

Committee/Body	Suggestions
Finance Commission/NITI Aayog	Maintain policy/predictability, focus on demand-side growth, stabilize inflation
RBI/Banking Panels	Encourage credit offtake, deploy innovative lending platforms, and support SMEs
Economic Advisory Council to PM (EAC-PM)	Improve investment climate by reducing regulatory friction, ensure ease of doing business and timely approvals
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry	Link PLI/incentives to actual job creation and capex execution; monitor roadblocks regularly

Way Forward

- 1. Reinforce Policy Stability and Certainty:** Enhance long-term clarity in policies and regulations, minimize sudden changes, and communicate government support to reduce business/investor anxiety.
- 2. Stimulate Private Sector Demand:** Expand targeted credit support and incentives for MSMEs, promote innovation- and R&D-linked investment, and ensure timely project clearances.
- 3. Address Demand Side Insecurity:** Increase social and job security through skill programs and employment guarantees, while continuing macroeconomic stability initiatives.
- 4. Strengthen Public-Private Coordination:** Convene sectoral taskforces to address specific bottlenecks, build public-private partnerships, and move from policy intent to actual execution on the ground.
- 5. Monitor Implementation and Feedback:** Use real-time data to track scheme outcomes, identify investment gaps, and adapt policy support accordingly—moving beyond one-off quick fixes.

UPSC Fact: RBI reports highlight that “animal spirits”—business optimism—drive over 40% of private investment decisions, underscoring the role of sentiment and certainty.

Conclusion

Despite a “sweet spot” in macroeconomic indicators, India’s growth potential depends on kindling private enterprise confidence and capital outlay. Building robust, stable policy frameworks, continuing reform, and addressing private sector anxieties will be crucial to unlock the next cycle of jobs, spending, and economic momentum.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

- Q1. Which of the following measures would MOST effectively revive private sector investment in the current Indian context?**
- Further reducing corporate tax rates alone
 - Providing stable, predictable policy environment and coordinated public-private execution
 - Restricting credit to only public sector undertakings
 - Relying solely on quick-fix regulatory tweaks

Answer: B) Providing stable, predictable policy environment and coordinated public-private execution

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Despite supportive public policy and infrastructure investment, private sector capital formation remains subdued in India. Critically examine the factors behind this hesitation and propose sound strategies for mobilizing private investment, citing global and Indian committee recommendations."

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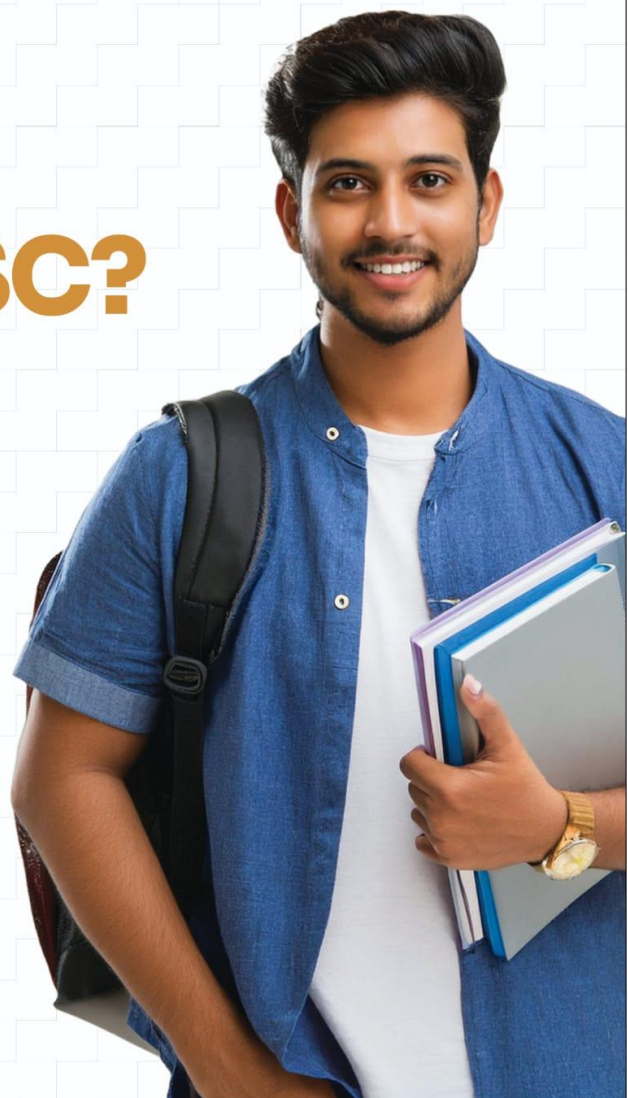
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Student Notes 

The RTI's shift to a 'right to deny information'

Author: Shailesh Gandhi **Source:** The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Polity (Transparency, Accountability, RTI Act, Privacy, Digital Laws)
- **GS Paper 4:** Ethics (Public Interest, Good Governance, Whistleblower Protection)

Introduction

The **Right to Information (RTI) Act** is a cornerstone of Indian democracy, affirming citizens' ownership over government information and enabling public scrutiny. However, recent legal trends—especially with the arrival of new data protection rules and wider interpretations of “personal information”—risk diluting RTI's effectiveness, turning it into a “right to deny information.” The editorial evaluates how legal and bureaucratic shifts threaten transparency and offers a call to preserve RTI's spirit.

Why in News?

The RTI Act, 2005 is approaching its **20th anniversary in 2025**, making it important to review its achievements and challenges.

About the RTI Act, 2005

1. **Enacted:** June 2005 | **Came into force:** October 2005
2. **Nodal Ministry:** Department of Personnel & Training, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
3. **Objective:** To ensure **transparency, accountability and citizens' access** to information under public authorities.

Applicability

1. Covers all **public authorities** established by:
 - Constitution of India
 - Law made by Parliament/State Legislature
 - Order/notification of appropriate Government
2. Includes **bodies owned, controlled, or substantially financed** (directly/indirectly) by Government.
3. Also applicable to **NGOs substantially financed by Government funds**.

Rights of Citizens

1. Every citizen can **request information** from a public authority.
2. **Section 4:** Public authorities must **maintain records** and **proactively disclose** key information to reduce formal RTI requests.

Exemptions from Disclosure

1. **Section 8:** Certain categories of information exempted (e.g., affecting sovereignty, security, strategic, economic interests).
2. **Second Schedule Organisations (27 bodies exempted):**
 - Intelligence Bureau (IB)
 - Research and Analysis Wing (RAW)
 - Directorate of Enforcement
 - National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO)
 - Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), etc.

Institutional Framework

1. **Central & State Information Commissions** → Monitor implementation, handle appeals and complaints.

2. **Public Information Officers (PIOs)** → Designated in every public authority to provide requested information.

Key Challenges

1. **Expanding Definition of 'Personal Information':** The original Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act protected individual privacy but mandated that information denied to Parliament cannot be denied to citizens. Now, the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill** interprets "person" broadly (including families, firms, and more), **allowing up to 90% of government information to be denied as "personal."**
2. **Natural Person vs. Legal Entity Debate:** Courts and administrative authorities lack a unified definition of "person," causing inconsistencies in disclosure. The DPDP Bill, if adopted, will trump all other transparency laws, further discouraging public information officers (PIOs) from sharing data.
3. **Incentivized Non-Disclosure:** High penalties for disclosure errors under new rules encourage PIOs to err on the side of denial. This creates an "RDI"—Right to Deny Information—environment, undermining proactive good governance.
4. **Transparency Versus Privacy Conflict:** The RTI Act's exemption for privacy was narrowly drafted, but current trends transform it into a catch-all denial, prioritizing administrative convenience and risk aversion over the original public interest aim.

UPSC Fact: More than 3 million RTI applications were filed annually before COVID, and RTI was key in exposing issues from corruption to social welfare leaks.

Global Practices

Country	Approach to RTI and Data Privacy
UK	Freedom of Information Act (FOI) with defined exceptions, independent Information Commissioner's Office adjudicates access and privacy conflicts
USA	Proactive disclosure under FOIA, limited exemption for "personally identifiable information," strong whistleblower protection
Canada	Open disclosure default, privacy/interests exceptions reviewed by external ombudsmen; mandatory public interest override
Australia	Mandatory public interest tests; administrative appeals for denials
Germany	Data protection overseen by independent authorities, robust judicial review of access refusals

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
Second Administrative Reforms Commission	Maintain a narrow definition of privacy, strengthen RTI default disclosure, subject all exceptions to public interest tests
Law Commission of India	Clarify "personal" definitions, ensure external review of denials, balance RTI and privacy by limiting scope of non-disclosure
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice	Mandate regular review of RTI jurisprudence, audit the impact of new data protection laws on citizen access
Central Information Commission (CIC)	Prescribe uniform practices for PIOs, enforce proactive disclosure norms, penalize arbitrary denials

Way Forward

1. **Narrow and Clarify 'Personal Information':** Reform the RTI Act and DPDP Bill to define "personal information" narrowly, with explicit public interest overrides and external appeal mechanisms for denied information.
2. **Safeguard Proactive Disclosure:** Mandate proactive publication of routine data, government decisions, and official signatures, allowing scrutiny without relying solely on RTI requests.
3. **Strengthen Whistleblower and PIO Protections:** Cap penalties for well-intentioned disclosures, provide training and legal support for PIOs, and penalize only willful violations.
4. **Enhance Public and Media Engagement:** Encourage wider citizen awareness, media campaigns, and civil society monitoring to defend and revitalize the RTI's founding principles.
5. **Institutionalize Review and Grievance Redress:** Establish fast-track appeals, judicial audits, and annual impact reports linking RTI to policy correction and public trust.

UPSC Fact: Section 8 of the RTI Act explicitly requires that exemptions "must be interpreted strictly and in public interest."

"Where a society has chosen to accept democracy as its creedal faith, it is elementary that the citizens ought to know what their government is doing."

– Justice P N Bhagwati.



Conclusion

The RTI Act embodies the spirit of democratic accountability—but must be protected from erosion by overbroad privacy laws, bureaucratic apathy, or shifting interpretations. India's democracy depends on real transparency, citizen access, and the courage to keep government answerable to the people.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which reform best preserves the core purpose of the RTI Act in the face of data privacy and bureaucratic denial?

- a) Expanding "personal information" to cover all government records
- b) Limiting the denial to information with genuine privacy risk and providing public interest override and appeal
- c) Penalizing all PIO disclosures by default
- d) Abolishing routine proactive disclosure

Answer: B) Limiting the denial to information with genuine privacy risk and providing public interest override and appeal

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "The rising tide of privacy and data protection laws risks undermining India's Right to Information regime. Critically analyze the challenges and propose reforms, drawing on committee recommendations and global best practice."

Student Notes 

Bringing global education home

Author: Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar **Source:** The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Education Policy, Regulation, International Relations)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Human Capital, R&D, Skill Building)

Introduction

India is witnessing a major shift in **higher education policy, as top foreign universities open campuses in the country for the first time**. This development, catalyzed by progressive University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations and Ministry of Education initiatives, opens new opportunities for students and advances India's ambition to become a global education hub. The move marks an inflection point in India's academic landscape, enabling both economic gains and educational reform.

Constitutional Provisions Supporting Education in India

The Indian Constitution ensures education through **Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), Fundamental Duties, and Language Rights**.

1. Fundamental Rights

- **Article 21A** – Provides **Right to Free and Compulsory Education** for children aged **6–14 years**.
- **Article 28** – Grants freedom regarding **religious instruction** in educational institutions.
- **Article 30** – Empowers **minorities** to establish and administer their own educational institutions.

2. Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs)

- **Article 41** – Advocates the **right to education, work, and public assistance** in special circumstances.
- **Article 45** – Directs the State to provide **early childhood care** and **free & compulsory education** for children below 6 years.

3. Fundamental Duties

- **Article 51A(k)** – Makes it the duty of **parents/guardians** to ensure education for children aged **6–14 years**.

4. Language Rights in Education

- **Article 350A** – Requires states to provide **primary education in the mother tongue** for children of linguistic minorities.

Education in British India

Key Committees & Commissions

Macaulay (1835) – Introduced English education; aimed to create "English-minded" Indians.

Wood's Despatch (1854) – 'Magna Carta of Indian Education'; structured primary, secondary & university system; promoted women & teacher training.

Hunter Commission (1882–86) – Strengthened primary & secondary education; promoted vernacular languages & female education.

Raleigh Commission (1902) – Linked higher education with industrial & vocational training.

Sadler Commission (1917–19) – Proposed a 3-tier education system; emphasized vocational & university education.

Hartog Committee (1929) – Highlighted low literacy; recommended expansion of secondary education.

Sargent Plan (1944) – Focused on primary education for all & technical/higher education development.

Key Challenges

1. **Regulatory Complexity and Quality Assurance:** Global universities setting up shop in India must align with stringent UGC and National Education Policy (NEP) norms, address diverse accreditation frameworks, and adapt quality assurance mechanisms to local needs.
2. **Equitable Access and Affordability:** While foreign universities may target elite students, there is a need to ensure opportunities for economically weaker sections and prevent widening educational inequities.

- Integration with Local Ecosystem:** Seamless collaboration between foreign and Indian institutions—on curriculum, research, and faculty—remains a challenge, as does ensuring alignment with domestic reforms like multidisciplinary and digital learning.
- Brain Drain and Retention:** Attracting top students and faculty to Indian campuses rather than overseas locations requires robust facilities, international-standard teaching, and progressive pedagogies.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Model/Examples
UAE (Dubai, Abu Dhabi)	“Academic free zones” with world university branches and local partnerships
China (Suzhou, Shanghai)	Co-branded campuses (e.g., NYU-Shanghai), joint degree programs, global faculty
Singapore	Partnering with Yale, Duke, INSEAD on city campuses, cutting-edge research clusters
Qatar (Education City)	International universities sharing infrastructure and labs, integration with local needs
Malaysia	Tax holidays, sector incentives, and accreditation bridges for foreign universities

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Main Suggestions
NEP 2020 Implementation Committee	Encourage foreign university presence, ensure regulatory alignment, promote multidisciplinary innovation
UGC Task Force	Streamlined single-window clearances, robust quality benchmarks, tuition fee regulation for inclusivity
NITI Aayog	Leverage global partnerships for R&D, upskill domestic faculty, foster innovation clusters on campuses
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education	Monitor socio-economic impact, ensure scholarships for meritorious but disadvantaged students

Way Forward

- Facilitate Regulatory Clarity and Quality:** Adopt clear, streamlined approval processes, transparent accreditation, and robust quality audits to guarantee world-class standards without bureaucratic bottlenecks.
- Prioritize Equity and Inclusion:** Mandate need- and merit-based scholarships, diversify student recruitment, and ensure that access to flagship foreign campuses benefits all social segments.
- Forge Deep Research and Innovation Linkages:** Promote joint research, faculty exchanges, and innovation labs between Indian and foreign institutions in fields like AI, public health, energy, and urban planning.

UPSC Fact: The NEP 2020 explicitly calls for making India a global study destination and easing norms for reputable foreign institutions. **The UGC was officially established in 1953, inaugurated by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Education Minister. It became a statutory body under the UGC Act of 1956, tasked with coordination, funding, and maintenance of standards in Indian higher education.**

The UGC (2023) guidelines allow foreign universities to set up wholly owned campuses in India, provided they are globally ranked in the top 500 or demonstrate high standards in research and innovation.

4. **Integrate with Indian Reforms:** Align foreign campus curricula and pedagogies with Indian priorities such as multidisciplinary education, digital learning, and community engagement.
5. **Monitor Social and Economic Impact:** Track employment, upskilling, and R&D contributions; periodically review tuition policies, campus operations, and their role in India's global academic reputation.

Conclusion

Allowing world-class foreign universities to establish campuses in India can transform the higher education ecosystem, foster global-standard research and innovation, and help democratize opportunities for Indian students. Ensuring regulatory clarity, equity, and meaningful collaboration will be vital for maximizing the gains of this new educational era.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which policy measure would BEST ensure the inclusive success of foreign university campuses in India?

- a) Allowing only elite private institutions to admit students
- b) Mandating affordable scholarships, local research collaborations, and transparent quality audits
- c) Exempting all foreign campuses from Indian accreditation
- d) Restricting joint research to foreign faculty only

Answer: B) Mandating affordable scholarships, local research collaborations, and transparent quality audits

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "India's policy allowing foreign universities to establish campuses promises both opportunity and challenge. Critically analyze the regulatory, equity, and innovation dimensions, suggesting robust mechanisms for educational and societal benefit, using global and Indian committee insights."



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Positioning India in an Unruly World

Author: M.K. Narayanan **Source:** The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (Foreign Policy, Strategic Autonomy, Global Institutions)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Technology, Security, Economic Diplomacy)

Introduction

In a volatile global context marked by U.S.-China rivalry, disrupted alliances, and shifting technological frontiers, India faces the urgent task of recalibrating its grand strategy. The editorial examines **India's journey toward "middle power" status and its growing aspirations to be a "great power," while warning of continued challenges—both domestic and external—as India navigates an unruly and competitive international order.**

Key Challenges

1. **Shifting Geopolitical Alliances:** The world is starkly divided: **"great powers,"** especially the U.S. and China, are preoccupied with competition and their own ambitions. India's balancing act between old partners (the West) and new relationships (Russia, Global South, Indo-Pacific states) comes under stress as realpolitik replaces ideology.
2. **Unstable Path to "Great Power" Status:** Despite mounting economic and strategic ambition, India still struggles with weaknesses: internal cohesion, capacity gaps, and a lack of technological supremacy that major powers wield.
3. **Technology as Pivot for Global Power:** Technological superiority—not just economic or military strength—has become the key differentiator. Without significant investment in R&D, digital infrastructure, and critical technologies, India risks trailing global leaders.
4. **Complex Strategic Autonomy:** India's effort to retain strategic autonomy is tested by evolving regional crises (e.g., West Asia, Ukraine), shifting export markets, and energy vulnerabilities. Even as India moves toward "China Plus One," it must work harder to avoid dependence on any single bloc.

UPSC Fact: The biggest difference between current hegemonic powers and "middle powers" is technological edge—not just GDP or military size.

Global Practices

Country/Bloc	Relevant Model or Strategy
USA-China	Technological arms race: vast R&D investment, global digital standards, military-tech integration
EU	Regulatory superpower: sets global tech, climate, and trade norms through law and standards
Japan & S. Korea	Focus on "core technology" independence, collaborative innovation, supply chain resilience
Australia	Strategic alignment (AUKUS) for tech and security upgrades, reinforcing alliances
Israel	Sustained investment in start-ups, dual-use defense and civilian R&D, flexible security posture

Indian Committee/Expert Panel Suggestions

Committee/Body	Recommendations
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National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)	Prioritize tech innovation, resilience in supply chains, and intelligence infrastructure
Economic Advisory Council to PM (EAC-PM)	Invest in frontier technologies, incentivize private R&D, diversify energy sources
NITI Aayog	Develop digital public goods, upskill workforce, promote indigenous startups
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Deepen multi-alignment, update scenario planning, boost regional partnerships

Way Forward

1. **Deepen Technological Self-Reliance:** Expand high-tech, semiconductor, AI, and quantum investments; incentivize tech start-ups and MSMEs to scale innovation; integrate R&D with security policy.
2. **Institutionalize Flexible Diplomacy:** Strengthen partnerships in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, maneuver tactically in multilateral forums, and avoid permanent alignment with any one bloc.
3. **Strengthen Human Capital and Capacity:** Reform education and skill systems to align with new-age technology, foster cutting-edge research in premier institutes, and attract global talent.
4. **Boost National Security and Resilience:** Secure supply chains, expand cyber and space defense capabilities, and diversify critical imports/exports to reduce strategic vulnerability.
5. **Engage boldly in Global Governance:** Shape international standards and rules, act as a voice for the Global South, and use forums like G20, BRICS, Quad, and the UN to proactively advance India's interests.

UPSC Fact: Initiatives like "Semicon India," "Digital Public Infrastructure," and "PLI for High-Tech" are central to making India a future-ready power.

Conclusion

India's ascent in an unruly world hinges on technological ambition, smart alliances, and strategic flexibility. To sustain its global rise and safeguard sovereignty, India must strengthen innovation ecosystems and adeptly balance great power rivalries through long-term, results-oriented statecraft.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which factor is most critical for India's pursuit of "great power" status in the current global context?

- a) Military alliances only
- b) Technological self-reliance, innovation, and flexibility in alliances
- c) Reliance on traditional export markets
- d) Avoidance of regional engagement

Answer: B) Technological self-reliance, innovation, and flexibility in alliances

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "In a world riven by technology-driven rivalries and unstable alliances, analyze India's path toward great power status. What internal reforms and strategic shifts are needed, drawing on committee recommendations and global best practices?"

Unlocking innovation with India's procurement reforms

Author: Arindam Goswami **Source:** The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Public Procurement, Policy Reform, Research Ecosystem)
- **GS Paper 3:** Indian Economy (Innovation, R&D, Industry Policy, MSME Support)

Introduction

Public procurement has traditionally aimed for **transparency and cost efficiency** but has also—often unintentionally—**constrained innovation and R&D**. Recent reforms in India's **General Financial Rules (GFR)**, including exemptions for R&D procurement and new financial thresholds, mark a pivotal shift. The editorial explores how procurement can be an engine for homegrown innovation, R&D advances, and industrial modernization.

UPSC Fact: The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) and recent GFR changes (2023) allow for bespoke, quality-led procurement exempt from L1 price thresholds in R&D and innovation—aimed at promoting advanced tech and dynamic vendors.

Key Challenges

1. **Procurement's Historic Rigidity:** Standard procurement rules often favor the lowest cost and standardized goods, sidelining novel products, smaller innovators, and risky R&D-driven solutions.
2. **Difficulty in Sourcing Innovation:** Without dedicated innovation-focused policies or thresholds, public procurement rarely spurs private sector R&D or early adoption of advanced technologies.
3. **Fragmented Systems and Complex Bureaucracy:** Innovation demands specialized, flexible procurement systems and inter-agency collaboration—but India's frameworks have often been centralized and risk-averse.
4. **Global Best Practice Gap:** Countries with advanced procurement systems (e.g., Germany, Finland, Israel) use innovation-targeted "mission procurement" to create demand for new technologies, something India has only recently begun to emulate.



Global Practices

Country	Best Practice Model
Germany	Innovation Agency (NOW/NOWA) champions "mission procurement," directly funding and piloting R&D for public sector needs
Finland	Procurement as a research variable; public agencies co-finance pilots and field-testing of early-stage technologies
Israel	Mandates government to buy innovative products/services where possible, linking procurement to nationwide R&D aims
EU	Joint procurement for cutting-edge green technologies, digital solutions, and pandemic responses; cross-border alliances
USA	Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) drive technology breakthroughs through federal procurement

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
NITI Aayog Innovation Task Force	Adopt “Mission-Oriented Procurement,” diversify vendor base, foster start-ups through targeted procurement
Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT)	Simplify processes for MSMEs, enable trials and pilots in public contracts
Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)	Use procurement to upgrade research commercialization, foster partnerships with private innovators
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry	Regularly assess procurement outcomes, benchmark with global peers, recommend MSME-friendly modifications

Way Forward

- Institutionalize Innovation Procurement Cells:** Establish dedicated innovation procurement teams—empowered to run pilots, collaborate with start-ups, and adopt new tech flexibly.
- Expand and Monitor Mission-Oriented Procurement:** Scale targeted procurement for research-driven products in strategic sectors—health, energy, defense, and digitalization—allowing for outcome-based contracts and direct R&D funding.
- Foster MSME & Start-up Participation:** Lower entry barriers, simplify documentation, and support consortia, ensuring that smaller firms can access public contracts for innovative solutions.
- Align with Academic and Research Institutions:** Leverage university and lab capacities for pilot procurement, “test-bedding” solutions, and spinning off R&D-driven enterprises.
- Global Benchmarking and Cross-Sector Alliances:** Adopt best practices from Germany, Israel, and Finland, using alliances and federated procurement for high-impact national missions.

UPSC Fact: India’s Public Procurement Policy mandates 25% of orders to be placed with MSMEs, but innovation procurement is just beginning to be mainstreamed.

Conclusion

Procurement reform is now a strategic lever to ignite India’s innovation ecosystem, bridge public-private divides, and modernize key sectors. Implementing agile, mission-driven procurement and supporting start-ups and MSMEs will secure India’s place among global innovation leaders.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which step will most effectively turn public procurement into a catalyst for innovation in India?

- Relying solely on price-based selection
- Institutionalizing mission-oriented procurement and lowering barriers for MSMEs and start-ups
- Mandating only large firms participate
- Avoiding collaboration with research institutions

Answer: B) Institutionalizing mission-oriented procurement and lowering barriers for MSMEs and start-ups

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Public procurement, if reformed, can drive innovation and economic competitiveness. Critically examine India’s new procurement framework, key challenges, and propose reforms with reference to global models and committee suggestions.

Different Ball Game – Asia Cup no-handshake moment shows India is redrawing lines of sportsmanship

Author: Sriram Veera **Source:** The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (International Relations, Diplomacy, Soft Power)
- **GS Paper 1:** Society (Sports and Nationhood, Culture, Changing Social Norms)

Introduction

The refusal by the Indian cricket team to engage in a **post-match handshake with Pakistani players at the Asia Cup signifies a turning point in the relationship between sports and politics**. No longer insulated as a diplomatic bridge, sporting gestures now reflect a recalibrated civility suited to evolving national interests, shifting public sentiment, and contemporary geopolitics.

Key Challenges

1. **Blurring of Sports and Politics:** The traditional ideal that sports remain above politics is eroding, as national policies and international tensions increasingly shape how teams interact, both on and off the field.
2. **Shifting Symbols of Civility:** India's stance—playing when required, but withholding overt gestures—reflects a new kind of sports diplomacy that privileges restraint over ritual, signifying national autonomy and recalibrated soft power.
3. **Public and Diaspora Perceptions:** Such incidents resonate widely with Indian and Pakistani diaspora, shaping identity, influencing soft power narratives, and sparking debate on what constitutes sportsmanship.
4. **Potential Global Influence:** India's approach may set precedents for handling sports events amid diplomatic disputes, with implications for international best practices in sports diplomacy.

***UPSC Fact:** Cricket diplomacy has previously played a major role in India-Pakistan thaw (e.g., 1987, 2004), but growing security and political realities increasingly limit such engagements.*

Global Practices

Country/Event	Approach/Trend
USA–Cuba Baseball	Used handshakes as powerful symbols of rapprochement (2016 Obama visit)
North-South Korea	Carefully staged encounters; handshakes mediated as high-stakes political acts
Israel–Arab States	Boycotts, withheld gestures, and staged interactions reflecting deep-seated conflict
China-Japan	Ping-pong diplomacy used handshakes to catalyze diplomatic opening
FIFA/IOC	Generally promote handshakes, but allow context-based exceptions for security and political tensions

Indian Committee Recommendations

Committee/Body	Recommendations
Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)	Adapt sports diplomacy to national interest and security context; protocol review ahead of tense encounters
Department of Sports, Ministry of Youth Affairs	Prioritize athlete security; assess risks before symbolic engagements

NITI Aayog (Culture/Sport Policy Groups)	Foster sports as cultural diplomacy where feasible, but evolve context-driven standards
Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs	Frame annual sports diplomacy strategy, factoring in current bilateral relations

Way Forward

- 1. Flexible Protocols for International Sports:** Develop event-specific guidelines, allowing symbolic gestures (like handshakes) to be withheld or adapted based on current diplomatic climate and security risks.
- 2. Leverage Sports for Strategic Dialogue:** Continue to use sports as a confidence-building measure when appropriate, but without mandatory engagement where national interests are at risk.
- 3. Enhance Communication with Public and Diaspora:** Proactively explain the rationale for changed gestures to global audiences, reducing misunderstanding and misinformation.
- 4. Institutionalize Scenario Analysis:** Monitor global best practices and update Indian sports diplomacy guidelines regularly, focusing on the evolving interplay of sports, security, and foreign policy.
- 5. Document Soft Power Impact:** Track how such actions affect India's global image, diaspora attitudes, and relationships with other nations.

UPSC Fact: Since the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Indian sports teams have engaged with Pakistan only under stringent conditions and at neutral venues, per MEA and Sports Ministry guidelines.

Conclusion

As sports and politics intersect more visibly, India is redefining its approach to international civility, reflecting a pragmatic blend of national interest and modern diplomacy. Such moments are no longer merely about the game—they mirror a country's stance in an increasingly complex global arena.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. What is the most contextually sound approach for India's sports diplomacy with rival nations?

- Mandate symbolic gestures like handshakes in every encounter
- Withhold or modify such gestures depending on security, diplomatic relations, and national priorities
- Adopt a permanent ban on all sports engagements
- Ignore all public and diaspora perceptions

Answer: B) Withhold or modify such gestures depending on security, diplomatic relations, and national priorities

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Recent events show that sportsmanship and diplomacy are becoming inseparable in India's foreign strategy. Discuss the implications of this shift and recommend a robust framework for sports diplomacy that balances tradition, security, and national interest, citing global and Indian examples."

Student Notes 

Unseen labour, exploitation: the hidden human cost of Artificial Intelligence

Author: Nivedita S. **Source:** The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 3:** Science & Technology (AI, Digital Economy, Labour), Economy (Informal Sector, Globalisation, Inequality)
- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Labour Rights, Regulation, Protection for Platform Workers)
- **GS Paper 4:** Ethics (Human Rights at Work, Exploitation, Accountability in Tech)

Introduction

Global advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI)—**chatbots, content moderation, voice/image tech, and especially LLMs like ChatGPT and Gemini—are built on the invisible, low-paid labour of workers in developing countries.** These "ghost workers" perform crucial data labelling, content moderation, and cleanup tasks, often under poor wage and insecure working conditions, bearing significant economic and mental health costs.

Key Challenges

- 1. Invisible Backbone of AI:** AI systems rely on data labelled by humans—tagging images, transcribing voice, filtering spam, removing hate speech, and more. This work is mostly done by low-wage workers, primarily from India, Africa, and developing Asia.
- 2. Low Pay and Harsh Conditions:** Annotators can earn less than \$2 an hour for gruelling, repetitive tasks, facing job insecurity, lack of benefits, and isolation. For example, Kenyan content moderators for OpenAI

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Machine Learning	Neural Networks	Natural Language Processing	Robotics
Using sample data to train computer programs to recognize patterns based on algorithms.	Computer systems designed to imitate the neurons in a brain.	The ability to understand speech, as well as understand and analyze documents.	Machines that can assist people without actual human involvement.
			

UPSC Fact: India hosts a large share of the world's digital ghost workforce, especially for US and European AI firms, drawn by low costs and English proficiency.

Factwise

- 1. LLMs trained via staged human review:**
 - Data labelled, filtered, and ranked by annotators.
 - Indian, African, and other Global South workers perform bulk of this work.
- 2. Scale of work:**
 - Around 2 lakh Indian workers label data for AI, often for \$2 or less per hour.
 - Kenyan moderators in OpenAI projects earned less than \$2 per hour for viewing/fixing traumatic content.
- 3. Risk:**
 - Up to 90% of LLM "training" data is organized by human annotators, not automated crawling or API scraping.
- 4. Mental impacts:** Repetitive exposure to disturbing content is linked to burnout, depression, and PTSD among "ghost" workers.
- 5. Industry growth figures:** AI services built atop human annotation are projected to be worth \$2 billion by 2030.
- 6. Supply chain opacity:** Much work is gig-based, lacking formal contracts or basic worker protections.

contractors reported earning under \$2/hour.

3. **Mental Health Strains:** Tasks often involve exposure to disturbing, harmful content (pornography, violence, hate speech), without adequate psychological support. “Modern-day slavery” is how some researchers describe their conditions.
4. **Lack of Recognition and Rights:** Most annotation and moderation work is performed anonymously, with scant legal protection, no job security, and little power to demand higher wages or fair treatment.
5. **Complex Supply Chains and Disguised Automation:** LLMs like ChatGPT, Gemini, etc. are trained via human-in-the-loop processes: (1) supervised learning (data annotation), (2) reinforcement learning (feedback labeling), and (3) human preference tweaks. Tasks are outsourced to platforms and agencies, with little transparency over who does the work or how much they are paid.
6. **Disguised Nature of “Automation”:** Even “automated” AI features, such as content moderation or chatbots, are underpinned by constant human review and correction, making algorithmic “autonomy” a myth.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Approach & Issues
USA/EU	Some legal action and unionization for content moderation; ethical audits for Big Tech firms, but most ‘ghost’ work remains offshore
Philippines	BPO hubs for moderation, periodic strikes, worker action for better pay and protections
Kenya	Grassroots campaigns and lawsuits have raised standards, demand pay transparency and mental health support
EU (AI Act)	Proposals to enforce transparency and require firms to protect digital labour, set minimum standards

Indian Committee Recommendations

Body	Main Recommendations
NITI Aayog AI Policy	Set ethical norms for outsourcing, require fair pay and recognition for digital workers
Ministry of Labour & Employment	Include digital workers in social security, enforce labour codes, mandate wage transparency
Parliamentary Committee on IT	Require employment contracts, provide avenues for grievance redress and regular welfare audits
Justice Srikrishna Data Protection Report	Extend data protection and privacy rights to gig workers, not just end users

Way Forward

1. **Enforce Fair Wages and Worker Rights:** Mandate national and international minimum wage standards for AI gig workers, with binding contracts and basic legal safeguards.
2. **Instituting Transparency:** Require tech firms to disclose workforce size, pay scales, and supply chains for all annotation/moderation contracts.
3. **Mental Health and Social Protections:** AI platforms must provide psychological care, regular breaks, and insurance for content moderation staff.

UPSC Fact: *The Social Security Code, 2020, in India nominally includes gig and platform workers, but practical coverage and enforcement are still limited.*

4. **Audit and Monitor AI Supply Chains:** Government and independent bodies should perform mandatory social audits of tech outsourcing, ensuring compliance.
5. **Worker Representation and Advocacy:** Support unionization, bolster grievance mechanisms, and ensure statutory inclusion in national labour codes.

Conclusion

AI's power emerges from the unseen, often-exploited labour of millions in the Global South.

For ethical digital progress, India and global technology leaders must guarantee recognition, safety, and fair pay for all workers supporting artificial intelligence's rise.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which of the following reforms is BEST suited to address AI's hidden human labour exploitation?

- a) Rely only on voluntary self-regulation by tech firms
- b) Mandate minimum wage standards, transparency, social audits, and grievance redress for all digital annotation work
- c) Outsource without contracts or safeguards
- d) Ignore supply chain conditions as "non-core" issues

Answer: B) Mandate minimum wage standards, transparency, social audits, and grievance redress for all digital annotation work

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "AI's global success hides a deep pool of underprotected, invisible human labour. Examine the ethics and policy challenges involved, and propose robust reforms suited to India's workforce and digital ecosystem, using global and national committee insights."

Student Notes 

Ease of trade – To integrate more closely with global supply chains, India should lower tariffs and relax non-tariff barriers

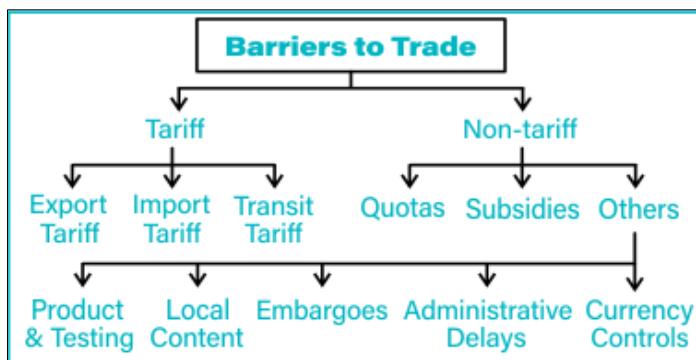
Source: The Hindu

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Trade Policy, International Relations, Regulatory Reform)
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Exports, MSMEs, Global Supply Chains, Tariff/Non-tariff Barriers)

Introduction

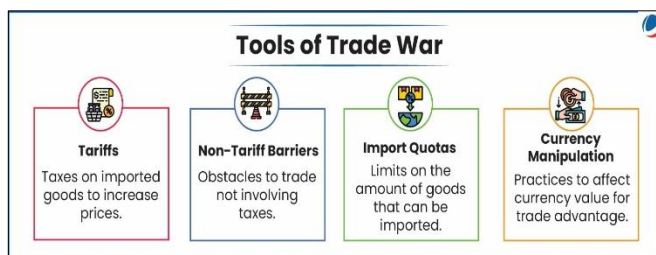
India's ambition to integrate with global supply chains is hampered by high tariffs and widespread non-tariff barriers. **Although there are signs of progress in trade negotiations—such as with the US and EU—the persistence of steep tariffs and restrictive Quality Control Orders (QCOs) threatens to harm exports, especially from sectors like aquaculture and MSMEs.**



Key Issues & Challenges

1. **Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers:** A 50% US tariff on Indian shrimp led to half of Andhra Pradesh's orders being cancelled. While India lines up free trade agreements, barriers such as QCOs (Quality Control Orders) covering 769 products across 187 categories act as trade barriers—raising costs and reducing competitiveness.
2. **MSME and Industry Concerns:** Reports show MSMEs, textile, and pipe industries have all complained about the inflationary effect of QCOs on input prices and international competitiveness by making Indian goods costlier.
3. **Protectionism and Policy Lobbying:** Most QCOs are issued to protect domestic industry from low-quality imports, but they become obstacles and lobbying tools. Even NITI Aayog Vice-Chairperson Suman Bery called QCOs on inputs a “malign intervention.”
4. **Regulatory Complexity:** Opaque and protectionist interventions (both tariffs and non-tariff) create compliance issues, unpredictability, and dampen India's attractiveness for global supply chain investors.

UPSC Fact: As of March 2025, 187 QCOs impacting 769 products—ranging from water bottles to pipes and furniture—are active in India, and many are based on the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade's recommendations.



Global and Indian Approaches

Entity	Approach or Reform
EU	Active negotiation for tariff and NTB reductions; technical standard harmonization
US	Targeted retaliatory tariffs (shrimp case), in line with trade policy objectives
MSME Sector	Raised concerns about QCO-linked input cost surges, competitiveness losses

NITI Aayog	High-level committee on non-financial regulatory reforms advises relaxation of input QCOs
Finance/Textile Ministries	Support for lobbying against QCOs, identifying their negative impact on value chains

Committee and Expert Recommendations

Body/Expert	Recommendations
NITI Aayog High-level Committee (2024)	Remove/reduce QCOs on intermediate and raw material inputs, enable MSME competitiveness
Department for Promotion of Industry	Review and streamline QCOs, ensure they only apply to end-use, not inputs
Parliamentary Committee on Commerce	Ensure transparency, impact evaluation for every tariff or QCO intervention
Industry Associations (Textile/Export)	Independent audit and rollback of protectionist QCOs that harm exporters

Way Forward

- Reduce/Eliminate QCOs on Inputs:** Focus QCOs only on finished goods to protect consumers, not on raw materials or components needed for export manufacturing.
- Lower Tariffs Consistently:** Give clear policy signals by reducing tariffs, thus enhancing global investor trust and integrating Indian firms into world supply chains.
- Transparency and Predictability:** Harmonize regulations, publish clear standards and review QCOs/tariffs regularly with stakeholder input, reducing unpredictability for both exporters and buyers.
- Policy Discipline and Non-protectionism:** Avoid ad hoc interventions; resist the temptation to impose new trade barriers—use WTO-compliant remedies for proven cases of dumping only.
- Support MSMEs and Supply Chain Integration:** Provide regulatory clarity, ease compliance burdens, and prioritize reforms to lift MSME/external sector growth and job creation.

UPSC Fact: Even the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry has called for a finance ministry review of QCOs, as QCO-imposed costs erode export profits.

Conclusion

For India to realize its supply chain ambitions and export-led growth, it must rationalize tariffs and QCOs, embrace open trade, and provide a predictable regulatory regime that builds investor and exporter confidence. Sustained reform, not piecemeal protectionism, will secure India's place in global value chains.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

- Q1. Which of the following reforms is MOST likely to improve India's integration with global supply chains?**
- Maintaining broad QCOs and high tariffs on all products
 - Removing QCOs from inputs/raw materials, lowering tariffs, and ensuring regulatory transparency
 - Imposing frequent new non-tariff barriers in response to lobbying
 - Protecting every industry sector through ad hoc interventions

Answer: B) Removing QCOs from inputs/raw materials, lowering tariffs, and ensuring regulatory transparency

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Non-tariff barriers and QCOs, even when intended to raise quality, risk undermining India's supply chain ambitions by raising export input costs. Critically examine this dilemma and propose a reform agenda drawing on Indian and global best practices."

Student Notes 

Between profit and promise – With roots in socialism and a stake in capitalism, India's economic future lies in pragmatic reinvention

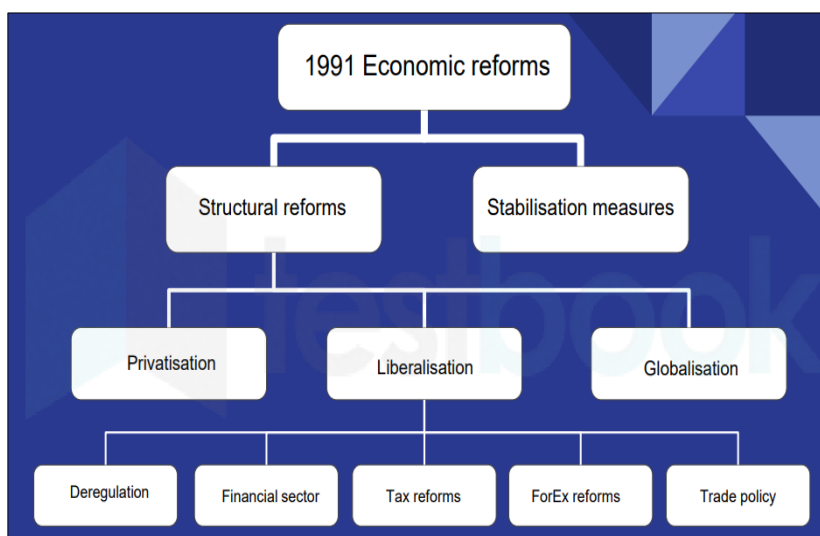
Author: Shashi Tharoor **Source:** The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 3:** Economy (Economic Models, Liberalisation, Poverty & Inequality, Public-Private Partnership, Indian Growth Story)
- **GS Paper 2:** Governance (Social Justice, Welfare, Policy Evolution, Regulation)

Introduction

India's economic trajectory is uniquely defined by a mix of socialist legacy and capitalist reform. The nation's journey from **Nehruvian socialism to the liberalized, market-driven policies of the post-1991 era** remains a case study in pragmatic adaptation, balancing welfarism, state interventions, and vibrant private enterprise. This delicate balance between public good and profit is central to the country's ongoing economic reinvention.



Key Themes & Challenges

1. **Enduring Socialist Influence:** India's economic foundations rested on public ownership, planned economics, and state-led development—prioritizing social equity, rural welfare, and self-reliance, with state intervention in key sectors.
2. **Shift to Capitalism and Market Reform:** Fiscal pressures, inefficiency, and the 1991 crisis ushered in **liberalization, privatization, and global integration**. Economic activity shifted strongly towards **private entrepreneurship, FDI, and “start-up”** culture.
3. **Blended Economic Identity:** Today, India exhibits a hybrid pathway—embracing the wealth and innovation potential of capitalism while retaining state welfarism, regulation, and periodic redistribution. The goal is not absolute free markets, but balanced growth that accounts for social equity and basic security.
4. **Complex Social & Political Factors:** Unlike in the West, Indian economic debates are deeply entwined with identity, historical experience, family networks, and inequality. Policies reflect the aspiration for both growth and protection against exclusion or instability.

Note: LPG reforms refer to the economic policy changes in India in 1991, centered on **Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization**, designed to reduce government controls, transfer state-owned enterprises to the private sector, and integrate India into the global economy. These reforms, enacted under Prime Minister [P.V. Narasimha Rao](#) and Finance Minister [Manmohan Singh](#), aimed to address India's economic challenges, boost growth, increase foreign reserves, and make the economy more competitive on the world stage.

5. **Persistent Tension and Discontent:** Even with rapid growth, many youth express impatience at perceived unfairness or the slow trickle-down of prosperity, asking why opportunity is not more widely shared. Anxiety about employment, inequality, and social mobility remains high, despite innovation and wealth creation.

UPSC Fact: India remains among the few major countries where both a major public sector and vibrant private sector coexist as growth drivers. India is among the few large economies in the world that follows a **true mixed economy model**, where a strong **public sector** and a dynamic **private sector** coexist as complementary growth drivers.

- The **public sector** anchors strategic and social needs—railways, defence, energy, space, and welfare services—ensuring equity, national security, and long-term infrastructure creation.
- The **private sector** injects efficiency, innovation, capital, and global competitiveness in areas like IT services, telecom, e-commerce, manufacturing, and renewable energy.

Global Practices

Country/Block	Model/Key Features
US/Europe	Tension between market capitalism and social safety nets; recent inflation revival of welfare debates
China	“Socialism with Chinese characteristics”—market-led growth under one-party state control
Scandinavian Countries	Strong combination of social welfare models with high competitiveness and innovation
Latin America	Attempts at redistribution and welfare, often struggling with efficiency and corruption

Indian Committee & Expert Recommendations

Committee/ Expert Panel	Main Recommendations
Economic Advisory Council to PM (EAC-PM)	Flexible economic models—pursue welfare where needed, but foster innovation and market efficiency
NITI Aayog	Targeted public expenditure, more role for PPPs, regular review of welfare outcomes UPSC Fact: The NITI Aayog’s “Strategy for New India@75” emphasizes blended solutions—public provision + innovation-driven capitalism
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry	Remove red tape, ensure smooth business regulation while monitoring social impact
Planning Commission Legacy Reports	Adaptive balancing of equity and growth via incremental, evidence-based reform

Way Forward

1. **Balanced Model of Inclusive Growth:** Permit robust private sector innovation, investment, and competition while retaining targeted state welfarism for vulnerable groups.
2. **Responsive Public Policy:** Avoid rigid ideology—adapt regulatory frameworks and welfare schemes to changing needs, using data and evidence to guide incremental change.
3. **Upskill Youth, Foster Opportunity:** Invest in universal, quality education and upskilling, with public-private collaboration for high-value jobs and entrepreneurship.

4. **Foster Social Justice without Stifling Dynamism:** Regulate for basic safety and equity, but do not suffocate dynamism by excessive control or misplaced protectionism.
5. **Nurture Local Solutions and Adaptation:** Policies should reflect both global experience and India's unique social fabric, enabling pragmatic trade-offs rather than one-size-fits-all models.

Conclusion

India's economic future will **depend on sustaining a pragmatic blend of profit and promise—reconciling markets with social justice, and fostering innovation without neglecting inclusion.** The country's remarkable resilience and adaptability are its greatest assets for navigating a swiftly evolving global economy.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which approach BEST reflects India's current economic path as described in the article?

- a) Unfettered laissez-faire capitalism without safety nets
- b) Complete return to state socialism and public ownership
- c) A pragmatic blend of market-driven growth, state welfare, and adaptive regulation
- d) Isolation from global trends

Answer: C) A pragmatic blend of market-driven growth, state welfare, and adaptive regulation

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "India's economic pathway lies between market-driven capitalism and tradition-rooted socialism. Critically examine this blended model, its benefits, limitations, and ongoing challenges, with reference to policy recommendations and global debates."

Student Notes 

Partners in Turbulent Times – PM Modi's Japan visit reaffirmed shared stake in innovation, multilateral diplomacy

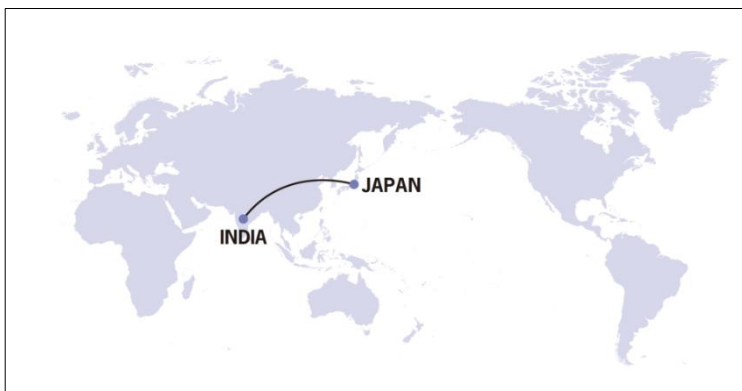
Author: Keiichi Ono **Source:** The Indian express

UPSC GS-wise Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations (India-Japan, Multilateral Diplomacy, Bilateral Cooperation)
- **GS Paper 3:** Innovation, Economic Relations, Defence, Technology Transfer

Introduction

Prime Minister Modi's recent **visit to Japan** highlights the critical India-Japan partnership in a rapidly changing global landscape. As both nations face geo-economic upheaval, the visit reaffirmed a shared interest in innovation, supply chain security, technology transfer, and robust multilateral engagement—positioning the relationship as indispensable for both regional stability and global governance.



India–Japan Relations: Key Dimensions

1. Defence & Security Cooperation

- **Institutional Frameworks:**
 - ✓ Defence Equipment & Technology Cooperation Agreement (2015).
 - ✓ Agreement on Security of Classified Military Information.
 - ✓ **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (2019).**
 - ✓ **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA, 2020)** for reciprocal logistics support.
 - ✓ Regular **Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation (JWG-DETC).**
 - ✓ **First Joint Services Staff Talks (2023)** – boosting tri-service interoperability.
- **Exercises:** Malabar, Milan, JIMEX, Dharma Guardian, Coast Guard cooperation.
- **Technology Cooperation:** Amendments to Japan's Three Principles (2023) now allow greater equipment & tech transfer to India.

2. Indo-Pacific & Regional Cooperation

1. **Strategic Alignment:** India's **Act East Policy** & **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)** complement Japan's **Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).**
2. **Institutional Mechanisms:**
 - **Act East Forum (2017)** – key consultation platform.
 - Joint statements reiterate **Free and Open Indo-Pacific** vision.
3. **Multilateral Cooperation:** Quad, International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI).
4. **Development Partnership:** Japan is India's **largest ODA donor**, financing infrastructure (metros, freight corridors, connectivity projects).

3. Trade & Investment

- **Economic Agreements:**
 - ✓ Review of **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**.
 - ✓ Financial linkages via **GIFT City** initiatives.
- **Japan's Strategic Approach:** India as a major partner in **China+1 strategy** → alternative manufacturing base.
- **Investment Commitment:** Japan pledged **USD 68 billion by 2035** in India.
- **Economic Security:** Launch of **Joint Action Plan on Economic Security** to safeguard critical supply chains, semiconductors, and emerging tech cooperation.

Key Themes & Challenges

1. **Innovation and Industrial Partnership:** The visit featured the launch of Maruti Suzuki's new battery electric vehicle line in Haryana and deepening R&D ties in advanced sectors—robotics, AI, mobility, disaster prevention, and clean energy.
2. **Strategic and Supply Chain Coordination:** India and Japan are jointly building resilient supply chains, highlighted by support for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and collaboration on quality infrastructure, digital connectivity, and energy security.
3. **Multilateral Diplomacy and Security:** The trip underscored joint commitment to Quad (Japan, US, India, Australia) and partnerships in Indo-Pacific maritime security, climate change, and humanitarian relief.
4. **People-to-People Ties and Talent Exchange:** Expanded student, tech, and professional mobility programs, language training, and arts/cultural partnerships aim to forge a future-ready workforce and deepen mutual understanding.
5. **Shared Worldview in Turbulence:** Japan and India both emphasize rules-based order, respect for sovereignty, and multilateral cooperation—balancing China's growing assertiveness and ensuring supply chain security across Asia.

Fact wise

1. Maruti Suzuki Battery EV Plant in Haryana inaugurated.
2. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) endorsed as a critical supply chain initiative.
3. Major push for Indo-Pacific maritime security, climate innovation, and people-to-people exchanges.
4. Joint "Strategic and Global Partnership" highlighted as a pillar of both countries' foreign policy.
5. Emphasis on high-level government and industry dialogues to promote future-focused joint projects.

Global Practices

Country/Region	Approach/Model
US-Japan	Deep defence and tech partnership (AUKUS, science alliances)
EU-Japan	Economic Partnership Agreement, value chains, joint green economy projects
ASEAN-Japan	Quality infrastructure, digital, and connectivity cooperation
Germany-India	"Green and Sustainable Development Partnership" – shared R&D, vocational training, people mobility
QUAD	Joint initiatives on Indo-Pacific strategy, supply chain integrity, tech governance

Indian Committee & Policy Recommendations

Committee/Agency	Recommendations
NITI Aayog–MEI Taskforce	Expand joint innovation funds, streamline startup mobility, promote clean tech exchanges
India-Japan Business Leaders Forum	Invest in digital skilling, promote SME cross-investment, incentivize R&D in both countries
MEA Indo-Pacific Division	Advance trilateral and Quad coordination for maritime security and technology resilience
Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs	Scale language training and university collaborations in STEM fields

Way Forward

- 1. Accelerate Joint Innovation Projects:** Leverage co-investment in advanced manufacturing, clean mobility, AI, and green technologies.
- 2. Deepen Supply Chain and Technology Cooperation:** Synchronize strategies in critical minerals, semiconductors, resilient logistics, and cybersecurity.
- 3. Enhance Talent and Cultural Exchange:** Establish more mobility corridors for students, engineers, and professionals; expand language and cultural programs to nurture mutual empathy.
- 4. Strengthen Multilateral Engagement:** Align India-Japan platforms with Quad, G20, and Indo-Pacific partners for broader governance reform, climate action, and digital rules.
- 5. Advance Co-development for Global Challenges:** Build on shared democratic and human-centric values to create models for digital inclusion, sustainable urbanism, and regional connectivity.

Conclusion

India-Japan ties have become an anchor of stability, innovation, and multilateral cooperation in a volatile world. By sustaining high-level engagement and embracing joint challenges—from green tech to maritime security—the partnership forms a key pillar of Asia’s forward-looking, rules-based order.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. What is the single most distinguishing feature of the current India-Japan partnership?

- Exclusive defence focus
- Shared emphasis on innovation, supply chain security, and multilateral rule-making
- Only trade in low-value goods
- Unilateral actions in the Indo-Pacific

Answer: B) Shared emphasis on innovation, supply chain security, and multilateral rule-making

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Discuss how the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership advances innovation, supply chain resilience, and regional order in the Indo-Pacific. Suggest further steps for maximizing its potential in a turbulent global context."

Student Notes 

Equalising Primary Food Consumption in India

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Exam Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice):** Role of NFSA, welfare schemes.
- **GS Paper III (Indian Economy & Agriculture):** Food security, nutrition, PDS reforms, subsidy reforms.
- Possible linkage with **SDG-2: Zero Hunger**.

Introduction

India has made **remarkable progress in reducing poverty** over the last decade. According to the World Bank (2025), the share of people living on less than \$2.15/day has dropped from **16.2% in 2011-12 to 2.3% in 2022-23**. While this reflects strong economic growth and targeted welfare policies, the **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2024** shows that **nutritional inequality persists**, especially in the consumption of pulses and proteins. Thus, the challenge is no longer just poverty alleviation but ensuring **equitable and nutritious food security**.

Key Issues

1. Inequality in Consumption

- Cereals consumption equalised across groups, but pulses intake in **0%-5% group is half of that in 95%-100% group**.
- Poor households spend **40%+ of expenditure on food**, limiting dietary diversity.

2. PDS Limitations

- PDS ensured rice & wheat availability but **failed to integrate pulses, millets, oils**.
- Over 80% cereals distributed via PDS, reinforcing cereal-heavy diets.

3. Urban-Rural Divide

- Rural households more food-deprived (40%) vs urban (10%).
- Access to subsidised nutritious food remains inadequate.

4. Fiscal Burden

- Subsidy on cereals alone strains FCI; expansion to pulses/oils requires restructuring.

5. Hidden Hunger

- Calorie sufficiency ≠ nutrition security. Issues of **stunting, anemia, micronutrient deficiency** continue.

Poverty Estimation in India – Evolution

1. Pre-Independence Phase

- **Dadabhai Naoroji** (Drain of Wealth theory, 1867) first linked poverty to British rule.
- **National Planning Committee (1938) & Bombay Plan (1944)** suggested initial poverty lines.

2. Post-Independence Committees

- **Alagh Committee (1979):** Nutrition-based poverty line for rural & urban India.
- **Lakdawala Committee (1993):** State-specific poverty lines, calorie consumption method.

3. Modern Committees

- **Tendulkar Committee (2009):** Shift to per capita daily consumption; broader poverty line (₹816 rural, ₹1000 urban per month in 2011-12).
- **Rangarajan Committee (2014):** Expanded consumption basket (food + health, housing, education); poverty line ₹972 rural, ₹1407 urban.

4. Recent Methods

- **SECC 2011 (Saxena Committee):** Classified households as *automatically excluded, included, or others*. Basis for welfare targeting.
- **NITI Aayog (Current):** Uses **NSSO data (MOSPI)** for poverty estimates.



Global Practices

1. **Brazil – Zero Hunger Programme:** Subsidised diverse diets (pulses, vegetables, fortified foods).
2. **USA – SNAP (Food Stamps):** Provides access to not just calories but **balanced nutrition**.
3. **Bangladesh – Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF):** Combines rice subsidies with **nutrition-sensitive transfers**.
4. **FAO Recommendation:** Shift focus from calories to **nutrient adequacy and dietary diversity**.

Indian Committee Recommendations

1. **National Food Security Act (2013)** – Legal right to food but limited to cereals.
2. **Shanta Kumar Committee (2015)** – Restructuring of PDS, integration of DBT.
3. **NITI Aayog's Nutrition Strategy** – Diversified food basket (pulses, oil, millets).
4. **Economic Survey 2021-22** – Urged shift from calorie-based subsidies to **nutrition-based subsidies**.

Way Forward for Strengthening Food & Nutrition Security

1. **Expand PDS Basket:** Include **pulses, millets, and edible oils** along with rice and wheat to ensure **balanced nutrition**, addressing hidden hunger and micronutrient deficiencies.
2. **Targeted Subsidies:** Provide maximum support to the **poorest and vulnerable groups**, while gradually shifting **higher-income groups to Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)** for efficiency and fiscal prudence.
3. **Integrate PDS with Poshan Abhiyan:** Converge PDS with **nutrition-focused schemes** (Poshan Abhiyan, ICDS, Mid-Day Meal) to tackle **maternal and child malnutrition** in a holistic manner.
4. **Promote Local Crops:** Mainstream **nutri-cereals (millets, coarse grains)** in procurement and distribution. This not only boosts **climate-resilient agriculture** but also enhances dietary diversity.
5. **Real-Time Monitoring:** Adopt **Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys (HCES)** and **digital tracking systems** to ensure **transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking**.

Conclusion

India's journey from **poverty reduction to nutrition security** is at a turning point. While PDS has succeeded in equalising cereal access, it must evolve to provide **protein-rich, micronutrient-dense diets**. Reforms that expand the food basket, integrate DBT, and promote sustainable crops like millets can ensure **inclusive and equitable food security** in the true sense.

Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With reference to the Public Distribution System (PDS), consider the following:

1. NFSA 2013 legally entitles beneficiaries to subsidised rice, wheat, and pulses.
2. The Shanta Kumar Committee recommended DBT for better efficiency in PDS.
3. PDS has been successful in equalising cereals but not pulses consumption.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| a) 1 and 2 only | b) 2 and 3 only |
| c) 1 and 3 only | d) 1, 2 and 3 |

Answer: B

Mains Practice Questions

Q1. "India has nearly eliminated extreme poverty, but nutritional inequality remains a challenge." Discuss the role of Public Distribution System reforms in ensuring equitable and nutritious food consumption.

India Needs More Focus to Reach SDG 3, a Crucial Goal

Source: the Hindu

UPSC Exam Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice):** Healthcare delivery, UHC, digital health.
- **GS Paper III (Inclusive Growth, SDGs):** Health & nutrition indicators, resource allocation.

Introduction

India ranked **99 out of 167 countries** in the **SDG Index 2025**, showing steady progress from rank 109 in 2024. However, despite improvements in access to services and infrastructure, **health and nutrition indicators remain a concern**. SDG 3, which aims to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,” is critical. India faces significant challenges in **maternal mortality, under-five mortality, life expectancy, and out-of-pocket expenditure**, raising doubts about meeting 2030 targets.

Key Issues in India's Health Sector (2025)

1. Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):

- India's MMR is **97 per 100,000 live births**, above the **SDG target of 70**.
- High maternal deaths reflect gaps in **antenatal care, institutional deliveries, skilled birth attendance, and nutrition among women**.

2. Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR):

- At **32 per 1,000 live births**, it exceeds the target of **25**.
- Causes include **low birth weight, malnutrition, poor neonatal care, and preventable infectious diseases**.

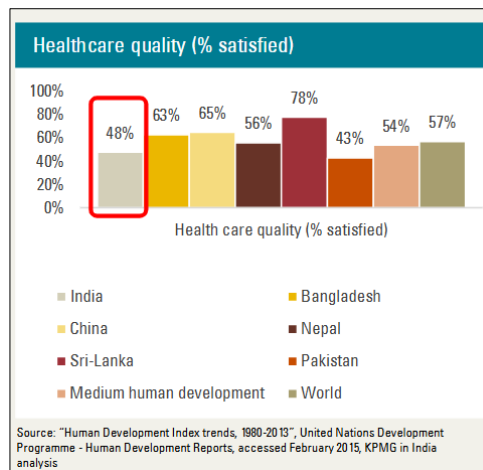
3. Life Expectancy:

- Stagnant at **70 years**, much below developed nations (80+).
- Driven by **high burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**, lifestyle factors, and **unequal access to quality healthcare**.

4. Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE):

- At **13% of total health spending**, nearly double the target (**7.83%**).
- Indicates limited **financial protection, weak health insurance penetration, and high dependence on private healthcare**.

5. Immunisation Coverage:



Key Healthcare Policies & Acts in India

1. Medical Education & Regulation

- *Indian Medical Council Act (1956)* → Regulated medical practice & education.
- *National Medical Commission Act (2019)* → Replaced MCI, promotes transparency, improves medical education standards.

2. Drugs & Healthcare Establishments

- *Drugs & Cosmetics Act (1940)* → Regulates manufacture, import, sale & distribution of drugs/cosmetics.
- *Clinical Establishments (Registration & Regulation) Act (2010)* → Ensures registration, regulation, and minimum quality standards in public & private healthcare facilities.

3. Nursing & Allied Professions

- *Indian Nursing Council Act (1947)* → Governs training & professional standards of nurses and midwives.

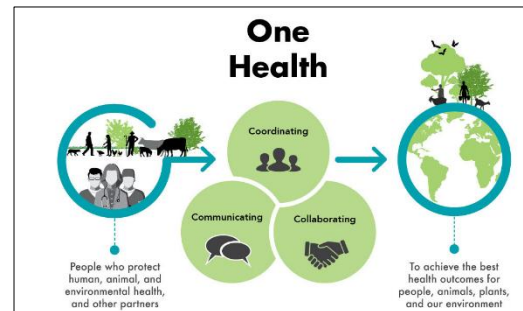
4. Health Policy Framework

- *National Health Policy (2017)* → Focus on **universal health coverage**, affordable & quality healthcare, preventive and promotive

- Achieved **93.23%**, but **universal 100% coverage** remains unfulfilled.
- **Vaccine hesitancy, supply chain gaps, and inequitable outreach** to remote populations persist.

6. Health Access Inequality:

- Rural, tribal, and low-income groups face **limited health infrastructure, affordability challenges, and cultural barriers**.
- Urban–rural divide and **shortage of doctors in rural PHCs** worsen inequality.



Global Practices

1. **Finland (1970s):** Introduced school health reforms (nutrition, hygiene, lifestyle) → reduced cardiovascular disease rates.
2. **Japan:** Curriculum-based health education linked to improved hygiene and life expectancy.
3. **WHO Recommendations:** Emphasis on **UHC (Universal Health Coverage)**, preventive healthcare, and school health programs to reduce long-term costs.

Indian Committee / Policy Recommendations

1. **National Health Policy 2017:** Targeted MMR <100, U5MR <25, and reduction in OOPE.
2. **NITI Aayog – Health Strategy:** Promote telemedicine, digital health, and AI-based diagnostics for rural areas.
3. **Lancet Digital Health Study:** Suggested leveraging health records and digital platforms to bridge urban-rural divides.
4. **Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY):** Aims to reduce catastrophic health expenditure through insurance-based models.

Way Forward.

1. Primary Healthcare & Integration

- Expand **Ayushman Bharat HWCs** with modern tech, trained staff, and integrated preventive, curative, and palliative care.
- Stronger primary care reduces pressure on higher-level hospitals.

2. Healthcare Workforce

- Increase medical schools & improve training quality.
- Scale up **Community Health Officers (CHOs)** training.
- Incentivize doctors/nurses to serve in **rural & underserved areas**.

3. Digital Health & Telemedicine

- Integrate **eSanjeevani & telemedicine platforms** for virtual care, e-prescriptions, and chronic disease management.
- Partner with private & non-profit bodies for rural access.

4. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

- Use PPPs for hospitals, equipment, and rural health centers.
- Provide tax rebates & regulatory support for private investments in healthcare.

5. Universal Health Coverage & Insurance

- Reform **Ayushman Bharat** to include outpatient & diagnostics.
- Make premiums affordable, expand awareness in rural areas.

Conclusion

India's improved rank in the SDG Index is encouraging, but **health indicators lag behind global targets**. Without urgent reforms, India risks missing SDG 3 by 2030. A shift from hospitalisation-centric healthcare to **preventive, equitable, and digital-first health systems** is necessary. Achieving SDG 3 is not just about health—it is central to **economic growth, human development, and sustainable future generations**.

Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following indicators are part of SDG 3 targets?

1. Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)
2. Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR)
3. Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE)
4. School Enrolment Ratio

Options:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- c) 2 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: B

Mains Practice Questions

Q1. Despite progress in poverty reduction and service access, India continues to lag behind on SDG 3 indicators. Analyse the reasons and suggest policy measures to bridge this gap.

Student Notes

The Saudi-Pakistan pact is a dodgy insurance policy

GS Paper UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations – West Asia geopolitics, bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, India's strategic interests.
- **GS Paper 3:** Security – Implications for regional stability, risk management, and India's defense policy.

Introduction

The signing of the **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan marks a new chapter in West Asian power politics**, set against turbulent regional security and shifting alliances. While it appears a victory for future joint defense cooperation, historical experience and current geopolitical realities suggest this pact is primarily for optical effect, lacking concrete substance and sustainability. India must assess its regional impact and recalibrate its strategy accordingly.

***fact:** The Saudi-Pakistan defence relationship—which peaked during the 1979–89 Afghan war with over 20,000 Pakistani troops in Saudi Arabia—has frequently suffered setbacks due to differences over command, operational limits, and Riyadh's shifting priorities.*

Key Issues

1. Historical Limits of Defence Cooperation

- Pakistani military presence in Saudi Arabia since the 1950s has largely been symbolic, often limited in command and operational engagement.
- Periodic tensions over troop deployment, exclusion of Shia personnel, and variable Saudi priorities have restricted deep integration.

2. Current Geopolitical Calculations

- The SMDA comes at a time of heightened regional unpredictability, especially after the Israel-Hamas crisis and shifting US engagement in the Gulf.
- Saudi Arabia's need to demonstrate security assurances is partly a response to American retrenchment and the failure to secure broader GCC military commitments.

3. Optical vs. Real Military Support

- The pact is seen as a "Hobson's choice" for Saudi Arabia—primarily to signal resolve rather than to create genuine deterrence.
- Pakistan, for its part, avoids open alignment beyond limited commitments, mindful of wider Arab-Iran rivalry and domestic pressures.

4. Strategic Implications for India

- The pact highlights the fluidity of power coalitions in West Asia, prompting India to maintain diplomatic agility and strong independent defense ties.
- India's interests—energy security, diaspora protection, counterterrorism—are best protected through multi-vector engagement rather than bloc politics.



India And Saudi relations

1. **Energy Security:** 3rd largest crude & LPG supplier (2023–24).
2. **Trade:** Bilateral trade ~USD 43 bn (2023–24). Saudi = 5th largest trading partner.
3. **Investment:** Saudi invested ~USD 10 bn; pledged USD 100 bn more.
4. **Remittances:** 6.7% of total inward remittances (2024) from Saudi.
5. **Religious Ties:** Expanded Hajj quota for 2025.
6. **Counter-Terrorism:** Saudi support in arrests/deportations (26/11 link, fake currency). Helped in **Operation Kaveri** evacuation (3,500 Indians).
7. **Moderate Islam:** Crown Prince's reforms → important for South Asia (400 mn Indian Muslims)

For Saudi Arabia

1. **Trade:** India = 2nd largest trading partner.
2. **Indian Investments:** ~USD 3 bn (2023).
3. **Vision 2030 Alignment:** India key partner in diversification and growth.

Global Practices

1. **Flexible Alliances:** Middle Eastern states often sign symbolic defense pacts, but rely on diverse coalitions, including US or European security umbrellas, rather than exclusive alliances.
2. **Balance of Power Strategy:** Nations such as Turkey and Egypt engage in balancing acts—participating in pacts without sacrificing autonomy or risking entanglement in external conflicts.
3. **Pragmatic Military Agreements:** Bilateral defense agreements usually involve joint exercises and intelligence sharing rather than deploying troops for third-party conflicts.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS):** Advises maintaining flexible, multi-vector engagement in West Asia, avoiding entanglement in rival coalitions.
2. **Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs:** Recommends prioritizing economic and strategic interests, advocating for active diplomatic monitoring and readiness for rapid adaptation in crisis situations.
3. **Ministry of External Affairs (Policy Papers):** Calls for strengthening bilateral defense partnerships, energy diplomacy, and diaspora safety programs.
4. **Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA) & Observer Research Foundation (ORF):** Analysis suggests India should remain vigilant, avoid overt alignment, and focus on deepening autonomous security frameworks.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Independent Strategic Ties**
 - Expand direct partnerships with key West Asian states, emphasizing economic, security, and energy links.
2. **Monitor Regional Shifts**
 - Deploy dedicated diplomatic and intelligence assets to track evolving alliances and emerging threats.
3. **Enhance Defence Readiness**
 - Invest in rapid deployment capacity, diaspora evacuation plans, and intelligence sharing to deter and respond to crises.
4. **Exercise Pragmatic Diplomacy**

- Assert India's neutrality in sensitive disputes, leveraging non-aligned credibility in regional forums.

5. Deepen Multilateral Engagement

- Proactively participate in broader economic, counterterrorism, and security initiatives with GCC, IORA, and other multilateral groups.

Conclusion

The Saudi-Pakistan defense pact is **more symbolic than substantive, serving political optics amidst regional turbulence**. India must view such agreements with strategic caution, focusing instead on safeguarding core interests through flexible engagement, strengthening autonomous security architecture, and maintaining diplomatic agility. In the volatile environment of **West Asia, India's enduring advantage lies in balanced policy rather than reactive alignment**.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which Indian institution is formally tasked with advising the government on maintaining multi-vector strategic engagement in West Asia?

- a) National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)
- b) Reserve Bank of India
- c) Ministry of Environment
- d) Central Bureau of Investigation

Answer: A) National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)

Mains Practice Question

Q1. Discuss the significance and limitations of bilateral defense pacts in West Asia, with reference to the recent Saudi-Pakistan agreement. Suggest a comprehensive policy approach for India to protect its strategic interests in the region. (250 words)

Student Notes

A climate-health vision with lessons from India

GS Paper UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance – Social sector interventions, welfare policies, health governance, international organizations.
- **GS Paper 3:** Environment – Climate resilience, disaster management, sustainable development, health and environmental linkages.
- **GS Paper 1:** Society – Community participation, inclusive development.

Introduction

At the 2025 **Global Conference on Climate and Health in Brazil**, the **Belém Action Plan** was crafted to steer global action on planetary health. India, though underrepresented, offers significant lessons for integrating health, environment, and welfare through flagship programmes like **PM POSHAN** and **Swachh Bharat**. With over 11 crore children covered by mid-day meals and millions benefiting from clean fuel and sanitation drives, India's approach demonstrates that synergetic, people-centric programs can yield major climate and health co-benefits for the Global South.

***Fact:** PM Ujjwala Yojana has delivered over 90 million LPG connections, reducing household air pollution and contributing to improved health and climate metrics.*

Key Issues

1. Synergy Gaps in Policy Design

- While welfare and climate schemes coexist, integration remains limited—climate health is rarely framed as a governance priority, risking missed co-benefits.
- Example: PM POSHAN connects nutrition with education, but similar integration for climate and health outcomes (e.g., air quality-linked health programs) remains weak.

2. Institutionalization and Political Leadership

- India's successes (Swachh Bharat, PMUY) have benefited from Prime Ministerial involvement, but many environmental-health linkages lack such high-level political backing.

3. Community Engagement and Anchoring

- Grassroot support through parent-teacher groups and local health advocates has made flagship schemes successful, yet much climate adaptation still lacks strong community participation.

4. Measurement Focused on Delivery, Not Outcomes

- Emphasis is often placed on scheme outputs (toilets built, meals served), not holistic outcomes (improved local air, reduced disease burden).

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

- Launched:** May 2016, Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.
- Objective:** Provide clean cooking fuel (LPG) to poor rural households dependent on firewood, coal, dung, etc.
- Benefits:**
 - ₹1,600 (14.2 kg) / ₹1,150 (5 kg) subsidy.
 - Free **first refill + stove + deposit-free connection**.
 - Priority to states with low LPG coverage.
- Eligibility (Ujjwala 2.0):**
 - Adult woman without LPG in household.
 - Categories: SECC 2011, SC/ST, PMAY, AAY, Forest dwellers, MBC, Tea tribes, River islanders.
 - Others: 14-point declaration.
 - **Men excluded.**
- Achievements:** 9+ crore connections (2025), improved women's health, reduced indoor pollution, saved time.
- Challenges:** Affordability of refills, reverting to traditional fuels, rural supply bottlenecks.
- Significance:** Women empowerment, energy transition, environment protection.

Global Practices



1. **Integrated Impact Assessments:** Many countries embed health impact assessments in all major climate/environmental projects (mandatory in EU, UK for infrastructure plans).
2. **Community Health Partnerships:** Nations like Brazil leverage community health agents for delivering both social safety and adaptation awareness at the local level.
3. **Institutionalized Climate-Health Bodies:** Nations establish agencies solely focusing on climate-health synergies to drive integrated action.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Recommends mainstreaming health in all major environmental policies, greater inter-ministerial coordination, and outcome-based measurement systems.
2. **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):** Advocates for climate-resilient health infrastructure, vulnerability mapping, and capacity building at all administrative levels.
3. **Prime Minister's Science, Technology & Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC):** Calls for data integration across health and environmental departments and public outreach to drive climate-health mobilization.
4. **Standing Committees on Health and Environment:** Recommend embedding health impact assessments in environmental clearances for all large infrastructure projects.

Way Forward

1. **Prioritize Political Leadership:** Climate-health must be framed as both a top governance and political priority, with high-level champions ensuring cross-sector convergence.
2. **Institutionalize Integration:** Mandate joint planning, funding, and outcome reporting for health and climate schemes, linking ministries and local bodies.
3. **Embed Outcome-Based Measurement:** Shift from output-only monitoring (e.g., number of toilets, stoves, immunizations) to tracking true health and environmental advances.
4. **Strengthen Community-Based Action:** Empower local leaders (ASHAs, SHGs, Panchayat members) to advocate and implement climate-health interventions from the village up.
5. **Mainstream Impact Assessments:** Make health-climate impact assessments standard for all large projects, not just for environment and transport, but also for housing, agri-policy, and disaster planning.

Conclusion

India's welfare-driven, multisectoral approach provides a vital blueprint for integrating health and climate goals, particularly for the Global South. The next step is to institutionalize such synergies—political leadership, outcome-oriented measurement, community mobilization, and cross-policy mandates—for a true whole-of-society response to the dual crises of health and climate.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Which flagship Indian government programme focuses on providing clean cooking fuel to poor households and emphasizes both health and climate benefits?

- a) PM-KUSUM
- b) PMAY-G
- c) PM Ujjwala Yojana
- d) PMGKY

Answer: C) PM Ujjwala Yojana

Mains Practice Question



**Q1. "Integrating welfare policies with climate action is essential for resilience in the Global South."
Discuss with reference to India's recent experience and suggest reforms for improved climate-health
outcomes. (250 words**

Student Notes 

Article Title: H-1B, maybe: India's tech workers must reduce their reliance on U.S. jobs

GS Paper UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper 2:** International Relations – Diaspora, migration policy, bilateral relations (India-US).
- **GS Paper 3:** Economy – Human capital mobility, innovation ecosystem, technology policy.
- **GS Paper 1:** Society – Migration trends, challenges for skilled professionals.

Introduction

The U.S. administration's recent decision to hike the H-1B visa application fee for highly skilled workers to \$185,000—almost six times its previous rate—**has sparked widespread concern among India's tech workforce and major Indian IT companies operating in the U.S.** With Indian applicants historically comprising nearly 77% of H-1B visas, and recent years seeing around 3,59,000 Indian applications annually, this steep fee threatens family livelihoods and India's leading position in the global technology sector. The Ministry of External Affairs recognizes these "humanitarian consequences," emphasizing the need for policy evolution and resilience in India's skilled talent mobility.



Fact: In 2022, Indian nationals occupied approximately three-quarters of all H-1B visas issued—reflecting India's high skill supply, but also its vulnerability to U.S. policy changes.

Key Issues

1. **Excessive Reliance on the U.S. Jobs Market:** 77% of H-1B visas go to Indian nationals, with a four-year average of nearly 3,59,000 applications. Fee hikes and nativist policies make Indian tech workers and companies highly vulnerable to external shocks.
2. **Barrier to Mid-Level Talent and Salaries:** Nearly 60% of visa recipients earn below \$100,000, making the new fee a significant roadblock for both workers and sponsoring companies.
3. **Limited Scope for Policy Intervention:** Diplomatic efforts by India (MEAs and IT industry appeals) have rarely led to reversal of regressive U.S. visa policies.
4. **Risk of Brain Drain and Stagnation:** The U.S. policy climate is increasingly restrictive; skilled talent faces uncertainty and delayed opportunities, impacting India's innovation capacity and global competitiveness.
5. **Need for Strategic Diversification:** To insulate against U.S. policy shocks, India must foster global links with Asia, Europe, and emerging markets, promoting local innovation and strengthening domestic opportunities.

Global Practices

1. **Talent Diversification:** Countries like China, Israel, and many EU states invest in domestic R&D and encourage IT professionals to explore regional and remote work opportunities, reducing dependency on single migration destinations.
2. **Skill Mobility Frameworks:** Singapore and Australia have set up fast-track work visa systems and robust bilateral talent exchanges with multiple countries.

3. **Returnee Incentives:** China and South Korea use repatriation incentives for overseas graduates to boost local tech ecosystems and capacity.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Advocates reducing reliance on outbound skilled migration; recommends investment in domestic innovation, AI, and IT entrepreneurship.
2. **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA):** Urges regular engagement with destination countries, monitors impact of visa changes, and calls for policy support for Indian workers abroad.
3. **Standing Committee on IT and Skill Development:** Proposes incentives for local start-ups and research parks, and digital infrastructure for remote work.
4. **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT):** Recommends reforms for innovation clusters, collateral-free loans for tech entrepreneurs, and "Make-in-India" for talent retention.

Way Forward

1. **Diversify Global Migration and Opportunity Channels:** Develop new partnerships with Asia, Europe, Africa; support Indian IT professionals to explore alternate job markets.
2. **Strengthen Domestic Innovation Ecosystems:** Invest in R&D, boost infrastructure for new technologies, support start-ups, and expand opportunities for home-grown AI, cybersecurity, and software leaders.
3. **Promote Remote and Hybrid Work Models:** Encourage Indian companies and professionals to pursue global opportunities through remote work, reducing physical migration dependency.
4. **Diplomatic and Policy Advocacy:** Maintain strong engagement with U.S. and other destination countries, ensuring timely support for affected Indian workers.
5. **Return Mobility Incentives:** Develop government and private-sector initiatives to attract high-skilled talent back to India with financial, institutional, and career-friendly packages.

Conclusion

India's heavy reliance on U.S.-based skilled jobs and the H-1B visa regime exposes its workers to economic and political risks beyond their control. By investing in domestic innovation, forging new global linkages, and nurturing flexible work models, India can shield its workforce from policy volatility and build sustained knowledge-driven growth. A resilient approach to skilled talent mobility is essential for India's IT leadership and economic stability.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India's reliance on H-1B visas:

1. In 2022, nearly three-fourths of all H-1B visas issued by the U.S. went to Indian nationals.
2. The recent U.S. policy change increased the H-1B visa fee by almost six times, significantly impacting mid-level Indian IT workers.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c) Both 1 and 2

Mains Practice Question

Q1. India's dependence on U.S. work visas is both an opportunity and a vulnerability. Critically examine the risks associated with excessive H-1B reliance and suggest comprehensive strategies for improving resilience in India's IT sector. (250 words)

Semiconductor designers chip in: India's ambitious industry-scale policy to build semiconductor facilities

Introduction

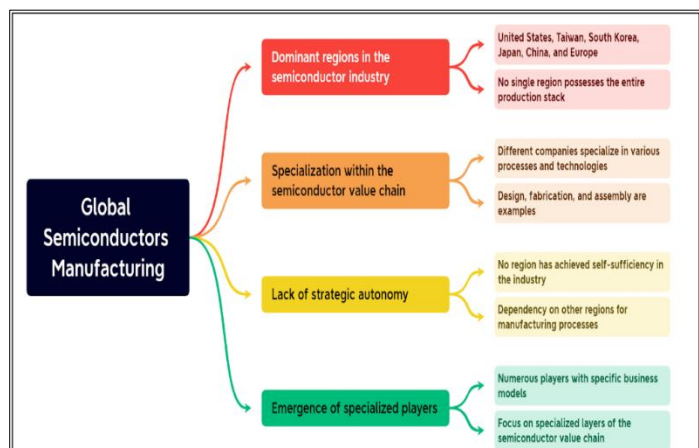
India's push for semiconductor self-sufficiency is gathering momentum. Since the India Semiconductor Mission was approved in 2021 with a ₹76,000 crore allocation, the country has been positioning itself as a hub for chip design and electronics manufacturing. In the last two years, 10 major chip manufacturing plants have commenced across key states, underlining how government incentives and research collaborations are putting India's chip design industry on the global map.

Fact: India's semiconductor industry is expected to cross \$64 billion by 2026, driven largely by investments in chip design, which requires less capital than fabrication but delivers global market reach through skills and innovation.

Key Issues

1. Design vs. Fabrication Focus

- India excels in chip design, supported by its skilled engineers and robust computer science ecosystem.
- While fabrication plants are expensive (requiring clean rooms, uninterrupted power), design centres mainly need talent and software tools—areas where India already leads.



2. Government Support and Industry Collaboration

- Schemes like the India Semiconductor Mission have provided subsidies and incentives.
- Industry-academia partnerships (e.g., between IIT Delhi and device manufacturers) have spurred research and student training, bringing more "taped-out" chips to the market (e.g., VEES Institute of Technology's success with four different toolsets for students).

3. Access to Tools and IP

- Design teams now benefit from easier access to "bundles" of professional software, previously restricted to high-value, global clients.
- This democratisation allows thousands of students, startups, and SMEs to test chip ideas and innovate.

4. Student-Industry Gap

- Despite rapid expansion, a lack of industry-level internships at universities persists. There's growing dialogue on how to bridge this gap, with new programs and joint startups showing promise (Hero Group, Tessolve).

Global Practices

- US and Europe:** Focus on building high-skill chip design clusters supported by public and private R&D investments. Universities collaborate with semiconductor companies for hands-on research and curriculum.
- Taiwan and South Korea:** Strong state-led investment in both fabrication and design, fostering advanced ecosystem linkages and skill development.

3. **China:** Aggressive subsidy model for both design and manufacturing, aiming for vertical integration in supply chains.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Advocates scaling up domestic chip design capabilities, incentivising R&D investment, and fostering academia-industry ties.
2. **MeitY (Ministry of Electronics & IT):** Policy support for start-ups, creation of fabless ecosystem, and easier IP access through collaborative consortia.
3. **Standing Committee on IT:** Recommends integration of industry-driven projects in university curricula, and better funding for semiconductor research facilities.
4. **India Semiconductor Mission:** Direct funding, skill upgrading, and tech transfer for labs and chip design hubs countrywide.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Academia-Industry Partnerships:** Expand internships, joint research programs, and “open lab” access for students to work on real-world chip designs.
2. **Increase Funding for R&D and Tool Access:** Provide more grants/subsidies for design centres, and negotiate global licensing deals for essential software/IP.
3. **Promote Fabless Startups and Clusters:** Encourage graduates and researchers to launch startups, extending the reach of Indian chip design globally.
4. **Address Skill and Infrastructure Gaps:** Build more advanced testing facilities, create collaborative platforms for rapid prototyping, and train students in emerging chip design technologies.
5. **Benchmark with Global Leaders:** Learn from Taiwan and the US in ecosystem development and supply chain resilience, while leveraging India’s software and design expertise.

Conclusion

India’s semiconductor story is increasingly being written in its chip design labs, not just in billion-dollar fabrication plants. Success will hinge on harnessing talent, technology, collaboration, and supportive policies—bridging gaps between academia and industry, and backing innovation with smart subsidies and research investments. With these steps, India can emerge as a true global leader in semiconductor design.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements about India’s semiconductor sector:

1. Chip design requires less capital investment than fabrication, making it a strength for India’s skilled workforce.
2. The India Semiconductor Mission, approved in 2021, allocated ₹76,000 crore to support domestic chip design and manufacturing.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) Both 1 and 2
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
- Both 1 and 2
- Chip design is talent + software-driven (less capital-intensive) → India’s edge.

- India Semiconductor Mission (2021) had ₹76,000 crore allocation to boost both fabrication and design capabilities.

Mains Practice Question

Q1. India's semiconductor policy must focus as much on chip design as on fabrication. Discuss the challenges and opportunities for India in the global chip design space, highlighting recent policy initiatives and industry trends. (250 words)

Student Notes 

The growing relevance of traditional medicine

Source: The Hindu

GS paper relevance: Paper 3 Health, traditional medicine

Introduction

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, traditional medicine is practiced in 88% of its member states – **170 out of 194 countries**. Globally, the market for traditional medicine is projected to reach \$583 billion by 2025, growing annually at 10–20%. In India, the AYUSH sector (**Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homoeopathy**) has seen manufacturing and export revenues jump several-fold in the last decade, with exports now reaching 150 countries. This signifies a paradigmatic shift in global health, from symptomatic treatment to holistic and preventative wellness.

Key Issues

1. **Access, Affordability, and Biodiversity Conservation**
 - For billions in low/middle income nations, traditional medicine remains the primary healthcare asset due to local accessibility and affordability (e.g., **China's \$122.4 billion Traditional Chinese Medicine sector**).
 - It also supports community-based biodiversity conservation and nutrition.
2. **India's AYUSH Transformation**
 - The AYUSH industry consists of **more than 92,000 micro, small, and medium enterprises**. Manufacturing revenues have surged from ₹21,671 crore in 2014–15 to ₹1.37 lakh crore today, with export earnings surpassing \$1.54 billion in 2023.
3. **Scientific Validation, Global Recognition**
 - More rigorous research, like All India Institute of Ayurveda's studies and Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences, is formalizing traditional knowledge through clinical validation.
 - **India now has AYUSH collaborations with 52 countries and bilateral agreements with 25 nations.**

World Health Organization (WHO)

1. **UN Agency:** Specialized health agency of the UN, coordinates global response to health threats.
2. **Genesis:** Adopted at International Health Conference (New York, 1946); came into force in 1948.
3. **Functions:**
 - Coordinate health emergencies.
 - Promote well-being & prevent diseases.
 - Expand healthcare access.
 - Provide technical aid, distribute vaccines/supplies.
 - Issue global health guidelines.
4. **Membership:**
 - 194-member states, grouped into 6 regions.
 - UN members can join by accepting WHO Constitution.
 - Others can join via WHA majority vote.
5. **Funding:**
 - Two sources: **Assessed Contributions (AC)** (<20% of budget, linked to GDP) & **Voluntary Contributions (VC)** (major share, incl. governments, UN bodies, NGOs, private sector).
 - Major contributors (2020–23): US, Gates Foundation, UK, Germany.
6. **Governance:**
 - **World Health Assembly (WHA):** Annual, Geneva; sets policies, elects DG, approves budget.
 - **Executive Board:** Implements WHA decisions; nominates DG.
 - **Director-General:** Appointed by WHA.
 - **Secretariat:** HQ in Geneva + 6 regional offices + 150+ country stations.

4. **Integration with Modern Approaches & Technologies**

- The convergence of traditional wisdom with artificial intelligence and big data analytics for predictive clinical validation is a major contemporary trend.

5. **Public Health and Preventive Care**

- Ayurveda's focus on lifestyle, balance, and prevention provides effective models for addressing rising chronic diseases, nutrition challenges, and promoting wellness (e.g., "Ayurveda for People & Planet," theme for 2025).

Global Practices

1. **Mainstream Integration:** China, Australia, the EU, and many African countries are incorporating traditional medicine into national public health systems.
2. **Institutional Support:** WHO has launched global frameworks for safe and effective use of traditional medicine alongside conventional medicine.
3. **Evidence-Based Promotion:** Several nations are conducting large-scale clinical trials for herbal and indigenous medical practices.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **Ministry of AYUSH:** Drives expansion, regulatory standards, research funding, and international outreach for Ayurveda and other systems.
2. **National AYUSH Mission (NAM):** Supports state-level infrastructure, digital documentation, and integration into rural/urban health programs.
3. **WHO Collaborating Centres in India:** Conduct validation studies on efficacy, safety, and quality standards.
4. **Standing Committee (Parliament):** Recommends enhanced digital health records and funding for new pilot programs, AI adoption, and international export promotion.

Way Forward

1. **Scale Scientific Validation and R&D:** Increase investments in evidence-led research, standardize clinical trials, and accelerate AI-based innovation.
2. **Expand Global Partnerships:** Build more bilateral and multilateral collaborations to mainstream Indian traditional medicine globally.
3. **Strengthen Quality and Regulatory Mechanisms:** Ensure safety, efficacy, and quality for exports and domestic markets through robust regulatory frameworks.
4. **Promote Community Participation:** Engage local health workers and Panchayats for grassroots awareness, conservation, and preventive health outreach.
5. **Mainstream Integration with Public Health:** Integrate AYUSH with existing systems for holistic, affordable preventive care and nutrition programs.

Conclusion

Traditional medicine, especially India's AYUSH, is **gaining global traction as societies seek sustainable, inclusive, and effective healthcare solutions. The sector now offers not only wellness but also economic opportunities, scientific breakthroughs, and cultural soft power.** As research and modern technologies continue to validate and expand traditional wisdom, India is well poised to lead this transformative wave for global health.

Prelims Practice Question

Q1. According to WHO, what percentage of member states practice traditional medicine?

- a) 25% b) 50%
c) 70% d) 88%

Answer: D) 88%

Mains Practice Question

Q1. How has the AYUSH sector transformed India's healthcare ecosystem and global standing? Critically analyze the opportunities and challenges of mainstreaming traditional medicine in India. (250 words)

Student Notes 

A conundrum: Household spending can boost the economy, but it needs a jump-start

Source: the Hindu

UPSC Relevance: GS paper 3 Indian Economy

Introduction

Government policy is **focusing on spurring household consumption to provide momentum for India's economy amid plateauing private investment, slowing exports, and constraints on public spending**. While infrastructure spending and low-interest loans for states continue, recent **Union Budgets have underscored that government capital expenditure alone cannot meet India's growth targets**. According to FICCI, more than three-fourths of Indian households' monthly expenditure will now attract either 0% or 5% GST—an increase from the previous 56%—in a bid to bolster households' disposable income and encourage higher consumption.

Key Issues

1. Lag in Private Investment

- Although private sector investment is growing, it falls short of the 6%–6.5% GDP rate needed for a high-growth trajectory; current levels barely cross 8% for industrial capacity utilization—far lower than the 30%–35% growth seen in the immediate post-pandemic years.

2. Stagnant Consumption and Real Incomes

- Household spending remains subdued due to weak wage growth and global inflationary pressures. Incomes are not rising as quickly as needed, and many households face price increases in essentials even as GST reforms aim to reduce outlays for most goods.

3. Export and External Headwinds

- Net exports are weak, especially with sustained global uncertainty and U.S. tariffs (50% on Indian imports), further limiting manufacturing and industrial momentum.

4. Limited Room for Fiscal Push

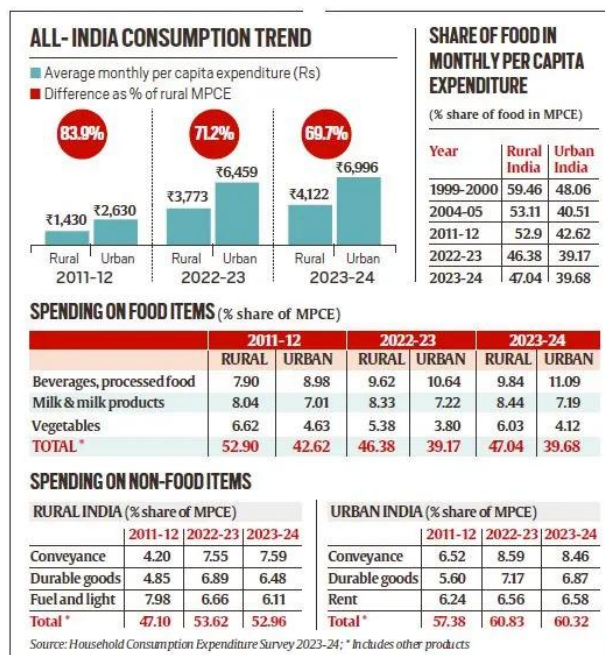
- The government's focus is shifting from direct spending ("big bang" capital expenditure) to boosting private consumption by reducing income tax rates and adjusting GST slabs.

5. Supply-Side Bottlenecks

- Even as demand is encouraged through tax cuts and lower GST, actual spending will not rise unless companies use these incentives to hire and raise wages, keeping the virtuous consumption cycle going.

Global Practices

- Targeted Tax Reforms:** The U.S., China, and several EU nations have used tax reductions, transfer payments, or direct cash transfers to stimulate household demand during economic slowdowns.



2. **Flexible Consumption Interventions:** Countries like Japan and South Korea have deployed time-bound consumption vouchers, reduced VAT, and offered subsidies on key household expenses to kickstart demand.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Recommends strengthening rural purchasing power, expanding employment guarantee schemes, and integrating social safety nets to lift consumption.
2. **RBI Expert Committees:** Suggest revisiting interest rates and improved credit flow to small businesses and consumers to induce higher spending.
3. **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance:** Urges enhancing direct benefits transfer (DBT), regular indexation of tax slabs, and targeted GST reforms for essential goods and services.
4. **14th Finance Commission:** Advocated fiscal devolution and expenditure reforms to empower states as demand drivers.

Way Forward

1. **Boost Real Incomes and Employment**
 - Create new jobs and incentivize wage growth through labor-intensive infrastructure, rural development, and MSME policies.
2. **Sustain Consumption-Friendly Tax Policies**
 - Continue rationalizing GST, index income tax bands to inflation, and further target subsidies for low-income groups.
3. **Coordinate with Industry for Pass-Through Effects**
 - Ensure that reduced input costs and tax savings are passed on to consumers as lower prices, not just higher profits.
4. **Monitor Global and External Risks**
 - Buffer against global headwinds with strategic reserves, diversified export markets, and timely trade interventions.
5. **Facilitate Credit and Digital Payment Expansion**
 - Expand access to consumer credit and fintech platforms, especially for rural and informal workers, to multiply the impact of government efforts.

Conclusion

India's growth journey depends critically on reviving robust household consumption and sustained private investment. **Only by integrating fiscal incentives, targeted tax reform, and proactive employment and wage support can policymakers ensure that the economy escapes stagnation and achieves inclusive, sustainable growth. Empowering households to spend**—while ensuring firms pay higher wages and pass on savings—is the clearest path toward lifting India's economic trajectory in a challenging global landscape.

Prelims Practice Question

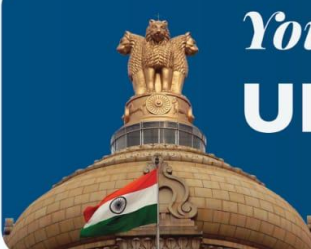
- Q1. According to recent editorial economic analysis, what percentage of Indian households' monthly expenditure will now attract either 0% or 5% GST under recent reforms?**
- a) 25%
 - b) 50%
 - c) 75%
 - d) 90%

Answer: C) 75%

Mains Practice Question

Q1. "Household consumption is critical for India's growth, but requires structural reforms for a meaningful jump-start." Discuss key challenges and suggest comprehensive policy measures to sustainably boost household demand. (250 words)

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Student Notes

Tying health to productivity: Modi government has made healthcare an instrument for economic growth

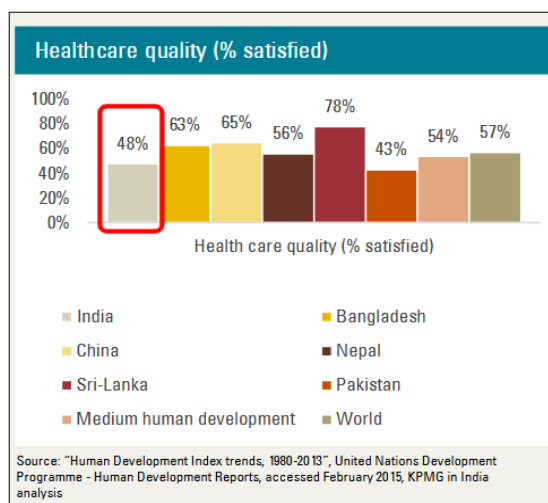
Source: Indian express Author: Devi prasad shetty

Relevance:

- **GS Paper II (Governance, Social Justice):** Health as a *public good* and constitutional mandate (Article 21, Article 47 – duty of the state).
- **GS Paper III (Economy, Development): Health–Economy Nexus:** Healthy workforce = higher productivity = GDP growth

Introduction

India's healthcare policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has redefined the sector as central to nation-building, prioritizing investments that link health governance directly with economic goals. By prioritizing health as an engine for a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047, the government has demonstrated how sound healthcare policy increases household savings, fortifies human capital, and catalyzes sustainable growth. **According to UNICEF, Swachh Bharat Mission** alone has saved each rural family ₹50,000 a year since its rollout, primarily through reduction in out-of-pocket health expenses.



Key Issues

1. **Healthcare Investments Reduce Disease and Enhance Savings**
 - Initiatives like 108 Emergency Ambulance Service and POSHAN Abhiyaan have expanded access and cut disease burden, enabling families to retain disposable income, save, and invest in education and livelihoods.
2. **Health as Human Capital Formation**
 - Malnutrition tackling, growth monitoring and behavioral interventions under POSHAN have led to measurable gains in cognitive and productive capacity; healthier mothers and children translate to a more skilled workforce.
3. **Affordable Medicines Boost Economic Participation**
 - Jan Aushadhi Kendras provide generic medicines at steep discounts; savings on medicine free up household funds for education, consumption, and investment, boosting participation in formal finance.
4. **Linking Hygiene and Water to Economic Outcomes**
 - Schemes like Swachh Bharat and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao incentivize clean living, reducing illnesses, improving productivity, and paving the way for new entrepreneurial opportunities in rural markets.
5. **Shift from Charity to Investment in Health**
 - By viewing public health spending as an economic investment, not charity, the government has made it easier for households to escape debt cycles, fostering new job markets and formalizing economic activity.

Global Practices

1. Universal Healthcare Access

- **UK (NHS):** Tax-funded universal care ensures equity and reduces out-of-pocket expenses.
- **Thailand, Brazil, South Korea:** Integrated **health + nutrition** into development planning, boosting human capital and economic outcomes.

2. Primary Healthcare Strengthening

- **Brazil (Family Health Program):** Deploying community health workers in underserved areas → improved prevention and early intervention.
- India can scale **Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs)** and train **Community Health Officers (CHOs)** to achieve similar outcomes.

3. Digital Health Integration

- **Estonia:** Advanced e-health records and telemedicine reduce administrative costs and improve patient care coordination.
- India can strengthen platforms like **eSanjeevani** to expand remote consultations and efficiency.

4. Affordable Medicines & Drug Policies

- **UK and Canada:** Widespread promotion of generic medicines keeps healthcare affordable and increases disposable income.
- India can expand **Jan Aushadhi Kendras** and ensure strict implementation of generic drug policies.

5. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

- **Singapore:** Successful PPPs in hospital infrastructure and service delivery improved capacity and quality.
- India can adopt similar PPP models, especially for rural and Tier-2/Tier-3 cities.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

- 1. National Health Policy (2017):** Advocates health investment as a vehicle for national development, targeting reduced disease burden and increased job market participation.
- 2. NITI Aayog:** Recommends integrating nutrition, sanitation, and preventive care with labor and productivity policies.
- 3. Economic Surveys:** Highlight how government health spending—like on Swachh Bharat or POSHAN—enables savings, reduces poverty traps, and boosts economic inclusion.
- 4. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare:** Calls for expanding insurance, improving rural health infrastructure, and ensuring deeper penetration of affordable healthcare to unlock productivity.

Way Forward**Key Measures to Enhance India's Healthcare Sector**

- 1. Primary Healthcare First** – Strengthen Ayushman Bharat HWCs with preventive, curative, and palliative care, supported by trained CHOs.
- 2. Prevention as Investment** – Invest in sanitation, nutrition, lifestyle campaigns, and screenings to reduce disease burden and boost productivity.
- 3. Affordable Medicines & Insurance** – Expand **Jan Aushadhi Kendras**, promote generics, and reform Ayushman Bharat for wider, simpler coverage.
- 4. Health Workforce & Jobs** – Train more doctors, CHOs, and paramedics; incentivize rural service; link wellness programs with enterprises.

5. **Digital Health & Telemedicine** – Scale up **eSanjeevani**, integrate e-health records, and promote virtual consultations for rural access.
6. **Women & Child Focus** – Prioritize maternal health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene, and adolescent care as foundations for future workforce.

Conclusion

India's transformation in healthcare policy since 2014 highlights how leveraging health investments as economic tools produces real dividends in savings, human capital, and economic dynamism. As the nation builds toward 2047, deepening and scaling these interventions for every household is vital—not just for health, but as a core driver of sustainable and inclusive growth.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Assertion (A): Preventive healthcare is increasingly seen as an economic investment by countries.

Reason (R): Investments in sanitation, nutrition, and early intervention reduce absenteeism and improve workforce productivity.

- a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
- b) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c) A is true, R is false
- d) A is false, R is true

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A

Mains Question

Q1. "Healthcare investment is no longer a peripheral concern; it is central to India's economic strength and transformation." Discuss with reference to recent government initiatives and their impact on productivity and growth. (250 words)

Student Notes

Penalty in proportion: Criminal defamation is incompatible with democratic debate

Source: the Hindu

GS paper relevance: GS Paper II – Polity & Governance

- **Constitutional Provisions:** Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech & Expression) and its reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) (Defamation).
- **Judiciary & Rights:** Supreme Court's 2016 *Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India* judgment upholding criminal defamation.

Introduction

Criminal defamation, as upheld by the **Supreme Court of India in Subramanian Swamy (2016)**, aims to protect reputation as a facet of the right to life. However, its application has raised concerns: instead of proportionate civil remedies, it often proposes imprisonment for speech, chills dissent, and is frequently invoked by political actors and private individuals to silence criticism. Since 2016, there's been a rise in criminal complaints against journalists, activists, and political opponents—highlighting the tension between protecting reputation and safeguarding free speech in a democracy.

'STATE MUST PROTECT RIGHT TO LIFE'

➤ Five-judge bench of unanimous view that state duty-bound to protect right to life whenever there is threat from any quarter, including private persons ➤ Majority verdict says fundamental right to free speech and life can be enforced against private persons other than state or its instrumentalities	➤ In dissenting verdict, Justice Nagarathna says except for habeas corpus (produce the person), right to free speech and life cannot be enforced against persons other than state ➤ Majority verdict says mere statement of a minister may not lead to violation of constitutional rights and hence not actionable for award of compensation
“Article 19(1)(a) (right to free speech) serves as a vehicle through which dissent can be expressed. The right to dissent, disagree and adopt varying and individualistic points of view inheres in every citizen of this country — Justice BV Nagarathna	

Key Issues

1. Chilling Effect on Free Speech

- Criminal defamation is routinely used to silence journalists, opposition leaders, and civil society; e.g., several criminal defamation cases followed reporting on government officials or policy criticism.
- Trials and legal harassment, not necessarily conviction, become the punishment, deterring robust public debate.

2. Disproportionate Penalties

- The law allows for jail terms and criminal conviction, even for minor harms to reputation—when civil damages or injunctions would usually suffice.

3. Judicial Endorsement and Executive Use

- Despite Supreme Court upholding its constitutionality in 2016, the judiciary often expresses unease about its misuse; e.g., remarks **by Justice M.M. Sundresh** on the burden of criminal defamation prosecutions.
- State agencies and political leaders increasingly use criminal defamation as a tool to shield themselves from criticism.

4. Weaponisation for Strategic Litigation

- Criminal complaints become instruments of propaganda or intimidation, used to restrict circulation of news and opinions, or to control narratives.

5. Undermining Democratic Ethos

- The threat of imprisonment for speech incompatible with democratic debate and the right to dissent, especially when civil remedies are available. Governance is harmed when criticism is suppressed.

Global Practices

1. **Civil Remedies Favored:** Liberal democracies like the US, UK, and much of Europe have either struck down or severely restricted criminal defamation laws, preferring civil actions for reputation-related harm.
2. **Proportionality Principle:** International human rights standards urge a proportionate remedy for defamation, reserving criminal penalties for only the gravest threats (e.g. incitement to violence).
3. **Protection for Public Interest Speech:** Jurisdictions such as South Africa and Canada offer special safeguards for good-faith speech on public affairs or directed at public officials.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **Law Commission of India (267th Report):** Recommends decriminalisation or, at minimum, significant limitation of criminal defamation, emphasizing proportionality and preference for civil remedies.
2. **Press Council of India:** Advocates robust protection for journalists and suggests that civil damages are adequate for defamatory wrongs.
3. **Supreme Court (Observations):** Multiple benches have expressed concern over the misuse of criminal defamation in stifling dissent.

Way Forward

1. **Decriminalise Defamation or Restrict Criminal Provisions**
 - Amend laws to replace imprisonment with fines for most defamation cases, except for incitement to violence or hate speech.
2. **Promote Civil Remedies and Proportionality**
 - Encourage use of civil damages, apologies, or public corrections as more proportionate remedies.
3. **Protect Public Interest and Journalistic Speech**
 - Provide robust legal shields for speech on public affairs, especially against officials and powerful interests.
4. **Sensitise Judiciary and Law Enforcement**
 - Train and direct officers to avoid overuse or misuse of criminal defamation.
5. **Strengthen Democratic Debate**
 - Foster legal and institutional culture valuing dissent and criticism as healthy aspects of governance.

Conclusion

While the aim of protecting reputation is valid, the overuse of criminal defamation—especially with jail terms—imperils free speech, criminalises dissent, and is incompatible with democratic values. Reform towards proportional, civil remedies is essential for a healthy, vibrant, and accountable democracy.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Which of the following statements regarding criminal defamation in India is/are correct?

1. Criminal defamation is punishable under Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code.
2. Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutionality of criminal defamation in the Subramanian Swamy vs. Union of India (2016) case.
3. The Law Commission of India in its 267th Report recommended retaining imprisonment as a proportionate punishment for defamation.

Options:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only



c) 2 and 3 only

d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Mains Question

Q1. "Criminal defamation laws have a chilling effect on freedom of speech and are incompatible with vibrant democratic debate." Critically discuss with reference to recent debates and judicial pronouncements. (250 words)

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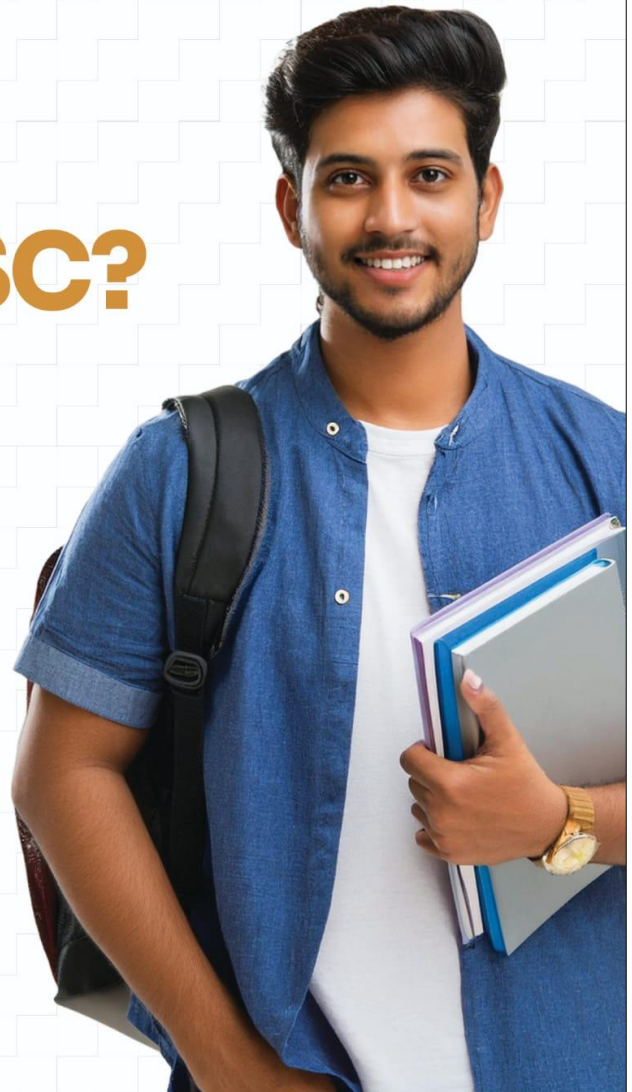
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Just a pinch can reduce an Indian's salt overload

Source: The Hindu

UPSC relevance: GS paper 3 Health, nutrition's

Introduction

Excessive salt consumption has emerged as a quiet but severe public health issue in India. Research indicates that Indian adults consume about 10 grams of salt daily—double the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended limit of 5 grams per day. Over 70% of this salt is ingested through home-cooked food such as pickles and papad, making salt reduction critical for combating the nation's growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like hypertension and heart disease.

Key Issues

1. High Salt Intake and Invisible Sources

- Salt is routinely added during cooking and at the table, as well as “invisible” forms in breads, sauces, packaged foods, and even some sweets.
- Market studies show three-fourths of India's daily salt comes from home-prepared foods, which challenges purely packaged food-targeted interventions.

2. Cultural and Behavioral Factors

- The tradition of eating salty side dishes, frequenting restaurants, and adding salt to food at the table reinforce high-salt habits.
- Nearly one-fifth of Indian adults eat outside food six times a week, often consuming processed foods high in hidden salts.

3. Lack of Comprehensive Policy Efforts

- Health messaging focuses on awareness, but board-level or industry mandates for salt limits are lacking.
- Current policies do not sufficiently regulate salt content in restaurant, fast, and processed foods, nor do they target vulnerable groups like children.

4. Health Impact on Vulnerable Populations



“Silent Salt Consumption Epidemic”:

1. **Definition:** A hidden public health crisis caused by excess salt intake, driving chronic diseases.
2. **Consumption Trends:** Urban India (9.2 g/day) and rural India (5.6 g/day) — both above the WHO safe limit of 5 g/day.
3. **ICMR Action:** Running a 3-year salt-reduction counselling project; pilot in Punjab & Telangana among hypertensive patients.
4. **Salt Types:**
 - Common Salt (NaCl) → Excess sodium linked to hypertension.
 - Low-Sodium Substitutes (potassium/magnesium salts) → Maintain taste, reduce BP by ~7/4 mmHg.
5. **Features of the Epidemic:**
 - Silent — health damage shows late.
 - Cultural — Indian food/snacks high in salt.
 - Underestimated risk — low awareness of safe limits.
 - Adds to NCD burden.
6. **Health Impacts in India:**
 - Hypertension rise (major risk factor).
 - Cardiovascular diseases (stroke, heart attack, arterial stiffness).
 - Kidney disorders (renal strain, chronic kidney disease).

- High sodium intake is associated with raised blood pressure, cardiovascular risk, and kidney disease, significantly affecting women, pregnant mothers, and children.

5. **Slow Progress in Institutional Action**

- While awareness is rising, effective interventions such as front-of-pack labeling, food reformulation, and public procurement standards are yet to be widely implemented, unlike in countries like Chile where salt and sugar content in foods is regulated by law.

Global Practices

1. **Mandatory Salt Limits:** Countries such as the UK and Finland set statutory salt targets for food manufacturers, resulting in population-wide reductions.
2. **Front-of-Pack Labeling:** Chile, Mexico, and Brazil have adopted clear labeling to inform consumers of high salt, sugar, or fat content.
3. **Regulation and Taxation:** Several countries tax high-salt processed foods or require warning icons to drive reformulation by manufacturers.
4. **Public Health Campaigns:** Australia and Japan run school and community programmes for salt reduction with concrete targets and monitoring.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **National Multisectoral Action Plan (NMAP) for NCD Prevention and Control:** Proposes reduction of salt intake as a national target, with associated dietary behavior change initiatives.
2. **FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India):** Issues advisories and guidelines for voluntary gradual salt reduction in processed foods and urges front-of-pack labeling.
3. **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare:** Advocates salt reduction via community health workers and school-based education programmes.
4. **ICMR-NIN (Indian Council of Medical Research - National Institute of Nutrition):** Regularly publishes dietary guidelines and advocates for integrating salt reduction into national nutrition policies.

Way Forward

1. **Immediate Institutionalization of Salt Limits**
 - Mandate salt limit targets in processed and restaurant foods through FSSAI regulations, complemented with robust enforcement.
2. **Widespread Consumer Education**
 - Intensify public campaigns using schools, Anganwadis, and community centers that highlight “hidden salt” and how to reduce daily intake.
3. **Front-of-Pack Labeling and Restaurant Guidelines**
 - Make salt content labeling mandatory for all packaged and restaurant foods to empower consumer choice.
4. **Targeted Interventions for Vulnerable Groups**
 - Restrict marketing and added salt in foods for infants and children, set nutrition standards for school, hospital and public procurements.
5. **Community and Behavioral Initiatives**
 - Encourage weekly “salt-fast” days, involve SHGs, and conduct cooking classes on low-salt traditional recipes.

Conclusion

India faces a looming health crisis due to unchecked salt consumption, with most of the danger hidden in home and restaurant cooking. A multi-pronged approach—combining regulation, front-of-pack labeling, strict food industry targets, and strong public education—can help curb salt overload and reduce the NCD burden, improving long-term national health.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. According to WHO, what is the recommended maximum daily salt intake for adults?

- a) 2 grams
- b) 4 grams
- c) 5 grams
- d) 10 grams

Answer: C) 5 grams

Mains Question

Q1. “India’s salt consumption patterns pose a serious public health challenge.” Discuss the causes and suggest comprehensive policy interventions to reduce salt intake in the Indian population. (250 words)

Student Notes 

India's muted voice, its detachment with Palestine

Source: The Hindu

UPSC relevance: GS Paper 2 international relations

Introduction

India was historically among the **earliest nations to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**, extending formal support to Palestinian statehood in **1988**—long before most advanced economies did so. However, as nearly 150 UN member states have now formally recognized Palestine, India's recent stance is marked by diplomatic restraint and strategic silence, even as global support for Palestinian aspirations grows amid renewed conflict and humanitarian crisis.

Key Issues

1. Historical Leadership in Anti-Imperial Causes

- India opposed apartheid in South Africa, supported Algerian independence (1954–62), and mediated against the genocide in East Pakistan (Bangladesh, 1971).
- After independence, India actively promoted the principle of state policy for Palestine and was a major contributor to UN peacekeeping.

2. Shift from Moral Leadership to Strategic Pragmatism

- Though India has maintained support for Palestine, recent years have seen a shift toward strategic balancing with Israel—leading to muted responses.

3. Muted Diplomacy Despite Escalating Crisis

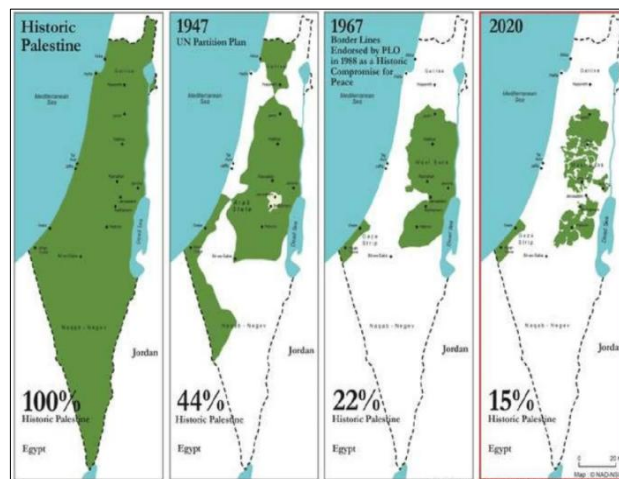
- With increased hostilities between Israel and Palestine, including the October 2023 conflict and ongoing humanitarian emergencies in Gaza, India has offered humanitarian aid and scholarships, but rarely raised its diplomatic voice. No major pronouncements followed recent civilian casualties.

4. Personalized vs. Principled Diplomacy

- Recent foreign policy has seen personalized leadership (e.g., Modi-Netanyahu friendship) overshadowing established Indian constitutional values and historic empathy with the Palestinian cause.

5. Global and Regional Context

- As France, the UK, Australia, and other democracies strengthen support for Palestine, India prioritized bilateral agreements with Israel, including investment deals and high-level diplomatic events.



Global Practices

- Principled Stand on Human Rights:** EU nations and several advanced economies have moved toward formal recognition of Palestine, often framing the issue as one of justice, human rights, and global law.
- Consistent Voice in Multilateral Forums:** Countries like Norway, Ireland, and Sweden regularly back Palestinian statehood in the UN, OIC, and other international bodies.
- Humanitarian and Developmental Assistance:** Most countries pair statements of support with concrete aid, capacity building, and programmatic support to Gaza and West Bank institutions.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations



1. **Ministry of External Affairs:** Periodically outlines official support for a two-state solution and humanitarian relief, but recommends strategic balance in West Asian engagement.
2. **Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs:** Has called for more consistent advocacy of human rights, emphasizing historic principles but not mandating direct action.
3. **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):** India participates in, but has not recently led, NAM debates for Palestinian rights.
4. **Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA):** Suggests balanced engagement that neither antagonizes Israel nor neglects moral obligations to Palestine.

Way Forward

1. **Restore Moral Leadership and Voice**
 - Strengthen principled advocacy for justice and human rights, in line with India's legacy and the global momentum for Palestinian self-determination.
2. **Balance Strategic Interests with Constitutional Values**
 - Continue deep engagement with both Israel and Palestine, but avoid personalizing foreign policy at the expense of historic empathy.
3. **Enhance Humanitarian and Development Aid**
 - Expand scholarships, capacity-building programs, and medical support to Palestinian institutions and civilians.
4. **Lead in Multilateral Forums**
 - Take more proactive positions in UN, NAM, OIC, and multilateral platforms, advocating peaceful resolution and respect for international law.
5. **Promote People-to-People Contacts**
 - Foster academic, cultural, and civil society exchanges to strengthen historic ties beyond state-to-state relations.

Conclusion

India's muted response in the Palestinian crisis stands in contrast to its historic leadership for global justice. As multilateral consensus for Palestinian statehood grows, India should reclaim its principled voice, balancing strategic interests with moral obligations and constitutional values—strengthening its place as a global advocate for justice and peace.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. In which year did India formally recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and support Palestinian statehood?

- a) 1971
 - b) 1988
 - c) 2001
 - d) 2014
- Answer: B) 1988**

Mains Question

Q1. "India's response to the Palestinian issue reflects a tension between moral leadership and strategic interests." Discuss the evolution of India's Palestine policy and suggest a way forward for balancing values and diplomacy. (250 words)



Mistrust in Ladakh: Legitimate aspirations of a people need to be taken into account

Introduction

Recent unrest in the **Union Territory of Ladakh**, triggered by a **shutdown in Leh** and subsequent violence—including the **burning of political offices**—has underscored the region's **simmering mistrust and unmet aspirations**. Despite an agreement in May 2025 guaranteeing 95% local job reservations and 33% reservation for women in the Hill Development Council, protests intensified after the hospitalization of elderly activists and renewed demands for greater constitutional safeguards and political autonomy.



Key Issues

1. Unaddressed Demands for Greater Autonomy

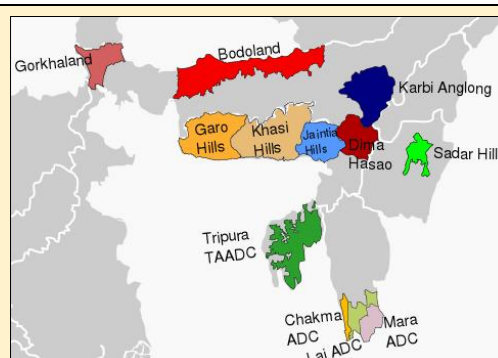
- Key groups such as the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)** and **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)** seek inclusion under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**, enhanced safeguards, and genuine political representation—provisions aimed at tribal and hill areas elsewhere in India.

Objectives of the Sixth Schedule

1. To provide for **autonomous administration of tribal areas** in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.
2. To **protect tribal land, resources, culture, and identity** from exploitation by non-tribals.
3. To ensure **self-governance and preservation of tribal traditions** through special councils.

Key Provisions of the Sixth Schedule

1. **Article 244(2)**: Applies Sixth Schedule to specified tribal areas of four states.
2. **Autonomous Districts & Regions**: Governor can create, reorganize, or alter boundaries of autonomous districts/regions.
3. **District & Regional Councils**:
 - District Councils (max 30 members, 4 nominated by Governor, rest elected by adult suffrage).
 - Regional Councils for specific autonomous regions.
4. **Law-making Powers**: Councils can make laws on land, forests (except reserved forests), inheritance, social customs, trade, and money-lending (subject to Governor's assent).
5. **Administration of Justice**: Councils can set up Village/District Council Courts for tribal disputes, but not for cases involving **death penalty or 5+ years imprisonment**.
6. **Taxation & Revenue**: Councils can levy taxes on land, professions, trades, vehicles, animals, etc., and grant licenses/leases for mineral extraction.
7. **Development Functions**: Councils can manage schools, dispensaries, markets, roads, fisheries, and waterways in their jurisdiction.



8. **Applicability of Laws:** Acts of Parliament/State Legislature apply with **exceptions or modifications** as decided.
9. **Governor's Role:** Can appoint commissions to review and report on the functioning of autonomous councils

2. Erosion of Trust Despite Recent Agreements

- Although the 2025 agreement addressed reservations and language protections, there is persistent distrust that real autonomy and agency for locals will be implemented.

3. Polarization and Violent Protests

- Violent incidents during a youth-led bandh in Leh reveal the depth of local frustration, with demands appealing to both identity concerns (bodily autonomy, language, domicile) and livelihood (reservation, job security).

4. Concerns over Central Policy and Political Representation

- As Ladakh remains centrally governed since the abrogation of Article 370, there is anxiety over the dilution of regional identity and perceived marginalization in political processes.

5. Security vs. Popular Aspirations

- The region's strategic importance and fragile ecology mean that balancing local aspirations with national interests and security is both critical and complex.

Global Practices

1. **Autonomy for Minority Regions:** Countries like Spain (Catalonia, Basque Country) and Italy (South Tyrol) have addressed minority demands through constitutional autonomy and proportional representation, undergirded by strong local governance.
2. **Negotiated Settlements:** Canada's recognition of unique status and self-governance for indigenous populations (e.g., Nunavut) provides a model for dialogue and partnership.
3. **Participatory Development Mechanisms:** Nepal's federal constitution entrenches local representation and linguistic rights to foster unity amidst diversity.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs:** Regularly recommends participatory policymaking, Sixth Schedule-type protections, and dialogue with community leaders in sensitive regions.
2. **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes:** Advocates for safeguards of tribal rights, language recognition, and women's reservation proportional to population.
3. **Delimitation and Development Councils:** Suggest greater local say in policy—especially for border, hill, and tribal communities—while balancing security requirements.
4. **Law Commission & Former Interlocutors:** Stress ongoing dialogue, transparent grievance redressal, and a flexible federal approach in resolving disputes.

Way Forward

1. Restore Institutional Dialogue

- Instant resumption of talks between Centre and all key Ladakhi stakeholders, including youth, women, and minority groups.

2. Implement Constitutional Safeguards

- Consider inclusion under Sixth Schedule, special domicile, and language status to protect local identities and livelihoods.

3. Build Trust through Local Representation

- Strengthen and democratize local governance (Hill Development Council), ensure genuine devolution of administrative powers.

4. Balance Security with Aspirations

- Maintain robust security, but without arbitrary curbs on dissent; pursue participatory development in sensitive zones.

5. Monitor, Mediate, and Communicate

- Continuous engagement, grievance redressal mechanisms, and transparent communication between people and policy makers.

Conclusion

The Ladakh unrest lays bare the gap between policy and people's expectations in sensitive, diverse regions. Only by earnestly addressing legitimate demands for autonomy, cultural protection, and participation—while safeguarding national security—can Ladakh's integration be harmonious and its people's aspirations fulfilled.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. The demand for Ladakh's inclusion under which constitutional provision aims to grant greater autonomy and protection to tribal areas?

- a) Article 371A
- b) Fifth Schedule
- c) Sixth Schedule
- d) Article 356

Answer: C) Sixth Schedule

Mains Question

Q1. "The Ladakh protests highlight the challenge of reconciling regional aspirations with national integration." Analyse the causes of mistrust in Ladakh and suggest a roadmap for sustainable peace and autonomy within the constitutional framework. (250 words)

Student Notes

Eight States with international borders, 0.13% of exports

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Relevance: GS paper 3, Indian economy, Export Centralization and Regional Disparities

Introduction

India's export economy is highly centralized, with Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka alone accounting for more than 70% of all merchandise exports. Despite sharing over 5,400 kilometers of international borders, eight other states collectively contribute only 0.13% of total Indian exports—a stark indicator of missed trade opportunities, unbalanced infrastructure, and persistent marginalization of border economies.

Key Issues

1. Export Centralization and Regional Disparities

- Export zones remain heavily concentrated in a handful of coastal states, due to decades of policy, investments, and political incentives.
- Example: Gujarat's export share is over 38%, while populous northern and northeastern states, despite vast borders with neighboring countries, barely register in trade figures.

2. Infrastructure and Policy Neglect

- Most border states lack adequate ports, highways, or trade-friendly customs clearance—leading to high transaction costs and redirecting trade flows to distant nodes.
- Example: Highways between Northeast India and Myanmar/ASEAN remain unfinished, silent, and underutilized despite agreements and geopolitical aspirations.

3. Ineffective Warehousing and Regional Specialization

- Border economies focus on local warehouses and basic trade in raw materials (agri, crude oil), not value-added manufacturing, missing out on opportunities in pharmaceuticals, electronics, and textiles.

4. Geopolitical Risks and Absence of Integrated Strategy

- Fragmented trade policies leave border states vulnerable to shocks such as tariffs, sanctions, and supply disruptions—seen in recent U.S. tariff increases and Russian crude issues.

5. Lost Potential for Cross-Border Dynamism

- Despite its proximity to Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and China, Northeast India's share in cross-border trade is insignificant, contributing to regional economic inertia.



Fact: Assam, a major border state, faces export margin threats as recent 25% U.S. tariffs on Indian imports have pushed regional planners to the brink, exacerbating industry vulnerabilities and border trade inertia.

Global Practices

1. **Integrated Border Trade Zones:** EU's Schengen Area and ASEAN Economic Community showcase seamless border-trade linkages with shared regulatory infrastructure and coordinated customs/standards.
2. **Special Economic Corridors:** China's border provinces use tailored development zones, trade parks, and local incentives to anchor vibrant cross-border exchanges (e.g., Yunnan with ASEAN neighbors).

3. **Proactive Warehousing and Logistics:** U.S.–Mexico border regions leverage bonded warehouses, fast cross-border terminals, and specialized supply chains to optimize trade and minimize delays.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Recommends creating dedicated border-area trade zones, investing in connectivity, and easing customs bottlenecks for Northeast and Northern states.
2. **Ministry of Commerce & Industry:** Proposes logistics modernization, border market development, electronic data interchange, and multimodal export corridors along international borders.
3. **Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs:** Urges synergy between border security and regional trade planning, leveraging local products and skills for competitive export advantage.
4. **North Eastern Council:** Focuses on bridging policy, investment, and infrastructure gaps to unlock region-wide export growth.

Way Forward

1. **Develop Integrated Border Trade Zones**
 - Set up SEZs, multimodal terminals, and bonded logistics parks along border areas, leveraging natural and human resources.
2. **Upgrade Connectivity and Warehousing**
 - Invest in modern highways, rail links, cold storage facilities, and efficient customs infrastructure, especially in Northeast and Himalayan states.
3. **Promote Regional Specialization and Value Addition**
 - Incentivize border states to move beyond commodities—support food processing, electronics, and pharmaceutical clusters.
4. **Bilateral and Multilateral Engagement**
 - Enable cross-border trade pacts, regular business summits, and harmonized standards/clearances with immediate neighbors.
5. **Strategic Trade Shock Management**
 - Build resilience through diversified supply chains, alternative export destinations, and local entrepreneurship support in border zones.

Conclusion

India's marginalization of its border states in export statistics reveals the urgent need for targeted infrastructure, policy innovation, and cross-border synergy. Empowering these regions with modern trade logistics, value addition, and integrated planning can convert proximity into prosperity, balancing regional disparities and strengthening India's economic resilience.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Roughly what share of India's merchandise exports do the eight border states collectively contribute?

- a) 1%
- b) 0.13%
- c) 10%
- d) 25%

Answer: B) 0.13%

Mains Question

**Q1. "India's international border states remain marginal players in the country's export economy."
Examine the causes of this marginalization and propose comprehensive measures for enhancing
border trade and regional prosperity. (250 words)**

Student Notes 

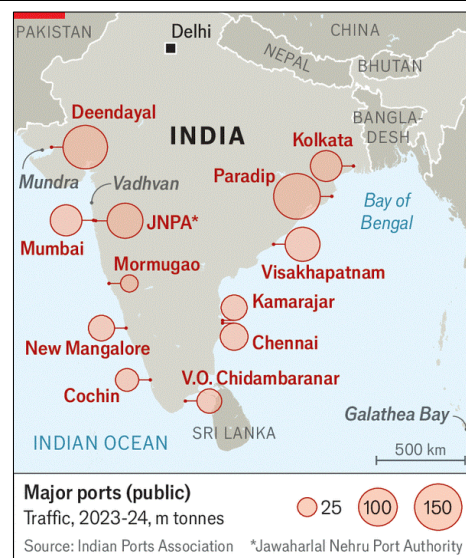
Upgrading Shipyards: Incentives for shipbuilding must include long term offtake possibilities

Source: the Hindu

UPSC relevance: GS paper 3, Indian Economy

Introduction

Despite India's robust GDP growth and significant maritime investments through the Sagarmala programme (₹5.8 lakh crore by 2035), the nation's shipping and shipbuilding industry remains stagnant. India's fleet has improved to an average age of 21 years, yet global ship ownership ranking has declined from 17th to 19th. To address these challenges, the government has announced a ₹6,725 crore package to revive the shipbuilding and maritime sector, replacing the 2015 incentives and targeting shipyards across the country. Despite India's potential, only a handful of significant merchant ships have been built in recent years, and indigenous capacity remains limited. Sustainable growth requires focused investment, creation of new shipbuilding clusters, upgraded technology, and strong offtake commitments.



Current Status of India's Shipbuilding Sector

- Valuation:** Grew from \$90 million in 2022 to \$1.12 billion in 2024.
- Ports & Shipyards:** 13 major ports, 200+ minor ports; 30 shipyards (public & private).
- Major Public Shipyards:** Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL), Hindustan Shipyard Ltd (HSL), Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL).
- Major Private Shipyards:** L&T Shipbuilding, Reliance Naval & Engineering Ltd (RNEL).
- Indian Fleet:** Average vessel age 21 years; global ship ownership rank fell from 17th → 19th.

Government Initiatives & Policy Support

- Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy (2016–2026):** Subsidies up to 20% on shipbuilding contracts.
- Sagarmala Programme:** Modernization of ports, coastal shipping, logistics efficiency.
- Atmanirbhar Bharat in Shipbuilding:** Focus on indigenous warship production (e.g., INS Vikrant).
- Gati Shakti Initiative:** Infrastructure push to enhance shipbuilding-related logistics.
- Budget 2025:** ₹25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund; vessels given infrastructure status.

Key Issues

- Low Domestic Shipbuilding Capacity**
 - In the last decade, only a handful of smaller merchant ships were built in India; large commercial orders mostly go overseas.
 - The new scheme targets ramping up capacity to global standards, but faces challenges in infrastructure and skilled manpower.
- Global Competition and Prefabrication Bottlenecks**

Fact: The planned incentives aim to expand India's annual shipbuilding capacity to 4.5 million gross tonnage, yet most large merchant vessels are still being built abroad due to higher costs and infrastructural bottlenecks.

- Korean, Japanese, and Chinese shipyards employ massive prefabricated hull blocks and seamless crane operations—Indian yards lack both the scale and specialized facilities for such assembly.
- Ancillary facilities and ‘cluster housing’ of suppliers are underdeveloped, slowing productivity.

3. **Financing and Long-Term Viability**

- The scheme provides for new shipyards and tech upgrades, but financial commitments often don’t stretch beyond 2 years, making returns unattractive.
- Without longer-term offtake or assured government orders, private yards are wary of major capital investments.

4. **Shortage of Large Orders and Management Hurdles**

- While Indian shipyards can now build small vessels, long-cycle, high-capacity orders rarely materialize.
- For instance, ships above 500 gross tonnage or specialized vessels (like oil/fuel carriers) are mainly ordered abroad, leading to stagnant capacity.

5. **Need for Policy Sustainability and Ecosystem Growth**

- Past sops lapsed before meaningful expansion; the sector needs multi-year, demand-side support—such as mandated government procurement and favorable fuel pricing for local carriers.

Global Practices

1. **Long-Term Contracts and Government Procurement:** China supports full cycles of shipbuilding, from small to mega-vessels, through state procurement, long-term financing, and technology upgradation.
2. **Cluster and Ancillary Development:** Japan, Korea, and China have clusters linking shipbuilding yards to nearby ancillary suppliers, lowering costs and raising competitiveness.
3. **Financial Guarantees and Extended Schedules:** These countries offer multi-year guarantees for new orders, subsidized loans, and clear future demand projections, enabling industry scaling.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Urges strategic linking of shipbuilding policy to coastal shipping expansion, Make in India procurement norms, and global trade integration.
2. **Ministry of Shipping Expert Groups:** Advocate for extended order books, skill apprenticeships, investment in prefabrication technology, and long-term R&D funding.
3. **Standing Committee on Transport:** Calls for cluster-based shipyard models, integration of ancillary units, tax breaks, and structured public-private partnerships.
4. **Maritime India Vision 2030 (Government Roadmap):** Recommends demand creation, easier credit, infrastructure upgrade, and systematic offtake contracts for domestic shipyards.

Way Forward

1. **Tie Incentives to Long-Term Offtake Agreements**
 - Mandate government and PSU ordering of Indian-built vessels, especially for projects above 500 gross tonnage.
2. **Develop Shipbuilding Clusters and Ancillary Parks**
 - Incentivize geographical clustering to leverage shared infrastructure, skill, and supply chain benefits.
3. **Invest in Technology and Prefabrication Facilities**
 - Support giant cranes, modular assembly and tech transfers, and R&D partnerships with top-tier global yards.
4. **Strengthen Finance and Credit Mechanisms**

- Provide multi-year, low-interest loans and credit guarantees tailored for shipyard expansion and technical upgrades.

5. **Streamline Regulatory and Fuel Policies**

- Offer fuel price parity, fast-tracked approvals, and regularize procurement from Indian yards to encourage industry confidence.

Conclusion

Reviving India's shipbuilding sector requires more than short-term fiscal packages—it demands sustained investment, technological modernization, and, critically, guaranteed long-term demand. With strategic planning and comprehensive policy implementation, India can scale its shipyards to global competitiveness and reduce reliance on imports for maritime strength.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Which policy feature is especially crucial for long-term viability of India's shipbuilding incentives, as highlighted in recent analysis?

- a) Short-term capital subsidies
- b) Multi-year offtake and government procurement agreements
- c) Higher import tariffs
- d) One-time tax holidays

Answer: B) Multi-year offtake and government procurement agreements

Mains Question

Q1. "Investment and technology alone cannot revive shipbuilding in India without long-term offtake commitments." Discuss the present challenges and policy reforms required for a globally competitive shipbuilding sector. (250 words)

Student Notes

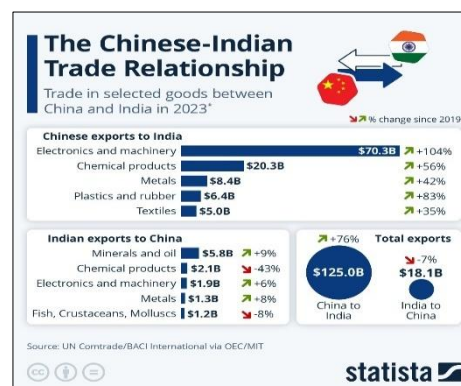
India needs a plan: China has said it will not seek 'Special and Differential Treatment' at WTO. What does this mean for Delhi?

Source: Indian express

UPSC relevance: GS paper 2, International Relations

Introduction

China's recent announcement at the **UN General Assembly** that it **will stop seeking 'Special and Differential Treatment' (SDT)** at the World Trade Organization (WTO) marks a potential turning point in global trade negotiations. This shift, while reinforcing China's status as a trade powerhouse, puts additional pressure on large developing countries—especially India—which have relied on SDT to protect crucial sectors like agriculture, food security, and industry from abrupt liberalization and subsidy cuts.



World Trade Organisation (WTO) Overview

The **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** was established in **1995** as a **global multilateral organisation** to create and enforce rules for trade between nations. It aims to **promote and manage free trade** while acting as a **forum for governments to negotiate trade agreements and resolve disputes**. The WTO also facilitates international business for producers.

Current Composition:

1. **164 members** (including the **European Union**)
2. **23 observer governments** (including **Iraq, Iran, Bhutan, Libya**)

Key Objectives of WTO:

1. **Establish and uphold rules** governing international trade to promote **global economic growth** and **employment opportunities**.
2. Provide a **platform for negotiations** to lower trade barriers and ensure **fair, non-discriminatory practices**.
3. Offer a **structured dispute resolution mechanism** to foster **economic predictability and geopolitical stability**.
4. Enhance **transparency in trade-related decisions**, empowering **smaller and developing nations**.
5. Collaborate with **other international economic institutions** for coordinated management of the global economy.
6. Support **developing countries** to fully leverage the **global trading system**, reducing operational costs and improving integration.
7. Promote **good governance** by encouraging **rules-based trade administration** and minimizing arbitrariness.

Evolution:

The WTO's history can be traced back to **1945**, with its official establishment in **1995**, succeeding the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** framework.

Key Issues

1. **Loss of Flexibility and Trade Safeguards**

- India has historically invoked SDT to delay or limit new subsidy caps, longer phase-ins, and gradual tariff reductions—for example, in food procurement and farmer support.
- Loss of SDT exposes India to challenges on procurement prices, input subsidies, and public stockholding—compromising food and livelihood security.

2. Pressure from WTO Disputes and Developed Countries

- The 2023 WTO farm subsidy panel cited Indian MSP and procurement programs as “potentially trade-distorting,” putting India at risk for disputes on rice, wheat, and sugar.
- The growing chorus for ‘graduation’ (removal of developing-country status) targets not just India’s subsidies but also fisheries, pharmaceuticals, and technology transfer.

Fact: Global developed nations, including the U.S. and EU, are pushing for an end to SDT privileges for major economies like India, potentially risking core subsidy programs (such as the National Food Security Act and fertilizer subsidies) if India must accept tighter WTO rules.

3. Impacts on Rural Livelihoods and Food Security

- India currently spends over \$50 billion on farm subsidies alone; forced phased cuts could endanger coverage of the National Food Security Act—affecting 67% of the population.
- Malnutrition and agrarian distress may worsen if India’s negotiating power is eroded.

4. Risks of Reciprocal Demands on Other Sectors

- If India is denied SDT, Western nations may demand further liberalization: lower tariff ceilings, stricter IP enforcement for pharma, cross-border data access, and controls on e-commerce and services sectors.

5. Strategic and Geopolitical Dimensions

- Faced with China’s “self-declared” developed status but continued structural support for agriculture and industry, India must avoid being diplomatically isolated or blindsided in future negotiations.

Global Practices

1. **Graduation Clauses:** World trade rules now pressure upper-middle income countries (China, Mexico, Brazil) to accept tighter rules on subsidies and tariffs as they “graduate” from developing status.
2. **Trade Remedy Mechanisms:** Many WTO members (like the EU) use anti-dumping, safeguard actions, and dispute settlements to defend sensitive domestic sectors after losing SDT.
3. **Phased Policy Adjustments:** Least-developed countries often negotiate longer timelines, safeguard clauses, and periodic reviews to minimize abrupt reforms.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **Ministry of Commerce (WTO Cell):** Recommends defending food security and MSME interests, seeking coalitions with other developing and least-developed economies.
2. **NITI Aayog:** Proposes continuous waivers or flexibility in crucial sectors, examining alternatives to MSP and expanding digital trade.
3. **Standing Committee on Commerce:** Suggests leveraging bilateral free-trade agreements, digital exports, and stronger trade defense laws to counter external pressure.
4. **High-Level Advisory Groups:** Call for coordinated, cross-ministerial WTO strategies, awareness for “graduation” triggers, and contingency plans on subsidies.

Way Forward

1. **Build Broad Developing Country Coalitions**

- Proactively ally with Africa, ASEAN, and Latin American countries still seeking SDT, amplifying Southern voice at WTO.
- 2. **Negotiate Phase-Out and Transition Periods**
 - Seek multi-year transition deals on farm subsidies, procurement, and tariffs—backed by data on food security needs and rural impact.
- 3. **Diversify Export and Trade Strategies**
 - Expand focus toward digital trade, services, and bilateral FTAs to cushion WTO-induced shocks.
- 4. **Reform Domestic Subsidy Systems**
 - Pilot alternatives to blanket subsidies (direct income support, smart procurement) to enhance WTO compatibility without hurting the poor.
- 5. **Strengthen Trade Defense Infrastructure**
 - Invest in legal, economic, and advocacy capacity to fight adverse WTO cases, and design early warning systems for impending disputes.

Conclusion

China's graduation from SDT status at the **WTO may accelerate calls for India to accept more discipline in trade and subsidy policies**. To safeguard food security, rural welfare, and inclusive growth, India must adopt a nimble, coalition-based, and reform-attuned trade strategy—turning this challenge into an opportunity for policy modernization and global leadership.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. What does 'Special and Differential Treatment' (SDT) at the WTO allow developing countries like India?

- a) Immediate elimination of all tariffs
- b) Blanket immunity from dispute settlement
- c) Flexible timelines for meeting trade commitments and maintaining subsidies
- d) Export bans on all essential goods

Answer: C) Flexible timelines for meeting trade commitments and maintaining subsidies

Mains Question

Q1. "The global rollback of Special and Differential Treatment at the WTO threatens India's food security model and trade flexibility." Discuss the challenges for India and outline policy measures to safeguard core interests in the new global trade environment. (250 words)

Student Notes

Slice the repo rate

Source: Indian express

UPSC Relevance: GS paper 3 (Indian Economy)

Introduction

India's GDP growth remains robust, exceeding expectations even as inflation stays subdued (**CPI inflation averaging 4.9% in August 2025**). However, global headwinds—such as US tariff increases (50% on Indian imports) and softening exports—pose risks for manufacturing, MSMEs, and the overall economy. in the second half of the fiscal year.

Key Issues

- Muted Inflation and Room for Monetary Expansion**
 - August CPI at 4.9%, well within RBI's comfort zone; first-quarter GDP print at 7.8% was robust, but future growth could soften, creating space for supportive rate cuts.
- Global Shocks Dampening Export Sector**
 - US tariffs and soft demand have especially hit textiles, gems, jewelry, seafood, chemicals, and MSMEs (35-40% export share), risking employment, revenue, and sectoral stability.
- Transmission to Domestic Demand**
 - With private investment slowing and government capex strong but not enough to sustain 6.5%+ growth, a repo rate cut would ease credit flows and consumption, supporting key lagging sectors.
- MSME and Rural Stress**
 - Tariffs, global price pressures, and weather impacts (like erratic rainfall in Rajasthan, Haryana, and northern India) threaten rural incomes, supply chains, and non-metro demand.
- Policy Balancing: Tax, Compliance, and Interest Rates**
 - GST simplification and compliance reforms (as implemented this year) boost formalization but need to be complemented by lower borrowing costs to maintain growth momentum.

What is Repo Rate?

- Repo Rate is the interest rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks against government securities.
- Used to control inflation and regulate liquidity in the economy.



Fact: Despite high export concentration, sectors such as textiles, gems and jewelry, and seafood account for nearly 25% of India's export value and are showing stress from prevailing tariffs and global slowdowns.

Monetary Policy in India

Definition:

Monetary policy refers to the **use of tools by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to regulate money supply, credit availability, and interest rates** in order to achieve macroeconomic objectives such as **growth, price stability, and employment**.

Types of Monetary Policy

- Expansionary Monetary Policy (Accommodative Policy)**
 - **Objective:** Increase money supply to stimulate economic growth.
 - **Key Measures:**
 - ✓ **Decreasing interest rates** – Encourages borrowing and investment.
 - ✓ **Lowering reserve requirements** for banks – Banks can lend more, increasing liquidity.
 - ✓ **Purchasing government securities** – Injects money into the economy.
 - **Impact:** Boosts economic activity, consumer spending, and reduces unemployment.



- **Risk:** Excessive use can lead to **inflation** or **hyperinflation**.
- 2. **Contractionary Monetary Policy**
 - **Objective:** Reduce **money supply** to **control inflation**.
 - **Key Measures:**
 - ✓ **Raising interest rates** – Makes borrowing costlier, reducing spending.
 - ✓ **Increasing reserve requirements** – Tightens liquidity in the market.
 - ✓ **Selling government bonds** – Withdraws money from circulation.
 - **Impact:** Maintains **price stability** and **economic stability**.

Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

1. **Recommended by:** Urjit Patel Committee.
2. **Legal basis:** Section 452B of the RBI Act, 1934 (amended).
3. **Composition:** 6 members (RBI Governor + 5 appointed members).
4. **Tenure:** 4 years; **non-renewable**.
5. **Voting:** RBI Governor has a **casting vote** in case of a tie.
6. **Meetings:** Must meet **at least 4 times a year**.
7. **Purpose:** To **fix the policy interest rate** (repo rate) and decide on measures to control inflation and growth.

Global Practices

1. **Proactive Monetary Accommodation:** Central banks in the US, Europe, Australia, and East Asia often use timely rate cuts to offset external shocks, stimulate domestic demand, and preserve growth during periods of subdued inflation.
2. **Targeted Support for MSMEs:** Many advanced economies implement credit guarantees, temporary tax reliefs, and targeted rate interventions for sectors bearing the brunt of global slowdowns.
3. **Integrated Transmission Mechanisms:** Moving in sync with tax reforms—a combination of monetary and fiscal easing, rather than siloed measures.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):** Encourages data-driven rate decisions anchored in inflation and growth trends, with flexibility in response to global and sectoral vulnerability.
2. **NITI Aayog:** Suggests targeted fiscal-monetary coordination and timely rate cuts alongside direct support for MSMEs and export-intensive industries.
3. **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry:** Advocates for enhanced credit transmission, lower real interest rates, and simplified GST for MSME competitiveness.
4. **Ministry of Finance Expert Groups:** Recommend responsive policy mix: monetary loosening when inflation is manageable and global risks threaten growth.

Way Forward

1. **Time Repo Rate Cuts to Demand Shocks**
 - RBI should implement a moderate repo rate cut if inflation stays within target, counteracting global drag and export stress.
2. **Strengthen Credit Transmission to MSMEs**
 - Expand refinancing lines and microcredit, ensuring that lower rates translate to cheaper loans for businesses most exposed to external shocks.
3. **Coordinate with GST and Compliance Reforms**

- Align monetary easing with continued GST simplification and tax reliefs, multiplying the impact on formal sector demand.

4. **Broaden Policy Support for Rural and Export Sectors**

- Supplement rate cuts with sectoral incentives and insurance for rural, non-metro, and export-dependent enterprises.

5. **Monitor and Respond to Future Headwinds**

- Set up continuous data dashboards and policy feedback loops for dynamic adjustment as global trends evolve.

Conclusion

With inflation tamed and exports facing exogenous challenges, a responsive monetary policy — including repo rate cuts, accompanied by direct MSME support and ongoing tax reform — can help India maintain its growth momentum through the second half of the fiscal. Policy agility is key to safeguarding jobs, income, and national economic strength.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Which of the following sectors accounts for nearly 25% of India's total export value, significantly affected by global tariffs?

- a) Automobile
- b) Electronics
- c) Textiles, gems and jewelry, seafood
- d) Software

Answer: C) Textiles, gems and jewelry, seafood

Mains Question

Q1. "In the face of external headwinds and subdued inflation, monetary policy must be agile." Discuss the pros and cons of a repo rate cut in India, considering current growth and sectoral challenges. (250 words)

Student Notes

What an empty plate of food should symbolise

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Relevance: GS paper 2, paper 3

Introduction

September 29 is the **International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (IDAFWL)**—a reminder that nearly **one-third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted**, with profound consequences for food and climate security. India, as one of the world's largest food producers, loses about ₹1.5 trillion (\$18 billion) annually to post-harvest wastage, amounting to roughly 3.7% of its GDP. Fruits and vegetables are especially vulnerable: 10–15% of total produce is lost, and even staples like paddy and wheat see 4–5% spoilage.

Key Issues

- Staggering Scale of Post-Harvest Losses**
 - **NABARD and Ministry data show losses from farm to market are alarmingly high**, affecting both nutrition and household incomes, while squandering input resources (**water, energy, labor**).
- Impact on Food Security and Climate Stability**
 - Lost food means lost nutrition for millions, economic drain on farmers, and wasted energy, water, and land—worsening food insecurity, environmental sustainability, and climate stability.
- Major Gaps in Storage, Supply Chain, and Technology**
 - Inadequate storage and cold chain capacity, poor supply chain infrastructure, and outdated logistics account for most losses. For example, only a fraction of perishable produce benefits from modern storage or efficient transport.
- Underestimated Emissions and Environmental Impact**
 - Food losses generate significant greenhouse gas emissions: latest studies link even minor percentage losses in cereals, fruits, and vegetables to millions of tonnes of wasted CO₂-equivalent emissions annually.
- Insufficient Focus on Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy**
 - Uncoordinated supply chains and lack of robust food system transformation strategies hinder significant recycling or re-use of food waste, both for human consumption and as bioenergy or animal feed.

Global Practices

- Targeted Food Loss Reduction Policies:** The EU, Japan, and Australia mandate waste reduction targets and incentivize circular food chains (composting, redistribution, biogas).
- Digital Monitoring and Smart Cold Chains:** China, Israel, and the Netherlands use IoT, AI-driven routing, and digital dashboards to minimize losses from farm to fork.
- Consumer Education and Legislation:** France and South Korea ban supermarket food waste, enforcing redistribution and consumer awareness.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations



1. **NITI Aayog:** Urges investment in logistics modernization, cold chain expansion, and circular economy models for food systems.
2. **Ministry of Agriculture (MoFPI, PMKSY):** Supports the creation of Mega Food Parks, cold storage incentives, and agro-processing clusters under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana.
3. **FAO India & NABARD:** Emphasize smallholder access to storage, local value chains, and real-time monitoring of surplus/deficit areas via digital tools.
4. **ICAR & NIIFTM:** Recommends improved post-harvest training, solar cold rooms, and food waste-to-energy conversion pilots.

Way Forward

1. **Expand and Modernize Storage and Cold Chain Infrastructure**
 - Subsidize cold storages, solar-powered chilling, and refrigerated transport, especially for perishable crops.
2. **Adopt Digital and AI Tools for Tracking and Managing Losses**
 - Deploy IoT, satellite mapping, and real-time supply chain platforms to monitor and act on losses at every stage.
3. **Incentivize and Enforce Food Redistribution/Circular Economy**
 - Support food banks, promote kitchen and marketplace composting, and mandate redistribution of unsold surplus foods.
4. **Strengthen Smallholder Support and Farmer Training**
 - Provide targeted grants and capacity-building on post-harvest management, quality standards, and new logistics.
5. **Foster Responsible Consumer and Market Behavior**
 - Launch awareness drives, incentivize biodiversity-friendly sourcing, and legislate against institutional food wastage.

Conclusion

India's food loss and waste crisis is not just an economic or agricultural challenge but a moral and climate imperative. Solutions must span better storage, systemic technology upgrades, cooperative supply chains, and collective responsibility—from farmer to retailer to consumer—for nutritious, secure, and sustainable food futures.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Approximately what percentage of India's GDP is lost annually due to post-harvest food wastage?

- a) 0.5%
- b) 1.0%
- c) 3.7%
- d) 10.0%

Answer: C) 3.7%

Mains Question

Q1. "Food loss and waste undermine both nutrition security and climate stability." Discuss the key causes and consequences of food wastage in India and suggest comprehensive strategies to address the issue. (250 words)

More women employed in agriculture, but half of them are unpaid:

Source: the Hindu

UPSC Relevance: women participation in labour force (GS paper 3)

Introduction

Women now make up **more than 42% of India's agricultural workforce, a 135% surge in rural women shifting from non-farm to agricultural jobs over the past decade**. Yet, nearly half (49.1 million in 2023-24) of these women are unpaid family workers—meaning India's "feminisation of agriculture" is marked by deep inequity rather than equally shared opportunity or improved livelihoods.

Key Issues

1. Unpaid and Invisible Women's Labour

- 49.1 million out of 99.1 million women workers in agriculture are unpaid family workers, a number nearly quadrupled since 2017-18 (only 23.6 million then).

2. Low Value-Addition and Gendered Segregation

- Most women are concentrated in subsistence farming and low-value activities, receiving little support or access to technology, credit, or market information.

3. Limited Access to Skills, Technology, and Markets

- Less than 13% of women workers in agriculture received any formal skills training in 2023-24, with even lower rates in high-export or high-growth crops (see chart: e.g., only 51% in meat/dairy, 62% in fruits/vegetables).

4. Policy Gaps and Unequal Outcomes

- Despite land and labour reforms, the benefits of formalization, government support and digital advancements remain male-dominated; women's growth in the sector has not translated into higher incomes.

5. Barriers to Modernization and Value Chains

- Language, digital and financial literacy gaps, lack of affordable technology, and limited access to support schemes slow "feminisation" from contributing to agricultural transformation.

All work, no pay

The data for the charts were sourced from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2023-24



Chart 1: The number of women in the agriculture sector who are unpaid family workers



Chart 2: Proportion of women (in %) in agriculture who received no wages according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2023-24

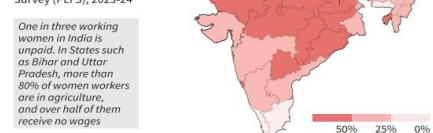
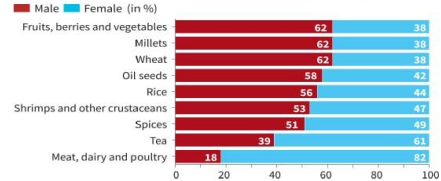


Chart 3: Proportion of men and women involved with crops with high export value



Fact: According to the 2023-24 Periodic Labour Force Survey, two out of every three women in agriculture are not recorded as receiving wages; 42% of sector workers are women, but most are in low-value, precarious or unpaid roles.

Current Status of India's Labour Force (2024)

- Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR): 59.6%**, slightly down from 59.8% in 2023 (PLFS 2024).
- Worker Population Ratio (WPR): 57.7%**, a marginal decline from 58.0% in 2023.
- Unemployment Rate: 3.2%** at the all-India level, slightly higher than 3.1% in 2023.

Key Insight:

The Indian labour force shows **relative stability**, but **minor declines in participation and employment ratios** indicate underlying challenges in **job creation and workforce engagement**.

Global Practices

1. **Inclusive Land and Labour Policies:** Countries like Rwanda and Vietnam have expanded land rights and training for women, resulting in increased crop yields and higher farm incomes.
2. **Digital Agriculture Platforms:** Kenya's mobile advisory services (e.g., mFarm), digital payment platforms, and e-market access have helped formalize women's participation and raise productivity.
3. **Cooperative Models:** Farmer-producer groups (FPOs) in Latin America and parts of Africa empower women with group bargaining and contract farming, increasing value-added participation alongside expanding exports.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

1. **NITI Aayog:** Recommends gender-sensitive reforms in land titling, farm credit, and digital literacy for women farmers; special incentives for FPOs led by women.
2. **Ministry of Agriculture (PMKSY/PMFME):** Calls for integrating women's collectives into food processing, micro-irrigation, and precision farming schemes.
3. **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Focuses on training, funding, and entrepreneurship for female farmers; supports women's access to market linkages and digital tools.
4. **Standing Committee on Rural Development:** Advocates for expanded extension services, guaranteed minimum wages, and PDS (public distribution) targeting for female-headed rural households.

Way Forward

1. **Mandate Wage Parity and Income Recognition**
 - Implement legal and monitoring mechanisms to recognize and remunerate women's farm work, including through statutory minimum wages.
2. **Scale Skill and Technology Access**
 - Target land holding women for agricultural training, digital literacy, and credit schemes; scale up access to new tech and high-value chains.
3. **Expand Formal Collectives and FPOs**
 - Incentivize women-led FPOs, cooperatives, and SHGs (Self-Help Groups) to improve bargaining power and market access.
4. **Promote Inclusive Policy Design and Implementation**
 - Make all new government farm schemes and digital platforms gender-responsive and accessible by default.
5. **Enhance Awareness and Social Protection**
 - Build on nutrition, asset, and health support for women agricultural workers; invest in community childcare, flexible timings, and rural infrastructure for women's empowerment.

Conclusion

The ongoing feminisation of Indian agriculture is critical for economic and social transformation, but the gains are undermined by wage disparities and a lack of formal recognition. Only with focused investment in parity, skills, digital access, and gendered policy reform can India bridge the gap—transforming women's agricultural participation into real prosperity and equality.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. According to the latest PLFS data, approximately what proportion of women working in Indian agriculture are unpaid family workers?

- a) 10% b) 25%
c) 50% d) 75%

Answer: C) 50%

Mains Question

**Q1. "While more women now participate in agriculture, their work often goes unpaid and unrecognized."
Examine the major challenges in realizing women's full potential in Indian agriculture and suggest
policy interventions to bridge gender gaps. (250 words)**

Student Notes 

An anti-terror role that defies logic

Source: The Hindu

UPSC relevance: International relations (GS PAPER 2)

Introduction

Pakistan's recent elevation to leading UN counter-terror bodies—including vice-chairing the UN Taliban Sanctions Committee and the 15-nation UN Counter-Terrorism Committee—raises major concerns due to its well-documented history of harboring terror groups like **Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad**. Despite a record of attacks such as Mumbai 2008, Pulwama 2019, and the recent Pahalgam incident in 2025, global institutions continue to overlook Pakistan's actions, complicating international counter-terror efforts and India's diplomatic priorities.



Figure 1: S Jayshankar speech: UN

Key Issues

1. State-Sponsored Terror Infrastructure

- Attacks in Mumbai, Pulwama, Pahalgam and frequent cross-border violence indicate ongoing support for terrorist organizations from Pakistani territory and institutions.

2. Global Governance Paradox

- Pakistan's leadership roles in UN bodies undermine the credibility of multilateral counter-terror frameworks, enabling countries with poor compliance to shape global narratives.

3. Diplomatic and Security Risks for India

- India's efforts to block problematic appointments and highlight evidence at UN forums face resistance; lack of consensus allows states with questionable records to lead key committees.

4. Implications for Regional Stability

- Pakistan's position allows it to deflect, delay, or influence sanctions and monitoring on terror groups, impacting India's strategic calculus and broader regional security.

5. UN Process Gaps and Geopolitical Maneuvering

- Selection criteria often ignore on-ground realities and favor tactical political alliances over demonstrated counter-terror performance, risking dilution of UN's moral authority.

Fact: In 2025, Pakistan's inclusion in UN anti-terror leadership followed its removal from FATF's 'grey list,' but India and many global observers continue to cite evidence of official support for terror infrastructure across the border.

Global Practices

- Rigorous Vetting & Compliance:** The EU, INTERPOL, and FATF conduct continuous compliance checks and exclude/blacklist states found sheltering or financing terror.
- Sanction-Based Accountability:** US, Australia, UK enforce asset freezes, travel bans, and visa restrictions for officials and entities with proven links to terrorism.
- Transparency and Public Evidence:** Global committees in advanced democracies require periodic reporting and public documentation of meetings, decisions, and compliance.

Indian Committees & Institutional Recommendations

- National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS):** Recommends proactive intelligence-sharing, evidence-based lobbying, and the formation of alliances to block state sponsors of terror from global leadership.

2. **Parliamentary Committees on External Affairs and Security:** Suggest using documented dossiers and leveraging partnerships with countries skeptical of Pakistan's record for UN voting and nominations.
3. **Ministry of External Affairs:** Urges synchronized diplomatic pressure, regular engagement with FATF, and increased use of media campaigns to highlight terror linkages.

Way Forward

1. **Lead Multilateral Advocacy for Reform**
 - Lobby for transparent and evidence-led criteria in UN counter-terror appointments; demand annual compliance reviews for committee chairs.
2. **Build Strategic Coalitions**
 - Intensify alliances with nations affected by cross-border terrorism to vote and block problematic appointments.
3. **Expand Intelligence and Evidence-Sharing**
 - Disseminate actionable intel and public documentation to strengthen India's position and press for international accountability.
4. **Use Public Diplomacy and Media**
 - Raise awareness globally, exposing the paradoxes and risks of current selection processes—showcase the impacts of terrorism with factual narratives.
5. **Demand Greater Accountability**
 - Push for sanction enforcement, mandatory reporting, and periodic reviews of committee effectiveness at UN, FATF, and allied forums.

Conclusion

Pakistan's inclusion in key UN anti-terror bodies—despite its record—undermines the credibility and effectiveness of global counter-terror efforts. India must respond with strong diplomatic, intelligence, and coalition strategies to safeguard its interests, restore the integrity of multilateral institutions, and ensure that genuine efforts to combat terrorism are not compromised by political expediency.

Prelims MCQ

Q1. Which UN body did Pakistan become vice-chair of in 2025, sparking concerns due to its terror links?

- a) International Court of Justice
- b) Taliban Sanctions Committee
- c) United Nations Women
- d) UNICEF

Answer: B) Taliban Sanctions Committee

Mains Question

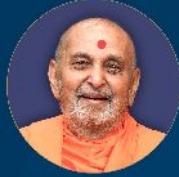
Q1. "State sponsors of terror must be excluded from global counter-terror leadership or risk undermining efforts against terrorism." Critically analyze Pakistan's recent elevation to UN counter-terror bodies and suggest policy responses for India. (250 words)

Student Notes 

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All Individuals, by pursuing titles such as IAS and IPS, truly become
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