

# CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION focus

MONTHLY NOTES BY RAU'S

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WHAT IS RIGHT IS NOT ALWAYS POPULAR AND WHAT IS POPULAR IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT. 107

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## CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYSIS

logical . simple . targeted  
analysis & explanation  
of relevant news

## ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

Coverage from  
varied  
sources

## ESSAYS OF THE MONTH

Selected essays  
from Rau's  
GSI students

**MARCH  
2025**



**RAU'S IAS  
STUDY CIRCLE**

Since 1953



# focus

## CRITICAL NOTES FOR THE PREPARATION OF GENERAL STUDIES PAPERS

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The **purpose** of Focus is to expound the applied nature of General Studies to Civil Services aspirants thereby making them aware of the real demand of UPSC exam.

The **sources** relied for selection and analysis of issues are:

1. The Hindu, The Hindu (Sun.)
2. The Indian Express
3. The Times of India
4. Asian Age
5. The Tribune
6. The Economic Times
7. Hindu Business Line
8. Frontline
9. Economic and Political Weekly
10. IDSA
11. BBC
12. Yojana
13. Kurukshetra
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Dear Students,

FOCUS is the Study Circle's monthly publication of contemporary issues and current affairs analysis. It is in fact a collective effort, by experienced educators in varied themes, of identifying current affairs in light of the UPSC syllabus, supplementing them with background information, explaining their related dimensions, lending them a generalist viewpoint and thus producing critical notes for the preparation of General Studies' syllabus.

The publication, as the name suggests, focuses solely on issues which are relevant to the **factual** as well as **applied** aspects of the General Studies' syllabus. That is how Focus covers all anticipated issues and themes for the upcoming Civil Services Examination (CSE).

### Features

#### PART ONE | CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYSIS

- This month's edition covers analysis of news from the immediately preceding month.
- All news/issues are categorized and clubbed syllabus-wise (International Relations, Polity & Governance, Science & Technology, Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude and so on) for efficient study.
- Background information has been added to provide context.
- Related and Additional information-dimensions have been explained to add depth to your understanding.
- Maps and figures have been provided for associative and retentive learning.
- Practice Questions

#### PART TWO | ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

- Coverage from varied sources

#### PART THREE | ESSAYS FOR YOU

- Selected essays from Rau's GSI students

For further understanding or discussion in any topic, please consult your respective professors.

**Good Luck!**

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# **PART ONE**

# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**logical .simple .targeted  
analysis & explanation  
of all relevant news of the month**

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

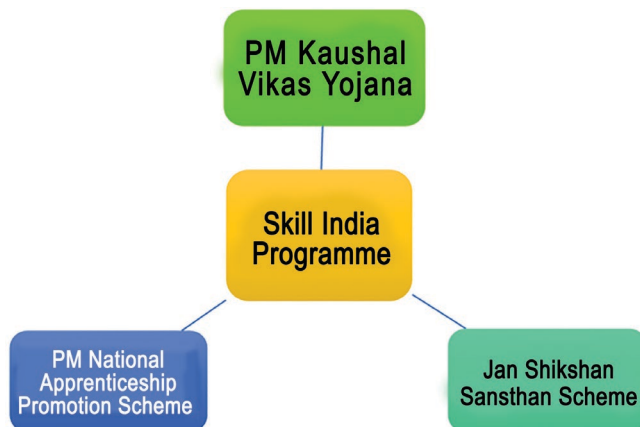
# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER III (MAIN)

## RESTRUCTURING SKILL INDIA PROGRAMME

#SKILL DEVELOPMENT #GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Union Cabinet has restructured the **Central Sector Scheme 'Skill India Programme'** till 2026 with an overlay outlay of Rs.8,800 crore from the period 2022-23 to 2025-26. This initiative aims to develop a **future-ready workforce** by integrating **demand-driven, technology-enabled, and industry-aligned training** across India.



### RESTRUCTURED SKILL INDIA PROGRAMME

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
- The programme consolidates **three flagship schemes**:
  - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0)
  - Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS)
  - Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme
- Under the three flagships schemes, there are **more than 2.27 crore beneficiaries** till date.
- **Aim:**
  - To build a skilled **future-ready workforce**

- To integrate **demand-driven, technology-enabled, and industry-aligned training**
- To provide structured skill development, **on-the-job training**, and **community-based learning**.
- To ensure that both urban and rural populations, including **marginalized communities**, have access to **high-quality vocational education**.

#### 1. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0):

- Provides **NSQF-aligned skill training** through:
  - Short-Term Training (STT)
  - Special Projects (SP)
  - **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**
- **Target beneficiary:** Age group of 15-59 years.
- **Key Features:**
  - Integration of **On-the-Job Training (OJT)** within skilling programs.
  - Introduction of 400+ new courses in **AI, 5G, Cybersecurity, Green Hydrogen, and Drone Technology**.
  - Establishment of **Skill Hubs** in premier institutions like IITs, NITs, JNVs, and Kendriya Vidyalayas. International mobility focus through **Mobility Partnership Agreements (MMPAs)**.
  - Blended learning approach incorporating **digital training**. Training material **translated into eight regional languages**.
  - **Inter-ministerial convergence** with PM Vishwakarma, PM Surya Ghar, and the National Green Hydrogen Mission.
  - **Ease of Doing Business approach** to streamline participation.

#### 2. PM National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS):

- **Objective:** Encourage **industry-led skill development** through apprenticeships.

- **Target Group:** 14-35 years.
- **Key Features:**
  - Focus on the earn-while-you-learn **model**.
  - Align skilling initiatives with futuristic job markets and industry trends.
  - **25% stipend support** (up to Rs. 1,500 per month per apprentice) via Direct Benefit Transfer, provided by the **Central Government**.
  - **Coverage:** AI, robotics, blockchain, green energy, and Industry 4.0.
  - Special focus on **MSMEs** and underserved areas such as **Aspirational districts** and **North-East Region**.

### 3. Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) scheme

- **Objective:** Community-based skilling for disadvantaged groups.
- **Target Group:** 15-45 years, especially women, rural youth, and economically weaker sections.
- **Key Features:**
  - Low-cost, doorstep training for self-employment and wage-based livelihoods.
  - Creating awareness on health, hygiene, gender equality, and education within communities to promote **inclusive skilling**.
  - Linked with PM JANMAN, ULLAS, and financial literacy programs.
  - Certification integrated with **National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)**, **DigiLocker**, and **National Credit Framework (NCrF)**.

The continuation of the Skill India Programme reinforces the importance of **continuous upskilling and reskilling**. The initiative will directly contribute to **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data**, ensuring that **workforce development policies** remain **aligned with economic and industrial trends**.

## BUDGETING FOR A GENDER-INCLUSIVE 'VIKSIT BHARAT'

#GENDER BUDGETING

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The **share of Gender Budget allocation** in the total Union Budget has **increased** to 8.86% in FY 2025-26 from 6.8% in FY 2024-25. This is the highest allocation in two decades, with **₹4.49 lakh crore spread across 49 Union Ministries and departments**.

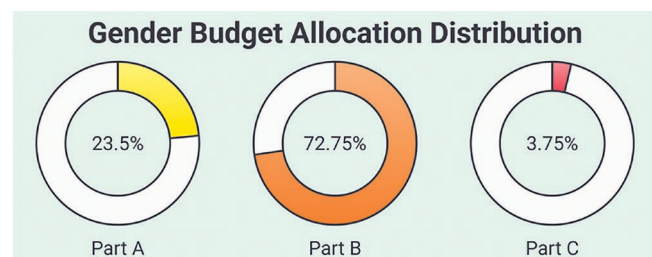
### ABOUT GENDER BUDGETING

- Gender Budgeting is an **approach that uses fiscal policy to promote gender equality** by assessing the impact of government budgets on gender equity.
- **Components of Gender budgeting-** There are three components of the gender budgeting
  - **Part A (100% for women):** These are gender-specific expenditures allocated for the schemes directly benefiting women. (E.g., Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, SHE-Box etc.)
  - **Part B (30% to 99% for women):** It consists of Pro-women general expenditure that benefits both men and women but special focus on improvement of women's condition (E.g., MGNREGA ensures wage equality for women).
  - **Part C (less than 30% for women):** These are gender-neutral budgeting that impacts all the citizens but may need gender sensitive planning to ensure equal benefits. (E.g., Har Ghar Nal project benefitting women by reducing their time to fetch water).

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF GENDER BUDGETING 2025-26

#### 1. Increased share of Gender Budget allocation:

- **Maximum allocation in Part B:**
  - 72.75% of the gender budget has been allocated to Part B type of gender budget, followed by Part A and Part C, i.e., 23.5% and 3.75% respectively.



#### • Ministry-wise allocation:

- The **Ministry of Women & Child Development** received the highest 81.79% allocation, followed by the Department of Rural Development (65.76%), the

Department of Food and Public Distribution, and the Department of Health and Family Welfare.

- **Allocation to new Ministries:**

- Twelve new Ministries/Departments have reported allocations which include: Department of Animal Husbandry, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Food & Public Distribution, Department of Financial Services, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Railways etc.
- This expansion of gender budgeting into **non-conventional sectors** reflects the government approach to **gender mainstreaming**.

- 2. **Advancing women's economic participation:**

- To achieve the **ambitious target of 70% women's participation** in economic activities by **2047**, key initiatives like Skill India Programme, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission, MGNREGS, PM Employment Generation Programme, PM Vishwakarma, Krishonnati Yojana, have received increased allocations.
- **The budget advocates unlocking finance for women-owned enterprises** through collateral-free loans, alternative credit scoring models, and targeted financial literacy programmes.
- Tracking access and usage of such schemes through **gender-disaggregated data** to further enhance their effectiveness.

#### ISSUES IN GENDER BUDGETING

- **Inadequate allocation:** Women constitute about half of the nation's population but gender budgeting is only 8.86% of the budget.
- **Skewed allocation:** Over 95% of the gender budgeting is done for the 5 ministries only, this limits the scope of implementation of the gender budgeting.
- **Implementation gap:** Many gender-responsive schemes suffer from poor execution due to bureaucratic delay and lack of coordination. (**only 37% of Nirbhaya Fund** has been utilised since its inception)
- **Gender neutral schemes overlook women:** Needs of women are often overlooked leading to further deprivation of the women. (**only 27% of supervisory position** in MGNREGA are held by women)
- **Insufficient monitoring and accountability:** There is a lack of clear mechanism that leads to inefficient spending. (**Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana's**

benefits have reached less than 50% of eligible women as per NITI Aayog: 2023).

## MARITIME DEVELOPMENT FUND & INDIAN SHIPPING INDUSTRY

#BUDGET #INFRASTRUCTURE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*The Union Budget 2025 has announced Rs. 25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund for the shipping industry, among other incentives.*

#### CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY

- **Capital Constraints and High Borrowing Costs:**
  - Indian shipping companies face high borrowing costs, **short loan tenures, and strict collateral requirements**.
  - Unlike foreign counterparts, Indian ship-owners cannot use ships as collateral, making financing difficult.
  - Lenders do not fully understand the **cyclical nature** of the industry, leading to rigid loan restructuring policies.
- **Unfavourable Tax Policies:**
  - Indian-flagged ships are subject to **5% IGST** on purchase price, a tax **not imposed on foreign vessels** operating in Indian waters.
- **Ship-building Challenges:**
  - India's shipbuilding industry suffers from **inadequate infrastructure, high input costs** (especially steel), dependence on imports for spare parts, and delays in vessel deliveries.
  - **Customs duties on imported machinery** increase production costs.
  - **Lack of skilled workforce** reduces efficiency. These issues discourage ship-owners from investing in Indian shipyards.

#### STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

- **Maritime Development Fund (MDF):**
  - A **₹25,000 crore fund** aimed at improving **access to capital** for ship-owners. The government will

contribute **up to 49% to the fund** and mobilise the rest from the private sector.

- The fund will provide **long-term and low-cost financial support** for Indigenous shipbuilding and other blue water infrastructure projects.
- The fund aims to provide **various forms of financial support**, including debt, equity, viability gap funding (VGF), and buyer credit.
- **Ship-building clusters:**
  - Facilitating ship-building clusters help to increase the range, categories and capacity of ships.
  - This will include additional **infrastructural facilities, skilling and technology** to develop the entire ecosystem.
  - This will not only **improve overall infrastructural and logistical support** for the export sector, but also help to **save a huge amount of forex remitted in dollars to foreign shipping lines**.
- **Infrastructure Status for Large Vessels:** This status allows shipping companies to access benefits similar to those in other infrastructure sectors.
- **Customs Duty Exemption on Shipbuilding Spares:** The government has extended this exemption for another **10 years**.
- **Revamped Financial Assistance Policy:** This includes **credit incentives for shipbreaking** and an extension of the tonnage tax scheme to inland vessels.

## UDAN 5.5 LAUNCHED

#INFRASTRUCTURE

PRIMARY SOURCE BusinessLine

The Centre has launched the next phase of its flagship **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik)** scheme. **UDAN 5.5** intends to promote last-mile connectivity in remote regions, hilly areas, and island territories.

### ABOUT UDAN (UDE DESH KA AAM NAGRIK) SCHEME

- Launched by the **Ministry of Civil Aviation** for **regional airport development** and **regional connectivity enhancement**. It is a part of the **National Civil Aviation Policy 2016**.
- **Objectives:**
  - To improve the air connectivity to **remote and regional areas** of India.

- To make flights accessible and affordable in tier-2 and tier-3 towns.

### KEY FEATURES OF UDAN SCHEME

- Under the scheme, airlines have to **cap airfares for 50% of the total seats at Rs. 2,500 per hour** of flight. This would be achieved through:
  - **Financial stimulus** in the form of concessions from Central and State governments and airport operators.
  - **Viability Gap Funding (VGF):** A government grant provided to the airlines to bridge the gap between the cost of operations and expected revenue.
    - **Regional Connectivity Fund (RCF):** created to meet the viability gap funding requirements under the scheme.
  - The partner **State Governments** would contribute a **20%** share to this fund.
    - **UTs and NER** states shall contribute **only 10%**.
- UDAN created a **framework based on the need** and led to the formulation of:
  - **Lifeline UDAN:** for transportation of medical cargo during pandemic.
  - **Krishi UDAN:** value realization of agriculture products especially in Northeastern Region (NER) and tribal districts.
  - **International UDAN routes for NER** to explore International Connectivity from/to Guwahati and Imphal.

### THE LATEST PHASE: UDAN 5.5

- **UDAN 5.5** intends to promote last-mile connectivity in remote regions, hilly areas, and island territories.
- **Focus:** Routes that will be serviced **exclusively with sea-planes, choppers, and small aircraft** with a seating capacity of less than 20 passengers.
- Operators will get a chance to chart seaplane routes between **80 water bodies**, which include **waterdromes, ponds, and dams**.
- **Around 400 helipads are also included** in the scheme for operators to map out chopper routes.
- Allows the participation of **operators of aircraft in categories** such as:
  - **Category '1A':** seat less than nine passengers.
  - **Category '1':** less than 20 passengers.

# NEW INCOME TAX BILL, 2025

#TAXATION #INCOME TAX

PRIMARY SOURCE 

*Income-tax Bill, 2025, recently introduced in Lok Sabha, intends to **simplify India's six-decade-old structure of direct taxation and replace the Income Tax Act, 1961.** Once passed by Parliament, the new law will likely come into effect on April 1, 2026.*

## INCOME TAX BILL, 2025: SALIENT FEATURES

### 1. Shift from Assessment Year (AY) to Tax Year:

- **Bill introduces Tax Year:** defined as a **12-month period beginning April 1**. In case of a business or a newly-set-up profession, the tax year will begin from the date it was set up, and will end with the said financial year. Income tax will be levied on the basis of the economic activity and income earned in a tax year.
- At present, income tax has the concept of **assessment year (AY)**. It assesses tax on income earned in the **previous (financial) year**. i.e., income earned in the financial year (FY) 2024-25 (April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025) is assessed in AY 2025-26 (beginning April 1, 2025).
- **This shift from AY to Tax Year** eliminates the need to track two different time periods (previous year & AY). Aligns tax computation with financial year reporting.

### 2. Crypto as Property:

- **Virtual Digital Assets (VDA)** such as **cryptocurrencies** have been included in the definition of property.
- They are to be **counted as a capital asset of the assessee** along with existing categories of immovable property such as land and building, shares and securities, bullion, jewellery, archaeological collections, drawings, paintings, sculptures, and any work of art.
- Strengthens tax administration on **evolving financial assets**.

### 3. Social Media Access in Tax Governance:

- Recognises **"Virtual digital space"** including email servers, social media accounts, online investment, trading and banking accounts, remote or cloud servers, and digital application platforms under provisions for surveys, searches and seizures by Income Tax authorities.

- Strengthens monitoring **against tax evasion**.

### 4. Dispute Resolution Mechanism:

- Provides **transparency in decision-making** through the **Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP)**. Reduces litigation and ensures **timely resolution**.

The Income Tax Bill 2025 is an effort to bring a change in the direct taxation landscape of the country. It is a commitment of the government to **reform, fairness, and justice**.

# UNDERDEVELOPED BOND MARKET IN INDIA

#DEBT AND BOND MARKET

PRIMARY SOURCE 

*The Economic Survey 2024-25 highlighted that the **Indian corporate bond market remained underdeveloped compared to global standards.***

## MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- The Survey highlighted that in contrast to the equity market, **the debt market in India remains undercapitalised**. Indian corporate bond market share is **18% of GDP**, as compared to 80% in South Korea and 36% in China.
- In FY24, the **public placement of corporate bonds** stood at Rs 19,000 crore against the **private placement** of around Rs 8,38,000 crore. The overwhelming **majority of corporate bond issuance** happens through **private placement**, which significantly limits participation of retail investors.

## WHAT ARE CORPORATE BONDS?

- Corporate bonds are **debt instruments** issued by a corporation to raise capital from the public.
- Corporations have a **right to issue these** bonds to fulfill their purpose, like debt refinancing, research development, etc.
- The holder of corporate bonds receives interest from the corporation periodically, **for a fixed period of time** and gets back the principal, along with the interest due at the end of the maturity period.
- It normally offers a **higher rate of interest** as compared to fixed deposits or postal savings or similar investments.

- **Regulated by:** Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

#### WHO CAN ISSUE CORPORATE BONDS IN INDIA?

- In India, **both public and private companies** can issue corporate bonds.
- A company incorporated in India, but part of a multinational group, can also issue corporate bonds.
- However, a company incorporated **outside India cannot issue corporate bonds** in India.
- A **statutory corporation** like LIC (Life Insurance Cooperation) can also issue corporate bonds.

#### CHALLENGES IN CORPORATE BOND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

- **Higher rated Companies dominate Corporate issuance:** In Indian corporate bond markets almost 80% of the bonds outstanding by value are rated AAA. This indicates that the number of sub investment grade issues is minimal and the proportion below AAA is small.
- **Narrow Investor Base:** The demand for corporate bonds as an investment is mostly confined to institutional investors such as insurance, mutual fund, pension fund companies etc. The retail investors account for only 3 per cent of the outstanding issuances.
- **Dominance of Government securities:** The Central and State Government securities constituted almost half of the total investment in the Bond Market.
- **Constraints on Foreign Investors:** In recent years the investment limit for FPIs in the corporate bond has been enhanced along with a reduction in the withholding tax. However, the FPIs are not fully utilizing the enhanced limits due to limited liquidity in the market.
- **Limited investor base:** Indian investor base is shrinking due to decline in individuals and households savings. **E.g.,** Indian savings reduced from 35% in 2011-12 to 30% in 2022-23.
- **High taxation and inflation burden:** India is facing a dual issue of high taxation combined with high inflation rate, especially food inflation, leading to low investments.
- **Long-term capital gains tax:** Investors are refraining from the bond market due to re-introduction of the long term capital gains tax.

- **Regulatory constraints:** Stringent regulations limit investors (like insurance companies) to invest in high-rated bonds. **E.g.,** IRDAI mandates insurance companies to invest in at least AAA rating bonds. This effectively crowds out small players in the corporate bond market.

#### IMPLICATIONS ON INDIAN ECONOMY

- **Overdependence on banking finance:** Companies, due to low corporate bonds, depend on banks for finances. This leads to crowding out effects for the retail borrowers and MSMEs. **E.g.,** In 2023, bank credit grew **by 15.4%**, while corporate bond issuances lagged at ₹7.5 lakh crore.
- **Limited access for lower-rated companies:** The nascent state of the corporate bond market restricts access to capital for lower-rated or first-time issuers. Investors often prefer bonds from top-rated companies, leaving others with limited financing options.
- **Economic slowdown:** A shallow corporate bond market impedes efficient capital allocation, slowing down economic development and infrastructure projects.
- **Hampers innovation:** The shortage of funding may lead to the reduction in innovation by new corporations and startups.

#### SUGGESTIVE MEASURES TO BOOST CORPORATE BONDS

There have been a number of reports by expert Committees on development of corporate bond markets in India such as R. H. Patil Committee (2005), Percy Mistry Committee (2007), H.R Khan Committee (2016). Important Recommendations:

- **Enhancing Issuer Base:** In order to incentivise corporates to raise a part of their requirements through bonds, the time and cost for public issuance and the disclosure and listing requirements should be reduced and made simpler.
- **Enhancing Investor Base :**
  - The scope of investment by Insurance, pension and insurance companies in corporate bonds should be enhanced
  - Retail investors should be encouraged to participate in the market through stock exchanges. Such investors should also be encouraged to participate in the corporate bond market through mutual funds.

- investment in corporate bonds should be considered as part of total bank credit while computing credit deposit ratio by banks
- **Bonds Primary Issuance Database:** A centralized database of all bonds issued by corporates should be made available free of cost to all the investors.
- **Acceptance of corporate bonds under LAF repo of RBI:** Encourage Banks to invest in Corporate Bonds and then use them to borrow loans from RBI through Repos.
- **Debt Market Index:** Though equity indices such as Nifty 50 and the BSE Sensex serve as popular benchmarks for equities, designing debt indices has posed challenges in India as the market lacks breadth and depth.
- **Credit enhancements of bonds** by setting up of Credit Guarantee Enhancement corporation.
- Strengthening of **Credit Default Swaps (CDS):** A credit default swap (CDS) is a financial swap agreement that the seller of the CDS will compensate the buyer in the event of a debt default (by the debtor)
- **Municipal Bond Market:** Municipal bonds may be given some fiscal support in the form of bond insurance or providing credit enhancement so that municipalities are encouraged to issue such bonds

rather than traditional sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, or services.

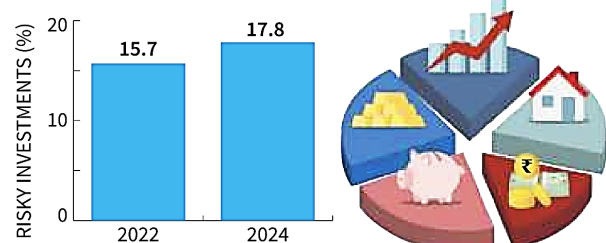
- **Financialisation of Savings** refers to the **shift of household or corporate savings from traditional, physical assets** (like gold, real estate, or cash) to **financial assets** (like stocks, mutual funds, bonds, and insurance).

#### FINANCIALISATION IN INDIA

- **Widening role of financial markets:** In India, financialisation is evident in the increasing role of financial markets, particularly with the growth of stock markets, insurance, and the mutual funds industry.
- **Rise in Retail Investors:** The **number of demat accounts** (necessary for trading stocks) grew from 114.5 million in FY23 to **151.4 million in FY24**.

#### Financialisation of savings

In 2022, close to 18% of the Indian households invested in at least one of the risky assets — shares and mutual funds — compared with only 15.7% in 2019



SOURCE: RBI OCCASIONAL PAPERS

## EXCESSIVE FINANCIALISATION CAN HURT INDIA'S ECONOMY

#ECONOMIC SURVEY #CAPITAL MARKET

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Economic Survey 2024-25 highlights concerns about the rapid growth of financial markets in India, emphasising that excessive financialisation can harm the economy.*

#### WHAT IS FINANCIALISATION?

- **Financialisation of Economy** refers to the **increasing dominance of financial markets, financial institutions, and financial motives** in the overall economy.
  - It means that economic growth and wealth generation **rely more on financial activities (like stock markets, banking, and investment funds)**

#### IMPLICATIONS OF FINANCIALISATION

- **Economic Inequality:**
  - Benefits of financialisation tend to be **concentrated among the wealthy**, particularly those with significant financial assets, leading to rising income and wealth inequality.
- **Vulnerability to Financial Crises:**
  - Financialisation has made economies more vulnerable to financial shocks, such as the **2008 global financial crisis**.
  - The **interconnectedness of global financial systems** means that a crisis in one market or country can have **ripple effects** worldwide.
- **Short-Termism:**
  - Corporations and investors focus on short-term profits and immediate financial returns, often at the expense of long-term investment in innovation, infrastructure, and human capital. This short-

termism **undermines sustainable economic growth.**

The **Economic Survey** warns that **rapid financial market growth without corresponding economic growth** has led to **crises** in both developed and developing countries. The **2008 global financial crisis** is cited as an example of the dangers of excessive financialisation.

## RBI LOWERS RISK WEIGHTAGE ON BANKS' EXPOSURE TO NBFCS

#LIQUIDITY #NBFCS #MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE BusinessLine

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a **significant reduction in risk weights on bank loans to Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) by 25 percentage points.** This move is aimed at improving credit flow and ensuring financial stability in the banking sector.

### BACKGROUND

- In November 2023, RBI **increased risk weights on bank exposures to NBFCs** by 25% to 125%, leading to **tighter credit conditions** and **slowing down bank lending.**
- RBI has **now reversed** this decision after evaluating its impact on credit availability and liquidity.
- **Objective:** To **enhance credit flow to NBFCs**, thereby, **improving credit availability for retail borrowers and small businesses.**
- **Impact on Microfinance loans:** RBI has also reduced risk weights on microfinance loans under regulatory retail **to 75% from 125%.**

### RISK-WEIGHTED ASSETS (RWAS)

- Risk-Weighted Assets (RWAs) refer to a bank's total assets, adjusted by a risk factor, to **determine the capital required to mitigate potential losses.**
- **How are RWAs calculated:**
  - Each loan or asset is assigned a risk weight based on its risk level.
  - Higher-risk assets require banks to allocate more capital as a safeguard against potential defaults.

- **Regulatory requirement:** Banks must maintain a **Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR)** to ensure they have sufficient capital to absorb risks.

## RBI CUTS REPO RATE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 5 YEARS

#MONETARY POLICY #INFLATION TARGETING

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

**RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has cut the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) in its upcoming meeting (February 2025), from 6.5 per cent to 6.25 per cent.** This decision is influenced by **easing inflation, government stimulus measures, and the need to boost economic growth.**

### REPO RATE

- Repo rate is the **interest rate** at which the **commercial banks borrow money** from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) during a short-term liquidity crunch.
- Repo stands for **'Repurchasing Option' or 'Repurchase Agreement'.**
  - In the agreement, banks provide eligible securities such as **Treasury Bills** to the RBI, while availing overnight loans. They agree to **repurchase securities at a predetermined price** later from RBI.
  - Thus, the bank gets the cash and the central bank the security.

### REVERSE REPO RATE

- **Reverse Repo Rate** is when the **RBI accepts deposits from the Banks** when there is **excess liquidity** in the market.
- Banks benefit out of it by **receiving interest for their holdings** with the central bank.
- **Reverse Repo Rate** is a mechanism to **absorb the liquidity** in the market, thus restricting the borrowing power of investors.

### FACTORS INFLUENCING REPO RATE CUT DECISION

- **Easing Inflation:**
  - **Retail inflation fell** to 5.22% in December 2024, the lowest in four months. Lower inflation allows for **monetary easing** without major inflationary risks.
- **Union Budget 2025-26 stimulus:**

- **Tax cuts** and **revised TDS limits** aim to boost disposable income and consumption.
- **Increased consumer demand** may require monetary support for sustained economic growth.
- **Liquidity Measures by RBI:** Recent liquidity enhancement steps of RBI ensure banking system liquidity before a rate cut. RBI announced **liquidity enhancement measures** such as:
  - \$5 billion **forex swap**.
  - ₹60,000 crore **open market operations**.
  - ₹50,000 crore **variable repo rate operations**.
- **Global Economic Uncertainty:**
  - **Trade tensions:** US imposing **tariffs** on China, Canada, and Mexico, is creating instability in global trade.
  - **Impact on currency markets**, with **rupee hitting an all-time low** of ₹87.29 per USD.
  - The RBI must **balance rupee stability and domestic liquidity management**.

#### IMPACT OF REPO RATE CUT ON ECONOMY

- **Reduce Borrowing costs:**
  - **Repo-linked lending rates (EBLR):** A cut in repo rate will reduce borrowing costs, making home, vehicle, and business loans cheaper.
  - **MCLR-linked loans:** Banks may also reduce rates for loans linked to the marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR). This will lead to lower lending rates for borrowers.
  - The expected 25 bps rate cut will **lower EMIs** for borrowers.
- **Boost Economic Growth:** A rate cut could **stimulate investment and consumption**, boosting GDP.

The anticipated **repo rate cut** signals a **pro-growth strategy** while **ensuring inflation** remains in check.

## FORWARD TRADING IN G-SECS

#CAPITAL MARKET

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to allow **forward contracts in government securities (G-secs)** to enable **market development** and aid financial institutions to **hedge against interest rate risks**.

#### WHAT IS A FORWARD CONTRACT?

- **Meaning:** It is a customised contract between two parties to **buy or sell** an asset at a **specified price** on a **future date**.
- **Use:** A forward contract can be used for **hedging (risk management)** or **speculation (profit from price changes)**.
  - **Hedgers:** People who want protection from price changes.
  - **Speculators:** People who want to profit from guessing future prices.

#### WHAT ARE GOVERNMENT SECURITIES?

- G-Sec is a **tradable debt instrument** issued by Central government or State governments. It acknowledges the government's debt obligation.
- **Types of G-secs:**
  - **Short-Term Government Securities** (maturity <1 year): Treasury Bills, Cash Management Bills.
  - **Long-Term Government Securities** (Maturity >1 year): Dated G-Secs.
- G-Secs are issued through **auctions conducted by Reserve Bank of India**, through the electronic platform E-Kuber.

#### RATIONALE FOR INTRODUCING FORWARD CONTRACTS IN G-SECS

- Enable long-term investors such as **insurance funds** to **manage their interest rate risk across interest rate cycles**.
- Enable **efficient pricing of bond-based derivatives** (derivatives that use bonds as underlying instruments).
- Allows market participants to **hedge against interest rate fluctuations** or to **speculate on future price movements** of G-secs.

## RBI TO CONDUCT \$10 BILLION USD-INR SWAP AUCTION

#LIQUIDITY #BANKING

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a **\$10 billion USD-INR Buy/Sell swap auction** with a tenure of three years, scheduled for February 28, 2025. This move is

aimed to inject liquidity into the banking system and stabilise Indian currency.

**ABOUT FOREX SWAP AUCTION**

- **Forex Swap Auction** is a financial instrument used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to **manage liquidity** in the financial system.

- In the **Buy/Sell swap mechanism**, RBI **buys U.S. Dollars from banks** in exchange for Rupees (**first leg**) and agrees to **sell them back** at a pre-determined future date along with a premium (**reverse leg**).

Criteria	Forex Buy/Sell Swap	Forex Sell/Buy Swap
What does the RBI do?	RBI <b>buys dollars</b> with an <b>agreement to sell</b> the dollars at a future date and at a fixed exchange rate.	RBI <b>sells dollars</b> with an <b>agreement to buy back the same</b> amount of dollars at a future date and at a fixed exchange rate.
When is it adopted?	Surplus of dollars → <b>Rupee Appreciation pressure</b> Hence, RBI buys dollars and injects Rupee to control Rupee Appreciation.	Shortage of dollars → <b>Rupee Depreciation</b> Hence, RBI sells dollars and sucks out Rupee to control Rupee Depreciation.
What does it lead to?	<b>Potential Rupee Devaluation:</b> Decrease in value of Rupee due to RBI's Intervention	<b>Rupee Revaluation:</b> Increase in value of Rupee due to RBI's Intervention
Impact on Rupee Liquidity	<b>Increases Rupee Liquidity</b>	<b>Decreases</b>
Impact on Rate of Interest on Loans	Increase in Rupee Liquidity → <b>Decrease</b> in Rate of Interest on Loans	Decrease in Rupee Liquidity → <b>Increase</b> in Rate of Interest on Loans
Impact on Forex Reserves	RBI Purchases dollars → <b>Increase in Forex Reserves (temporarily)</b>	RBI sells dollars → <b>Decline in Forex Reserves (temporarily)</b>

**SIGNIFICANCE OF SWAP AUCTIONS**

- **Liquidity management:** Helps inject or absorb Rupee liquidity in the banking system.
- **Exchange rate stability:** Reduces volatility in the USD/INR exchange rate by providing liquidity buffers.
- **Foreign exchange reserves management:** Enhances the efficient utilization of forex reserves.
- **Inflation & Interest rate control:** Manages liquidity, indirectly influencing inflation and interest rates.

#FISCAL DEFICIT #PUBLIC EXPENDITURE



Recently, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has released the **'Quality of Public Expenditure' Index** to assess how well the **government is spending public money**. The latest report makes for a positive picture.

**QUALITY OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE (QPE) INDEX**

- Developed by the RBI to assess how well the government is spending public money.
- The Index uses **five variables** to assess quality of spending:

**QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE INDEX: RBI**

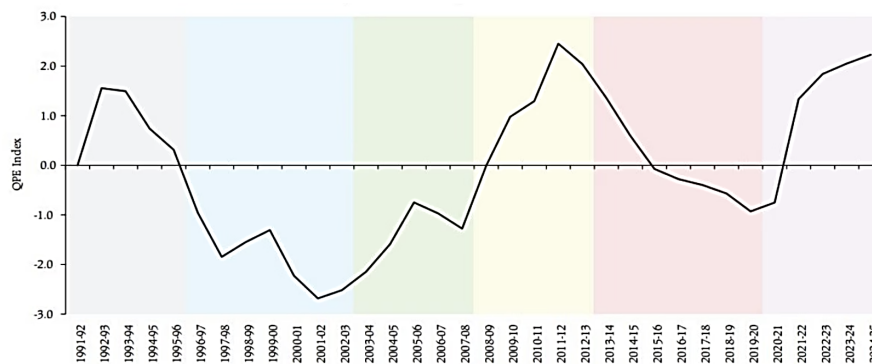
S. No.	Variables	Definition
1.	Capital Outlay to GDP ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money set aside by the government towards building physical infrastructure expressed as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).</li> </ul>

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

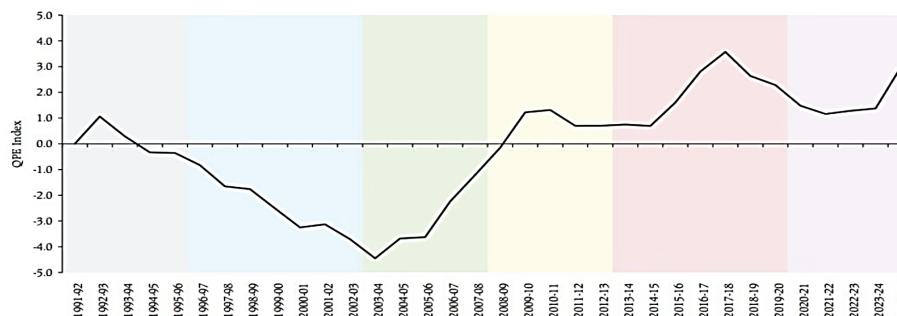
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>higher</b> the ratio, <b>the better</b> is the quality of public expenditure.</li> </ul>
2.	Revenue Expenditure to Capital Outlay ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compares operational expenses of the government (like salaries, subsidies, pensions) to the long-term capital investment.</li> <li>The lower the value of this ratio, <b>the better</b> is the quality of public expenditure.</li> </ul>
3.	Development expenditure to GDP ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refers to <b>all public expenditure to enhance production factors</b> (labour and capital) to stimulate economic growth.</li> <li>Higher share indicates better resource allocation</li> </ul>
4.	Development expenditure as a percentage of a government's total expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>higher</b> the value of this ratio, the <b>better</b> is the quality of public expenditure.</li> </ul>
5.	Interest payments to total government expenditure ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of government spending on servicing debt. A <b>lower</b> value of this ratio shows <b>better</b> quality of public spending.</li> </ul>

**QUALITY OF INDIA'S PUBLIC EXPENDITURE: ANALYSIS BY RBI**

- According to the RBI's index, the **quality of public expenditure** in India (both at Centre and state levels) is close to the **highest point** (in FY 2024-25) it has ever been since the start of economic liberalisation in 1991.



**Chart 1:** Quality of Public Expenditure index for the Centre. The six colour bands denote the six phases. Source: RBI estimates

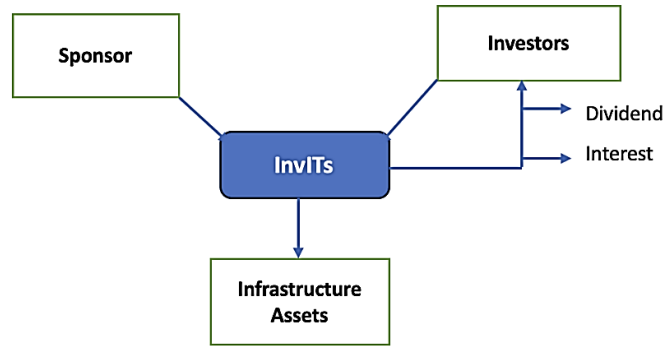


**Chart 2:** Quality of Public Expenditure index for the States. The six colour bands denote the six phases. Source: RBI estimates

- This has been possible due to the following measures:
  - To limit the tendency in government to overspend, India instituted the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003**.
  - FRBM limit on Fiscal & Revenue Deficit:**
    - As per FRBM Act, the **fiscal deficit** should ideally not exceed **3% of GDP**.
    - The **revenue deficit** should be **zero**.
    - Purpose:** Government should **only borrow for capital expenditure** (and not for paying higher salaries and other similar everyday spending).
  - Targeting overall debt:** India has now shifted to targeting overall debt as a percentage of GDP, instead of an individual year's fiscal deficit, as a way to maintain fiscal discipline.
- Push for higher capital expenditure:** Capex boosts productive capacity of the economy.

**estate** (E.g., offices, malls, hotels) and **sells shares** to raise capital to do so. Allow investors to earn returns without owning physical property.

- InvITs:** Infrastructure Investment Trusts ('InvITs') are **pooled investment vehicles** similar to mutual funds. InvITs enable private and retail investors for long-term investment in infrastructure projects such as roads, gas pipelines, transmission lines, renewable assets, etc. They are regulated by SEBI.



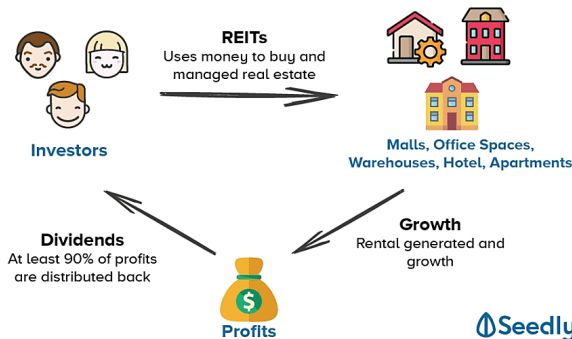
## REITs/InvITs: SEBI PROPOSES FAST TRACK FOLLOW-ON OFFERS

#CAPITAL MARKET #INFRASTRUCTURE

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

*Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed a framework for undertaking fast-track follow-on offers by real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) to make fundraising more efficient.*

### Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)



### REITs & InvITs

- REITs:** Real estate investment trust is a company that owns, operates, or finances **income-generating real**

## NAKSHA SCHEME

#LAND RECORDS #DIGITISATION

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

*Union Rural Development Minister launched the Central government's new initiative- NAKSHA.*

### ABOUT NAKSHA SCHEME

- NAKSHA** (National Geospatial Knowledge-based Land Survey of Urban Habitations) is a geospatial technology-driven **city survey initiative** under the existing **Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP)**.
- Aim:** To create and update **land records** in **urban areas** to ensure transparency, efficiency, and accuracy in property ownership documentation.
- Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development.
- Implemented by:** Department of Land Resources, in collaboration with Survey of India, and National Informatics Centre Services Inc. (NICSI)

### OBJECTIVES

- Modernise urban land records:** Ensure accurate, updated, and digitalized land ownership records.
- Enhance urban planning:** Facilitate smart city development and infrastructure planning.
- Reduce land disputes:** Minimize property disputes through clear, verifiable records.

- **Foster transparency:** Establish a Web-GIS-based IT system for land record management.
- **Support sustainable development:** Improve urban governance and land resource management.

**KEY FEATURES**

- **Launched as a pilot project in 152 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs):** Across 26 States and 3 Union Territories (UTs).
  - Cities selected **meet two criteria:** area less than 35 sq km, and population less than 2 lakhs. The pilot project will be completed in a year.
  - As per the Census 2011, **India has 7,933 towns** covering 1.02 lakh square km of the total 32.87 lakh square km geographical area of the country. NAKSHA will cover 4,142.63 square km of area.
- **Estimated cost of pilot project:** ₹194 crore (100% funded by Government of India).
- **Drone-based land survey:** High-precision aerial surveys for accurate mapping.
- **Web-GIS platform:** End-to-end IT-based land record management system.
- **Public accessibility:** Citizens can access digital land records for ease of living.

## RECIPROCAL TARIFFS BY THE U.S.

#EXTERNAL TRADE



The US President Donald Trump **announced plans for reciprocal tariffs** on numerous trading partners, which could take effect from April 2025. India will be **amongst the worst to hit** with sectors like food products, vegetables, textiles and clothing set to be the most impacted.

**INDIA-US TRADE RELATIONS**

- **India-US Bilateral Trade** (April-November 2024-25):
  - Total trade: \$82.52 billion
  - Indian exports to the US: \$52.89 billion
  - Indian imports from the US: \$29.63 billion
  - **India's trade surplus: \$23.26 billion**
- The US was India's **second-largest trading partner** during this period.

### US TRADE WITH INDIA, OTHER KEY COUNTRIES

**TABLE 1**

**TOP IMPORTS FROM THE US**

Top 5 items that comprise 60% of India's imports from US (2023-24)

Items	Value
Mineral fuels & oils	12.96
Precious, semi precious stones	5.16
Nuclear reactors, boilers	3.75
Electrical machinery	2.3
Aircraft and parts	2.25

**TOP EXPORTS TO THE US**

Top 5 items that comprise 67% of India's exports to US (2023-24)

Items	Value
Engineering goods	17.62
Electronic goods	10.49
Gems and jewellery	9.9
Drugs and pharmaceuticals	8.72
Petroleum products	5.83

*Value in \$billion*

**WHAT ARE RECIPROCAL TARIFFS?**

**Tariffs** are taxes imposed on imported goods. **Reciprocal tariffs** imply that the US will charge the same tariff rate on imports as the exporting country levies on the US goods.

**RATIONALE BEHIND US'S RECIPROCAL TARIFFS**

- **Address Trade Deficits:** The US has a significant trade deficit with multiple countries, including India. The US has a **trade deficit of \$1 trillion** with the rest of the world, while China enjoys a trade surplus of more than \$1 trillion.
- **Protectionist Economic Policy:** The US aims to boost domestic industries by making foreign imports costlier. Trump used the trade deficit as a campaign issue, claiming unfair treatment by trade partners.

**SECTORAL IMPACT OF RECIPROCAL TARIFFS**

Sectors	US exports to India (\$bn)	India's exports to US(\$bn)	Indian tariffs on US products (%)	US tariffs on Indian products (%)	Tariff differential (%)
Agriculture, meat & processed food	1.94	6.04	37.66	5.29	32.37
Automobiles	0.42	2.8	24.14	1.05	23.1
Diamond, gold products	1.92	11.88	15.45	2.12	13.32
Chemicals & pharma	3.52	18.44	9.68	1.06	8.63
Electrical, electronic products	1.34	14.4	7.64	0.41	7.24

**IMPACTS ON INDIA**

- As per Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), India imposes tariffs on the US goods at a simple average rate of 17%, compared to 3.3% by the US on Indian goods. This leaves India **exposed to the threat of increased tariffs** on their exports to the US.



# CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER II (MAIN)

## SHOULD CONVICTED CANDIDATES CONTEST ELECTIONS?

#ELECTORAL REFORMS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The **Supreme Court** of India is currently **hearing petitions seeking a lifetime ban** on convicted individuals from contesting elections.

### LEGAL PROVISIONS IN THIS REGARD

- **Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act, 1951):** Disqualifies individuals convicted of **criminal offences** and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more. Such individuals remain disqualified for **six years post-release**.
- **Section 8(1) of RP Act, 1951:** It further disqualifies individuals convicted under specific laws. The disqualification lasts during the sentence and 6 years post the release. The offences include:
  - Heinous crimes like Rape.
  - Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, Preaching or practicing Untouchability.
  - Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for unlawful associations.
  - Prevention of Corruption Act.
- **Section 11 of RP Act, 1951:** It empowers the Election Commission (EC) to remove or reduce the disqualification period of a convicted person.

### PRESENT TRENDS

A report by ADR states that:

- **251 (46%) of the 543 elected MPs in 2024, have criminal cases against them.**

- **171 (31%) face serious criminal charges** including rape, murder, attempt to murder and kidnapping.
- Candidates with criminal records have a **15.4% chance of winning**, compared to **4.4% for candidates with a clean record**.

### SUPREME COURT DECISIONS IN THE PAST

- **Association for Democratic Reforms (2002):** This mandated disclosure of criminal records of candidates contesting elections.
- **CEC vs Jan Chaukidar (2013):** Patna High Court interpreted that under-trial prisoners, as non-electors under Section 62(5) of RP Act, 1951, are ineligible to contest elections. However, Parliament amended the law to allow them to contest elections.
- **Lily Thomas Case (2013):** Struck down **Section 8(4) of RP Act, 1951**, which allowed convicted legislators to continue in office if they filed an appeal. Post-judgment, disqualification is immediate upon conviction.

### CURRENT PETITION

The petition seeks a **lifetime ban** on convicted individuals from contesting elections, arguing that convicted persons are ineligible for even junior government jobs, so they should not be lawmakers.

### CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S STANCE (2020 AFFIDAVIT)

- MPs and MLAs are not subject to **'service conditions'** like government employees. The existing six-year disqualification post-release is deemed sufficient.
- The Supreme Court has sought fresh responses from the Central Government and the EC on the issue.

### ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST A PERMANENT BAN

Arguments in Favour	Arguments Against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent ban is seen as a necessary measure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banning candidates with criminal records</li> </ul>

<p>to <b>maintain the integrity</b> of legislative bodies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would address the broader issue of <b>criminalisation in politics</b>.</li> <li>• Convicted politicians returning to Parliament and State Legislatures <b>face a conflict of interest</b> when vetting laws.</li> <li>• Allowing those convicted of heinous crimes to return after a short sentence <b>defeats democratic integrity</b>.</li> </ul>	<p>may impact parties expected winning probabilities, benefiting third-party candidates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each case should be decided on its own merit, considering the gravity of offences and criminal history.</li> </ul>
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**WAY FORWARD**

• **Law Commission and EC Recommendations:**

- In **1999 and 2014**, it has been suggested barring candidates from contesting if charged with offences carrying over five years of imprisonment.
- However, political consensus on this has been lacking due to likely misuse.
- Permanent disqualification may be **disproportionate** for minor convictions without moral turpitude.
- Matters related to heinous crimes and corruption-related convictions may warrant **lifetime disqualification**.
- The EC's power to **alter disqualification periods** should be reviewed for constitutional validity.

While a complete lifetime ban on convicted politicians is under consideration, **stricter measures for serious crimes** and a **review of the EC's discretionary powers**

could be viable steps toward reducing the criminalisation of politics.

## PANCHAYAT DEVOLUTION INDEX 2024

#GOVERNANCE #DECENTRALISATION

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

The **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** has recently published the **Panchayat Devolution Index 2024**. The index was last published in 2014. Over the past decade, the national average score has increased from 39.92 to 43.89.

**ABOUT PANCHAYAT DEVOLUTION INDEX (PDI)**

- **PDI** is a tool to assess the **devolution of powers and resources** to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across Indian states and Union Territories.
- The index measures the performance of **India's panchayat system** across states based on **six key parameters**:
  - **Framework**: Legal and policy framework supporting Panchayati raj institutions.
  - **Functions**: Extent of devolution of functions to panchayats.
  - **Finances**: Availability and allocation of financial resources.
  - **Functionaries**: Availability of trained personnel and administrative capacity.
  - **Capacity building**: Training and skill development of panchayat members.
  - **Accountability**: Transparency and effectiveness in governance.
- **Developed by**: Indian Institute of Public Administration.

The six parameters and top performing states			
The index score is on a scale of 0 to 100			
Parameter	Definition	Top state	Score
Framework	Whether the basic provisions mentioned in the Constitution are adhered to by states	Kerala	84
Functions	How panchayats fulfilled civic responsibilities, from sanitation and waste management to health and education	Tamil Nadu	60

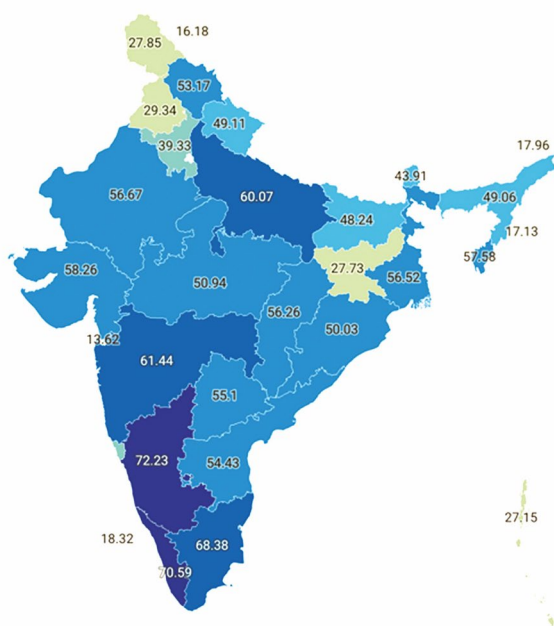
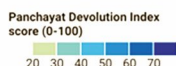
## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Finances	Efficiency in the devolution of funds to panchayats and the sources of their funding, whether from their own revenues, borrowing, or from state and Central grants	Karnataka	71
Functionaries	Strength and performance of panchayat officials and the infrastructure available to them	Gujarat	91
Capacity Building	How states are expanding the knowledge and skills of panchayat officials to fulfil and take on more responsibilities	Telangana	86
Accountability	The framework in place to audit and monitor the functioning of panchayats	Karnataka	81

### KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2024 REPORT

- **Top performing States:** Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.
- **The national average score** rose from 39.92 in 2013-14 to **43.89 in 2024**.
  - The PDI was last published in 2014. The slight improvement in **national average score** indicates modest progress in devolution efforts.

#### How states fared on the devolution index in 2024



Note: Data not available for grayed out states  
Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj • Map data: © OSM • Created with Datawrapper

- **Improvements and Declines:**
  - 18 states and Union Territories improved their scores, while 11 recorded declines.

- **Uttar Pradesh and Bihar** showed the biggest improvement compared to their past performance.
- **Maharashtra**, despite ranking **fourth overall in 2024**, is the **only top-10 state to register a decline**.
- **Lowest-ranked states:** Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand, with Manipur, Arunachal, and Haryana experiencing the steepest declines over the past decade.

### REPRESENTATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF PANCHAYATS IN 2024

- **Total number of Panchayats in India:**
  - Numbers have increased from 2.48 lakh (2013-14) to 2.62 lakh (2024).
  - States with the highest number of panchayats are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Average rural population per panchayat:**
  - Increased from 3,087 (2013-14) to 4,669 (2024), indicating a trend of fewer but larger panchayats.
  - West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar have the most densely populated panchayats.

### WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PANCHAYATS

- **Women's reservation in panchayats:**
  - Most states follow the 50% reservation quota for women in panchayat seats.
  - However, seven states and UTs fall below their mandated quota, E.g., Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Tripura.
- **Highest representation of women:**
  - Odisha (61.51%)
  - Himachal Pradesh (57.5%)
  - Tamil Nadu (57.32%)

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- **Lowest representation of women:** Uttar Pradesh (33.33%), which aligns with its one-third reservation policy for women rather than the 50% quota followed by most states.
- **Overall progress:**
  - The national average of women representatives has risen slightly from 45.9% (2013-14) to 46.44% (2024).
  - The number of states with 50% or more women representatives has increased from 11 (2013-14) to 16 (2024).

### REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES (SC), SCHEDULED TRIBES (ST), AND OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES (OBC)

- **Highest representation of marginalised groups in panchayats:**
  - Scheduled Castes (SCs): Punjab (36.34%)
  - Scheduled Tribes (STs): Chhattisgarh (41.04%).
  - Other Backward Classes (OBCs): Bihar (39.02%)
- **National averages for representation of marginalised groups in 2024:**
  - SC representation: 18.03%
  - ST representation: 16.22%
  - OBC representation: 19.15%
- **Arunachal Pradesh:** Reported 100% ST representation (2013-14), but did not provide 2024 data.

### CHALLENGES FACED BY PANCHAYATS

#### 1. Funding:

- Despite allocations, actual release of funds is often delayed. For instance, in 2023-24, only **Rs 10,761 crore out of Rs 47,018 crore allocated was released** as of November 2023.
- **Poor internal resource generation:** Most panchayats **lack the ability to generate their own revenue**, exacerbating their financial constraints.

#### 2. Infrastructure shortfalls:

- Many panchayats lack basic infrastructure like **pucca buildings, computers, and internet access**. E.g., Arunachal Pradesh has only 5% pucca buildings and no panchayat with computers.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** 100% computer availability in panchayats was reported in 12 states and UTs, while:
  - Arunachal Pradesh had 0% computer availability.
  - Odisha had only 13% of panchayats with computers.

#### • Internet access in panchayats:

- 14 states and UTs reported 100% internet access.
- Haryana (0%) and Arunachal Pradesh (1%) had nearly no internet connectivity in their panchayats.

#### 3. Administrative challenges:

- **Inadequate devolution of Powers:** Many states have not fully devolved functions and authority to panchayats, limiting their scope of work.
- **Lack of skilled functionaries:** There is a shortage of trained and skilled personnel, including elected representatives and support staff.
- **Interference from higher authorities:** Interference by MPs and MLAs is seen to have undermined the autonomy and decision-making capacity of panchayats.

**4. Women representation:** While 21 states and UTs meet or exceed the 50% reservation threshold for women, seven states fall below it.

#### 5. Social Challenges:

- **Gender and social biases:** Despite reservations, women and marginalized groups often face challenges in exercising their roles effectively due to patriarchal attitudes and biases.
- **Illiteracy among the functionaries:** Illiterate or semi-literate sarpanch **struggle to represent their panchayats effectively**.

### WAY FORWARD

- **Ensure timely-release of allocated funds** to panchayats and empower panchayats to generate their own revenue.
- **Invest in basic infrastructure** like buildings, computers, and internet connectivity.
- **Provide regular training** and capacity-building programs for panchayat functionaries to enhance their skills and knowledge.
- **Implement robust accountability mechanisms** to ensure transparency in decision-making and resource allocation.
- **Regular review** and updating legal framework to ensure it aligns with evolving needs and supports effective decentralization.
- **Reduce interference** from higher authorities and ensure clear devolution of powers.

The PDI 2024 findings underscore the need for renewed efforts in financial devolution, administrative capacity-

building, and infrastructure development to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions as the backbone of India's rural democracy.

## SELECTION PROCESS FOR CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER

#ELECTORAL REFORMS

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** was enacted in 2023. The **appointment process of CEC has undergone significant changes** with the enactment of the Act. Traditionally, the senior-most Election Commissioner was appointed the next CEC.

### CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

- **Article 324(2):**
  - **Election Commission** shall consist of the **CEC** and such number of **Election Commissioners (EC)**, as the President may fix from time-to-time.
  - **Appointment** of the CEC and other ECs are made by the President, subject to the law enacted by the Parliament.
- **Dec 2023:** Parliament enacted the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

### KEY FEATURES OF THE CEC AND OTHER ECS ACT, 2023

- **Election Commission:** Election Commission will consist of a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and other Election Commissioners (ECs). The President will periodically fix the number of ECs.
- **Appointment Process:** The Commission will be appointed by the President, upon the recommendation of the Selection Committee.
  - **A Search Committee** headed by the **Minister of Law and Justice** will suggest five names to the **Selection Committee** for appointment as Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners.
  - **Selection Committee:** Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners will be appointed

by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee consisting of:

- Prime Minister (Chairperson).
- Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha (or leader of the single largest opposition party).
- Union Cabinet Minister appointed by Prime Minister.
- The Selection Committee may also **consider any other person** than those included in the panel by the Search Committee.
- **Eligibility criteria:** CEC and ECs must:
  - be persons of integrity
  - have knowledge and experience in the management and conduct of elections
  - be or have been Secretary (or equivalent) to the government.
- **Term and reappointment:**
  - Members of the Election Commission will hold office for six years, or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
  - Members of the Commission cannot be re-appointed.
  - If an EC is appointed as a CEC, the overall period of the term may not be more than six years.
- **Salary, allowances,** and other conditions of service of the CEC and ECs will be equivalent to that of the **Cabinet Secretary**.
- **Removal:** CEC may be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court Judge. ECs may be removed only upon the recommendation of the CEC.

### KEY ISSUES

- **Potential government dominance:** The selection process of the Election Commission may be dominated by the government, which has implications for its independence.
  - Even as the senior most Election Commissioner remains a potential candidate for the top post, Section 8 of the Act gives the selection committee the **option of considering names from outside the Election Commission**.
  - The new process may **raise concerns regarding procedural fairness**.

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- **Eligibility limitations:** CECs and ECs also perform **quasi-judicial functions**, limiting these posts to senior bureaucrats may exclude other suitable candidates.
- Free and fair election is part of basic structure as per the ruling of **Raj Narayan Case**, which might be impacted.
- Merely financial independence is not enough to ensure overall independence of the institution, there is a need for substantive/administrative independence.

### SUGGESTIONS AND WAY FORWARD

- **The Law Commission** had recommended to have a selection committee comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India to ensure a balanced appointment process.
- **Alternative Committee Structure:** The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) suggested a committee including: Prime Minister + Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha + Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha + Speaker of Lok Sabha + Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha.

Dr. Ambedkar had warned that EC's integrity can be compromised under the **executive thumb**, so it is of utmost importance to ensure that the appointment should **not only be fair but also appear to be fair**.

## PRESIDENT'S RULE IN MANIPUR

#EMERGENCY PROVISIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

**President's Rule** has been imposed in Manipur, following the resignation of the Chief Minister of the state.

### PRESIDENT RULE IN MANIPUR

Manipur is among States with highest instances of President's Rule

■ This marks the **11th time** President's Rule has been imposed

■ The first was for **66 days** from January 12 to March 19, 1967

■ The longest was for **2 years and 157 days** from October 17, 1969, to March 22, 1972



■ The latest instance was **277 days** from June 2, 2001, to March 6, 2002

■ **Rishang Keishing** of the Congress became the first Chief Minister to complete his full term. **Okram Ibobi Singh** of Congress was the first Chief Minister to finish not one but **three terms**

- The Indian President **issued a proclamation under Article 356** after receiving a report from the Governor of Manipur.
- The **Manipur Legislative Assembly will be under suspended animation**. The Assembly has not been dissolved and its tenure is till 2027. The administrative and other security-related decisions will now be taken by the **Governor of Manipur**.

### EMERGENCY PROVISIONS

- **Emergency** provisions are listed in **Part XVIII** of the Indian Constitution.
- **Article 355 and 356:**
  - **Article 355:** Imposes a duty on the Centre to protect every State from external aggression and internal disturbance. It also specifies that the Centre should ensure that every State government operates according to the Constitution.
  - **Article 356:** Allows for the imposition of the **President's rule** if a State's government cannot function in accordance with constitutional provisions.

### GROUND OF PROCLAMATION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE

The President's Rule can be proclaimed under **Article 356** on two grounds, one mentioned in Article 356 itself, and another in Article 365:

1. **Article 356** empowers the President to issue a proclamation, if he is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of a state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Notably, the President **can act either on a report of the governor** of the state or **otherwise too** (i.e., even without the governor's report).
2. **Article 365:** Whenever a state fails to comply with or to give effect to any direction from the Centre, it will be **lawful for the President to hold that a situation has arisen** in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

### PROCESS OF IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE

- The **Governor** sends a report to the President stating governance in the state cannot be carried out in accordance with the Constitution.
- The **President** issues a **Proclamation** to impose President's Rule, initially valid for two months.

- Both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) **must approve** the Proclamation within this period to extend its validity.
- If approved, it can be **extended for six months** at a time, up to a **maximum of three years**.
- President's Rule **cannot continue** beyond one year unless:
  - A National Emergency is in force in the entire country or in that specific state.
  - The Election Commission certifies that elections to the state assembly cannot be held due to difficulties.

- **Options available with the Governor:**
  - He may give assent, or he can send it back to the Assembly requesting it to **reconsider some provisions of the Bill, or the Bill itself**.
  - In addition, as identified by Soli Sorabjee, the **governor can also reserve the bill** if it is of the following nature:
    - Ultra-vires, that is, against the provisions of the Constitution.
    - Opposed to the Directive Principles of State Policy.
    - Against the larger interest of the country.
    - Of grave national importance.
    - Dealing with compulsory acquisition of property under Article 31A of the Constitution.
  - In one particular case such reservation is obligatory, that is, **where the bill passed by the state legislature endangers the position of the state high court**.

## GOVERNOR'S POWER OVER STATE BILLS: ARTICLE 200 & 201

#EXECUTIVE #LEGISLATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*The Supreme Court has enquired from the Tamil Nadu Governor about the 12 bills pending before him for over three years. These Bills were sent by the State Legislature to him for consent **under Article 200**. The Governor **sat on them indefinitely**.*

### ARTICLE 200: ASSENT TO BILL

- When a bill is sent to the governor after it is passed by state legislature, he/ she can:
  - Give his/ her assent to the bill
  - Withhold his/ her assent to the bill
  - Return the bill (if it is not a money bill) for reconsideration of the state legislature. However, if the bill is passed again by the state legislature with or without amendments, the governor has to give his/ her assent to the bill
  - Reserve the bill for the President.

### ARTICLE 201: BILL RESERVED FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE PRESIDENT

- When a Bill is reserved for the consideration of the President, The President shall declare either that he assents to the Bill, or he withholds assent from the Bill.
- The President may also **direct the Governor to return the Bill to the House** of the Legislature of the State for reconsideration.

### SUPREME COURT OBSERVATION

- In 2024, the Supreme court in the State **of Punjab vs. Principal Secretary to Governor of Punjab** held that the Governor **can not veto the legislature** by indefinitely withholding assent to the bill. In case the bill is re-enacted, the Governor does not exercise discretion to withhold the reenacted bill.

## CAN AN MP LOSE HIS SEAT UNDER ARTICLE 101(4)?

#PARLIAMENT

PRIMARY SOURCE THE INDIAN EXPRESS

*A **Member of Parliament** from Punjab has approached the **Punjab and Haryana High Court** to seek permission to attend the ongoing Parliamentary session. Under **Article 101(4)**, he fears **losing his membership** due to his prolonged absence from Parliament.*

### PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 101

- **Article 101** mentions the provisions about the **vacation of the seats of members of Parliament**.
- **No Dual Membership:**
  - **Article 101(1):** No person shall be a **member of both Houses of Parliament** simultaneously.

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- **Article 101(2):** No person can become a **member of both the Parliament and a state legislature** at the same time. The seat of parliament becomes vacant if the member is not able to resign from the State Legislature within 14 days.
- **Article 101(3):** The members of either House of Parliament may resign from office by writing a letter in his own handwriting to the Chairman or Speaker (as applicable). If the letter is accepted by the Chairman or Speaker, the **seat becomes empty**.
- **Prolonged Absence: Article 101(4):**
  - If a member of either House of Parliament is absent from all meetings, without permission of the House for a **period of sixty days**, the House may declare his seat vacant.
  - The 60 days, however, do not account for any period during which the House is **prorogued** or is **adjourned** for more than four consecutive days.
  - **MPs can seek leave:** For long absences, MPs can write to the 'Committee on Absence of Members from the Sittings of the House' (parliamentary panel that deals with this issue). The committee makes recommendations on each leave application, which are then ratified by the House concerned.
  - Even if an MP is absent for more than 60 days, the House has to declare the seat vacant by **putting the matter to vote**.
- **Note:** No vacancy has been made till date by invoking Article 101(4).
- Defines obscene content as "**lascivious or appealing to the prurient interest**" or content that could "deprave and corrupt" readers, viewers, or listeners.
- **Punishments:**
  - First-time offense: Up to **2 years imprisonment** + fine up to **₹5,000**.
  - Repeat offense: Up to **5 years imprisonment** + fine up to **₹10,000**.
- **Section 67 of the IT Act, 2000** (For online obscene content):
  - Similar definition as Section 294 of BNS but has **stricter punishment:**
    - First-time offense: Up to **3 years imprisonment** + fine up to **₹5 lakh**.
    - Repeat offense: Up to **5 years imprisonment** + fine up to **₹10 lakh**.
- **Section 296 of the BNS, 2023** (Applicable in this case):
  - Criminalises obscene acts in public places or the utterance of obscene words, songs, or ballads that cause public annoyance.
  - **Punishment:** Up to **3 months imprisonment** and/or a fine up to **₹1,000**.
- **Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1986:**
  - Punishes the coarse representation of women.
  - Punishment for first offence: Imprisonment up to 3 years and a fine of **₹2 thousand**.
  - Repeat Offence: Imprisonment up to 5 years and fine of **₹10 thousand to ₹1 lakh**.
- **Information Technology (Intermediary guidelines and Digital Media Ethics) Rules, 2021:** Amendments impose a legal obligation on intermediaries to make reasonable efforts to prevent users from uploading fake news.

## WHAT DOES INDIAN LAW SAY ABOUT OBSCENITY?

#HUMAN RIGHTS

PRIMARY SOURCE | The Indian EXPRESS

Assam Police have registered a complaint against a YouTuber for allegedly making obscene remarks during an appearance on the YouTube show. He has been charged under **Section 296 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023**.

### LEGAL PROVISIONS ON OBSCENITY IN INDIA

- **Section 294 of the BNS, 2023**
  - It punishes selling, importing, exporting, advertising, or profiting from obscene materials (books, paintings, figures, electronic content, etc.)
- **Hicklin Test (1868, UK):** Established in *Regina vs Hicklin*, this test judged obscenity by whether the content had the potential to corrupt those "open to immoral influences," regardless of its literary or artistic merit.
  - This test led to a **low threshold** for obscenity, as it focused on the impact on the most impressionable audiences.

### JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION OF OBSCENITY IN INDIA

- **Ranjit D. Udeshi vs State of Maharashtra (1964, India):** The Supreme Court upheld the *Hicklin test* while declaring *Lady Chatterley's Lover* obscene.
- **Modern Approach: Community Standards Test**
  - **US Case: Roth vs United States (1957):** Rejected the *Hicklin test* and introduced a new standard: *Obscenity should be determined based on the dominant theme of the work, taken as a whole, and whether it appeals to prurient interest based on contemporary community standards.*
  - **India: Aveek Sarkar vs State of West Bengal (2014):** The Supreme Court **adopted the community standards test**, ruling that isolated passages cannot be taken out of context to judge obscenity.
    - Example: It quashed charges against a magazine for publishing a nude photo of tennis player Boris Becker with his fiancée, stating that it did not arouse lust but had an artistic and social message.

**OBSCENITY AND ONLINE CONTENT**

- **College Romance Web Series Case (2024):** The SC has quashed obscenity charges under **Section 292 of IPC and Section 67 of the IT Act**. It held that mere usage of explicit language does not automatically qualify as obscenity if it does not arouse sexual desire. SC applied the *community standards test* and ruled that such language often expresses emotions like anger, frustration, or excitement rather than prurience.

**CONCLUSION**

- In India, the obscenity laws have evolved from the **Hicklin test** (which had a rigid moralistic approach) to the **community standards test**, which considers changing societal norms.
- The **BNS, 2023**, IT Act, and previous judgments provide a framework to regulate obscene content in different mediums to balance **free speech** and **public morality**.

Courts now take a **contextual approach** to determining obscenity, ensuring that content is judged as a whole rather than by isolated statements. The way forward is **self-censorship** of such content by the creators.

**SC STAYS LOKPAL'S ORDER ON HC JUDGES**

#JUDICIARY #STATUTORY BODY

PRIMARY SOURCE | THE HINDU

The Supreme Court has **stayed a Lokpal order bringing High Court judges under its jurisdiction**, terming that the Lokpal order impacted the **independence of the judiciary**.

**REASONING GIVEN BY THE LOKPAL TO BRING HIGH COURT JUDGES UNDER ITS PURVIEW**

- The Lokpal (in its now-suspended order) ruled that **High Court judges fall within the definition of public servant** under the 2013 Lokpal Act, asserting its jurisdiction over them.

**Redefining jurisdiction**

Lokpal's January 27 order defines the rules and conditions under which it will inquire into complaints against High Court judges

- SC judges are public servants under the Prevention of Corruption Act but are not public servants under the Lokpal Act
- A judge of an HC established by an Act of Parliament will come within the ambit of expression 'any person' in Section 14(1)(f) of the Lokpal Act
- There is a precondition to consult the Chief Justice of India before initiating, under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act, a preliminary inquiry into a complaint lodged against an HC judge
- The SC was 'established' by the Constitution. The HCs pre-existed the Constitution and are only 'recognised' by it

- Unlike the Supreme Court, the **High Courts in India** were constituted by British Parliamentary Acts — Indian High Courts Act, 1861 and Government of India Act 1935 — and thus the High Courts pre-date the Constitution.
- **Article 214** of the Constitution, which said "there shall be a High Court for each State", had only "intrinsically recognised" the existence of the High Courts. The **Constitution did not establish the High Courts**.

**REASONING GIVEN BY SUPREME COURT TO STAY THE LOKPAL ORDER**

- The special bench of SC stated that **high court judges would not come under the purview of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**, since their appointment is governed by the Constitution and that they are not like any other "public servant" functioning in an organisation established by a parliamentary law.
  - After the commencement of the Constitution, High Court judges are constitutional authorities and **not mere statutory functionaries**.

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### OFFICE OF LOKPAL

- Lokpal is an **independent statutory body** established under Section 3 of the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**.
- **Aim:** To inquire and investigate allegations of **corruption** against public functionaries who fall within the scope and ambit of the Act.
- Since India is a signatory to the **United Nations Convention against Corruption**, it mandates the Government to provide clean and responsive governance which is reflected in passing of the legislation and creation of the body of Lokpal to contain and punish acts of corruption.

### OBJECTIVE BEHIND ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF LOKPAL

- To address concerns and aspirations of the citizens of India for **clean governance**.
- To serve the public interest and use the powers vested in it to **eradicate corruption in public life**.

### FEATURES OF LOKPAL AND LOKAYUKTA ACT (2013)

- **Uniform anti-corruption roadmap:** It seeks to establish the institution of the Lokpal at the Centre and the Lokayukta at the level of the State and thus seeks to provide a uniform vigilance and anti-corruption road map for the nation both at the Centre and at the States.
- **Jurisdiction of Lokpal** includes the Prime Minister, Ministers, Members of Parliament and Groups A, B, C and D officers and officials of the Central Government.
- **Composition:** Lokpal consists of a Chairperson with a **maximum of 8 members** of which 50% shall be judicial members.
  - 50% of the members of the Lokpal shall come from amongst the SCs, the STs, the OBCs, minorities and women.
  - The selection of the Chairperson and the members of Lokpal shall be through a **Selection Committee**, consisting of:
    - Prime Minister
    - Speaker of Lok Sabha
    - Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha
    - Chief Justice of India or a sitting Supreme Court Judge nominated by the Chief Justice of India

- Eminent Jurist to be nominated by the President of India on the basis of recommendations of the first four members of the selection committee.

### SEARCH COMMITTEE

- A Search Committee will assist the Selection Committee in the process of selection.
- 50% of the members of the Search Committee shall also be from amongst the SCs, the STs, the OBCs, minorities and women.

### JURISDICTIONAL ASPECT

- **The office of Prime Minister** is under the purview of the Lokpal, with subject-matter exclusions and specific process, for handling complaints against the PM.
- Lokpal's jurisdiction will **cover all categories of public servants**, including Group A, Group B, Group C, and Group D officers and employees of Government.
- Lokpal will have the **power of superintendence and direction** over any investigating agency, including the CBI, for cases referred to them by the Lokpal.

### CHANGES MADE BY THE LOKPAL ACT

- **Appointment of CBI Director:** A High-Powered Committee chaired by the Prime Minister will recommend the selection of the Director of CBI.
- **Attachment of property:** It incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property of public servants acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- **Provides timeline:** It lays down clear timelines.
  - For **preliminary enquiry**, it is three months extendable by three months.
  - For **investigation**, it is six months which may be extended by six months at a time.
  - For **trial**, it is one year extendable by one year and to achieve this, special courts to be set up.
- **Maximum punishment under Prevention of Corruption Act enhanced:**
  - It enhances **maximum punishment under the Prevention of Corruption Act** from **seven years to ten years**.
  - The **minimum punishment** under sections 7, 8, 9 and 12 of the Prevention of Corruption Act will now be three years, and the minimum punishment under section 15 (punishment for attempt) will now be two years.

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

- **Enhanced ambit:** Institutions which are financed fully or partly by Government are under the jurisdiction of Lokpal, but institutions **aided by Government are excluded**.
- **Power to grant sanction:** Lokpal is conferred with power to grant sanction for prosecution of public servants in place of the Government or competent authority.
- **Provisions to strengthen CBI:** It contains a number of provisions aimed at strengthening the CBI such as:
  - setting up of a Directorate of Prosecution headed by a Director Prosecution under the overall control of the Director of CBI.
  - appointment of the Director of Prosecution on recommendation of the CVC.
  - maintenance of a panel of advocates by CBI other than Government advocates with the consent of the Lokpal handling Lokpal-referred cases.
  - transfer of officers of CBI investigating cases referred by Lokpal with the approval of Lokpal.
  - provision of adequate funds to CBI for investigating ca referred by Lokpal.
- **FCRA:** All entities receiving donations from foreign sources in the context of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) in excess of ₹10 lakhs per year are brought under the jurisdiction of Lokpal.
- **Institution of Lokayukta for States:**
  - It contains a mandate for setting up of the institution of Lokayukta through enactment of a law by the State Legislature **within a period of 365 days** from the date of commencement of this Act.
  - Thus, the Act provides freedom to the states to decide upon the contours of the Lokayukta mechanism in their respective states.
- **Protection to the honest and upright:** It provides adequate protection for honest and upright public servants.

## FAILURE TO INFORM GROUNDS OF ARREST WILL MAKE IT ILLEGAL: SC

#FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

*The Supreme Court has ruled that **failure to inform an arrested person** of the grounds of arrest violates **Article 22(1)** of the Constitution and will render the arrest illegal. It will also amount to **depriving the arrestee of his liberty**.*

### ARTICLE 22 OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

- Provides protection against arrest and detention in certain cases.
- **Article 22(1) states that:** No person who is arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest nor shall he be denied the right to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice.

### KEY POINTS FROM THE JUDGEMENT

Safeguards provided under Article 22(1) ensure the **right to liberty under Article 21**, as no person can be deprived of liberty **except through due process**, which involves:

- **Mandatory communication of grounds of arrest:**
  - Grounds of arrest must be **clearly communicated** in a language the accused understands (written communication is recommended).
  - Informing only in the remand report **does not** satisfy constitutional requirements.
- **Informing relatives/nominated persons:**
  - As per **Section 50A of CrPC**, the accused's relatives or nominated persons must also be informed promptly.
  - This ensures **timely legal assistance** to secure **bail or legal representation**.
- **Judicial scrutiny of arrests:**
  - When presented before a **Judicial Magistrate for remand**, the magistrate **must ensure** compliance with **Article 22(1)**.
  - Failure to do so invalidates the **remand and continued custody** of the accused.
- **Burden of proof on Police:**
  - If non-compliance is alleged, the **Investigating Officer/Agency must prove** adherence to Article 22(1).
  - Filing a **charge sheet or order of cognizance** cannot validate an unconstitutional arrest.
- **Bail and immediate release:**

- Courts **must order the release** of an accused if a violation of **Article 22(1)** is established.
- Even if statutory restrictions on bail exist, **Article 21 takes precedence** in such cases.

The above ruling reinforces that **Article 22(1)** is a **fundamental right**, not a mere procedural requirement. The judgment upholds the **right to liberty and dignity**, emphasising the constitutional obligation of law enforcement and the judiciary to protect individual freedoms.

## REMOVAL PROCESS OF A JUDGE OF HIGH COURT

#JUDICIARY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Rajya Sabha Chairman asserted that **only Parliament has the jurisdiction to constitutionally remove a High Court judge**. His remarks come in the context of the Supreme Court's summons to Justice Yadav (a judge of Allahabad HC) to appear before senior judges of the SC regarding his communally charged remarks.

### REMOVAL PROCESS OF A JUDGE OF HIGH COURT

- A judge of a High Court can be removed from his/her office by an **order of the President**. The President can issue the removal order **only after** an address by the Parliament has been presented to him/her in the same session for such removal.
- The address must be supported by a **special majority of each House of the Parliament** (i.e., a majority of the total membership of that House and majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting).
- The grounds for removal are two: **proved misbehaviour or incapacity**. Thus, a judge of a High Court can be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as **a judge of the Supreme Court**.

The **Judges Enquiry Act (1968)** regulates the procedure relating to the removal of a judge of a High Court by the process of impeachment:

1. A removal motion signed by 100 members (in the case of Lok Sabha) or 50 members (in the case of Rajya Sabha) is to be given to the Speaker/Chairman.

2. The Speaker/Chairman may **admit the motion or refuse to admit it**.
3. If it is admitted, then the Speaker/Chairman is to constitute a **three-member committee** to investigate the charges.
4. The committee should consist of (a) the Chief Justice or a Judge of the Supreme Court, (b) Chief Justice of a High Court, and (c) a distinguished Jurist.
5. If the committee finds the judge to be guilty of misbehaviour or suffering from an incapacity, the House can take up the consideration of the motion.
6. After the motion is passed by each House of Parliament by a **special majority**, an address is presented to the President for removal of the judge.
7. Finally, the President passes an **order removing the judge**.

The procedure for the impeachment of a judge of a High Court is the **same as that for a judge of the Supreme Court**. No judge of a High Court has been impeached so far.

## CHHATTISGARH HIGH COURT EXTENDS MARITAL RAPE EXTENSION

#HUMAN RIGHTS

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

The Chhattisgarh High Court in a key ruling extended the **marital rape immunity to Section 377** of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which criminalised "unnatural sex".

### ABOUT CHHATTISGARH'S HIGH COURT RULING ON SECTION 377 (2024)

- The HC overturned a trial court's conviction of a man under IPC Sections **375 (rape), 377 (unnatural sex), and 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder)** for the death of his wife.
- The court cited the **marital rape exception** under IPC Section 375, which protects husbands from prosecution for non-consensual sex with their wives is applicable in the case.
- It ruled that **forced unnatural sex under Section 377** by a husband on his wife is not an offence by relying on

the SC's 2018 judgment that decriminalised consensual homosexuality.

**ISSUE OF OMISSION OF IPC SECTION 377 IN BHARATIYA NYAYA SANHITA (BNS)**

- **Section 377** was often used by married women to seek legal recourse against non-consensual sex in marriage. In the Navtej Johar case, SC decriminalised consensual sexual activities, but kept other parts of Section 377 intact.
- Its **omission** in the **BNS leaves no equivalent provision** to address sexual violence against men, LGBTQIA+ individuals, or bestiality.
- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee (2023)** noted that deleting Section 377 removes protection for non-consensual carnal offences against males, trans persons, and animals.
- **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** provides limited protection (max 2 years imprisonment), making it weaker than other sexual offence laws.
- **Delhi HC (August 2024)** directed the Centre to consider a plea for reviving Section 377 within six months.
- **SC (October 2024)** dismissed a similar plea, ruling that criminalisation falls under Parliament's domain.

**ISSUE OF MARITAL RAPE**

- Marital rape refers to sexual intercourse with one's spouse without the spouse's consent.
- Marital rape is **not explicitly criminalised** in Indian Jurisprudence due to exemption in IPC Section 375.
  - Exception two of Section 375 (rape) of IPC **excludes non-consensual sexual intercourse** by a husband with his wife, if the latter is **over 15 years of age**, from the definition of rape.
  - Similar Exception in Section 63 (rape) of BNS rules out forced sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, aged **over 18 years, as rape**.
- However, there has been growing clamour to criminalise Marital rape. According to the **NHFS-4** survey, 5.4% of women experienced marital rape in India.
- The marital rape exception is currently under **challenge before the SC**, with the **Centre supporting its retention**.

**REASONS**

- **Economic dependence:** Lack of economic independence often deters married women to report Marital rape.
- **Lack of awareness:** Women often do not even realise that they are victims of marital rape, as sex without consent is taken for granted in the marriage.
- **Patriarchy:** Sexual offence is a weapon of male domination, and it is a manifestation of patriarchy.

**IPC under Section 375 defines rape as follows:** A man is said to commit "rape" who has sexual intercourse with a woman under the following circumstances:

- against her will
- without her consent
- with her consent, but consent has been obtained because of putting her in the fear of death.
- when the man knows that he is not her husband, but she believes that he is her husband.
- unsound mind or intoxication with or without consent.
- when she is under 16 years of age.

However, the same section gave an exemption: **Sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, wife not being under 15 years of age, is not rape.**

**REMISSION WITHOUT APPLICATION: SC**

#HUMAN RIGHTS #PRISONER WELFARE



*The Supreme Court has directed **states with remission policies** to consider the **premature release** of prisoners even if they do not apply for remission beforehand. This is a shift from earlier positions in **Sangeet v. State of Haryana (2013)** and **Mohinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2013)** where the SC held that remission must be initiated by the convict.*

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON REMISSION**

- **Definition:** Remission is the legal power to **reduce or shorten the period of a sentence** that a convicted person must serve. It allows a state government to **partially cancel the punishment imposed by a court**.
- **Relevant provisions:**
  - **Section 473 of BNSS** (formerly Section 432 of CrPC): States can remit sentences **at any time** and impose

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

conditions like reporting to police at regular intervals.

- **Section 475 of BNSS** (formerly Section 433A of CrPC): Life convicts (guilty of offences punishable by death) must serve at least 14 years before remission.
- **Articles 72 & 161**: President and Governors have been given separate remission powers.
- Previously, remission required an application to be filed by the convict. Now, the Supreme Court has ruled that states must proactively consider eligible convicts.

### SUPREME COURT'S RULING AND REASONING

- Earlier rulings in *Sangeet v. State of Haryana (2013)* and *Mohinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2013)* judgements had not considered pre-existing remission policies and held that these powers cannot be exercised **Suo moto**.
- SC has now recognised that **state prison manuals** already mandate prison superintendents to initiate remission proceedings, hence administration can take steps for remission.
- Uniform remission policies ensure **uniformity** and prevent **arbitrary or en-masse releases** (E.g., festival-related remissions).
- If states fail to consider eligible cases, it would be **discriminatory** and violate **Article 14 (Right to Equality)**.

### SC'S DIRECTIVES TO STATES

- **All states must create an exhaustive remission policy within two months.**
- **Conditions for remission must be reasonable**: SC has directed states to consider crime motive, criminal background, and public safety while giving remission, it has further directed that the conditions cannot be excessively stringent or vague.
- **Remission cannot be revoked arbitrarily**: A minor breach of conditions should not automatically lead to cancellation and the **convicts must be notified and given a chance to respond** before cancellation.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE VERDICT

- **Impact on Prison Population**: Indian prisons have **131.4% occupancy** (NCRB, 2022), however, majority (75.8%) are **undertrials**, so immediate impact may be limited.
- **Reduced discretionary powers of the State**: Prevents arbitrary denials of remission and ensures consistent application of remission policies.

- **Balancing justice and reform**: While preventing mass releases, the ruling reinforces rehabilitation-focused justice. It allows for a structured approach rather than political or emotional decisions on remission.
- **Shift from Judicial restraint to Proactive State Role**: Previously, remission was considered a **privilege** requiring a convict's application. Now, remission is seen as a right if eligibility criteria are met. This shift aligns with the policy of progressive penal reforms, emphasizing reintegration with society over prolonged punishment.
- **Constitutional and human rights perspective**: The ruling ensures fair treatment and equality under Article 14. It also aligns with Article 21 (Right to Life and Liberty) by preventing arbitrary imprisonment.
- **Impact on prison overcrowding**: Overcrowding is a serious issue in Indian prisons, with occupancy exceeding 131%. The SC's decision may ease some of this burden but will have limited impact on undertrials. Future prison reforms should focus on speedy trials and bail reforms alongside remission policies.

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- **Implementation issues**: Some states may delay framing policies.
- **Political interference**: There is still scope for states to **misuse remission for electoral gains**.
- **Public safety risks**: Ensuring that only truly rehabilitated convicts are released is crucial.
- **Proper implementation and safeguards** are necessary to balance public safety and justice.

India also needs **faster trials** to reduce undertrial population, **parole and probation reforms** and increased focus on **rehabilitation and skill-building for prisoners**.

## PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE'S RIGHT TO ACQUIRE

#LEGAL RIGHT

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

*There has been a debate around the laws regarding acquisition of private property by the state.*

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

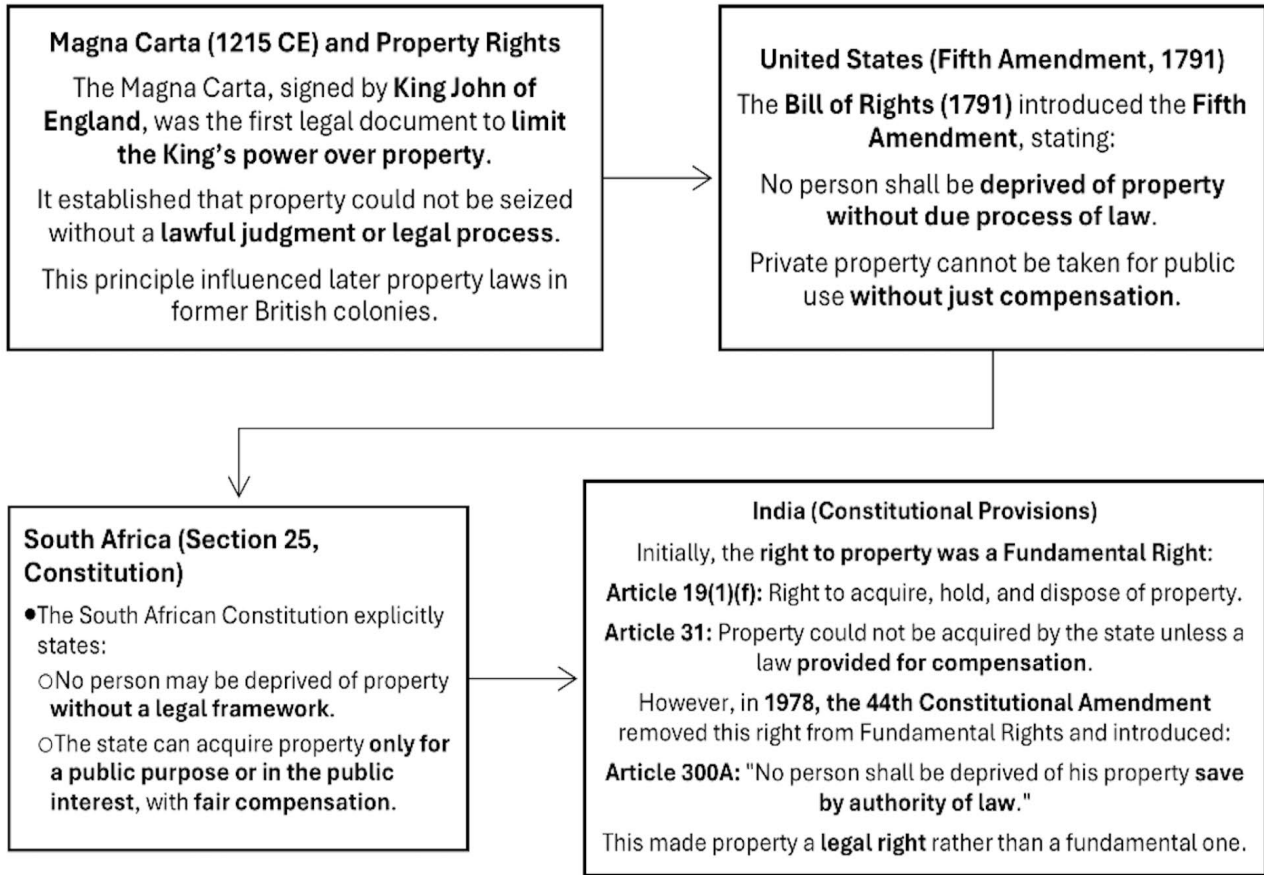
### PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE'S RIGHT TO ACQUIRE

- The state's power to **acquire private property** for public purposes is rooted in the legal doctrine of

**eminent domain** which has evolved across different legal systems.

- This principle is needed to **balance public interest with private property rights**, ensuring due process and compensation for landowners.

### EVOLUTION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS



### LAND ACQUISITION LAWS IN THE US & INDIA

UNITED STATES	INDIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over time, land acquisition in the US has shifted towards <b>private investment</b> to boost economic growth.</li> <li><b>Kelo v. City of New London (2005)</b>:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The US Supreme Court ruled that land could be acquired for <b>private</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For over a century, land acquisition was governed by the <b>Land Acquisition Act, 1894</b>, which allowed the state to acquire land for "<b>public purpose</b>" with compensation.</li> <li>However, this act had flaws:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It only compensated <b>landowners</b>,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>economic <b>development</b>, fulfilling the "<b>public use</b>" requirement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This has sparked controversy, leading several states (e.g., Alabama, Texas) to <b>restrict eminent domain</b> for private projects.</li> </ul>	<p>ignoring the impact on <b>tenants, laborers, and other affected communities</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In <b>2013</b>, the <b>Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement (LARR) Act</b> was enacted:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Social Impact Assessment (SIA)</b>: Ensures all affected</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<p>people are considered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Fair compensation:</b> Landowners must be adequately compensated.</li> <li>○ <b>Rehabilitation and resettlement:</b> Provisions for those displaced by land acquisition.</li> </ul>
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**CONCLUSION**

- The **US, South Africa, and India** recognise the **state's right to acquire private property** for public purposes. All three countries ensure **due process and compensation** for landowners.
- While the **US and South Africa** still emphasise **constitutional property rights**, **India has now positioned property rights to a legal right** under **Article 300A**.

However, India's **2013 Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement (LARR Act)** has introduced a more **humanitarian approach**, ensuring compensation, rehabilitation, and transparency in land acquisition.

## ARTICLE 371 TO 371J: SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR CERTAIN STATES

#SPECIAL PROVISIONS



A regional party in poll-bound **Meghalaya** has indicated that bringing the State under the purview of **Article 371-371J**, which could **help resume rat-hole coal mining**, that is banned in the state since April 2014.

**BACKGROUND**

- Rat hole mining has been banned in Meghalaya by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) since 2014.
- It is still ongoing in various parts of **Nagaland because of the protection provided under Article 371A**.
  - The Article **bars** any Act of Parliament related to their **customary law and procedure** (including civil and criminal justice matters, and ownership or transfer

of land and resources), to prevail unless the state legislative assembly passes the resolution to do so.

**ABOUT ARTICLE 371 TO 371J**

- **Article 371 to 371J (Part XXI)** of the Constitution of India, grants some **temporary, transitional, and special powers** for **12 States**, viz, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, and Karnataka.
  - Article 371 has been part of the Constitution since **26 January 1950**.
  - **Articles 371(A-J)** have been brought in via **amendments through Article 368**.
- Originally, the constitution did not make any special provisions for these states. They have been incorporated by the various subsequent amendments.

Article No.	Subject-matter
371	Special provision with respect to the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.
371 - A.	Special provision with respect to the state of Nagaland.
371 - B.	Special provision with respect to the state of Assam
371 -C.	Special provision with respect to the state of Manipur
371 - D.	Special provisions with respect to the state of Andhra Pradesh or the state of Telangana
371 - E.	Establishment of Central University in Andhra Pradesh
371 - F.	Special provisions with respect to the state of Sikkim
371 - G.	Special provision with respect to the state of Mizoram
371 - H.	Special provision with respect to the state of Arunachal Pradesh
371 -I.	Special provision with respect to the state of Goa
371 -J.	Special provisions with respect to the state of Karnataka

**INTENTION BEHIND ARTICLE 371 TO 371J**

- Meet the aspirations of the people of backward regions of the states
- To protect the cultural and economic interests of the tribal people of the states

- To deal with the disturbed law and order condition in some parts of the states
- To protect the interests of the local people of the states.

## FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS IN ASSAM

#GOVERNANCE #TRIBUNALS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, the **Supreme Court has ordered the Assam Government** to deport the foreigners lodged in detention centres. Some of them have been in detention for 10 years after being declared as foreigners by the **Foreigners Tribunal**.

### ABOUT FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS IN ASSAM

- Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) are **quasi-judicial bodies** established in Assam to adjudicate cases concerning individuals suspected of being illegal immigrants.
- They were created under the **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964**, which derives its authority from the **Foreigners Act of 1946**.
- The tribunals **primarily handle cases** related to individuals left out of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), with a significant number of cases involving approximately **19.06 lakh** people.

### STRUCTURE OF FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS

- **Number of Tribunals:** Currently, there are around **100 Foreigners Tribunals** operating in Assam.
- **Composition:** Each tribunal is headed by a member with legal or judicial experience, including judges and advocates. The members are appointed under the guidelines provided by the government.
- **Referral Process:** Cases can be referred to FTs by District Magistrates or through notices served to individuals marked as **"doubtful voters"** on electoral rolls. The tribunals also handle references made by **border police** regarding suspected illegal immigrants.

### FUNCTIONING OF FOREIGNERS TRIBUNALS

- According to the 1964 order, an FT has the powers of a **Civil Court** in matters such as summoning and enforcing the attendance and examining on oath and requiring the production of any document.
- A tribunal is required to serve a notice in English or the official language of the State to a person alleged to be a

foreigner **within 10 days** of receiving the **reference from the authority concerned**.

- Such a person has 10 days to reply to the notice and another **10 days to produce evidence** in support of his or her case. An FT has to dispose of a case **within 60 days of reference**.
- If the person fails to provide any proof of citizenship, the **FT can send him or her to a detention centre (now called transit camp) for deportation later**.
  - The **burden of proof** under the Foreigners Act is on the person accused as a foreigner.
  - Failure on his part to appear before the Tribunal, will result in him being declared a foreigner without the state having to prove its case.

### APPEAL AGAINST THE ORDER OF A FT

- Individuals declared as foreigners by the FT can **challenge the decision of the tribunal** by filing a writ petition in the **High Court of Assam**, under **Article 226** of Indian Constitution.
- If unsatisfied by the decision of the High Court, they can appeal to the Supreme Court of India under **Article 136** (Special Leave Petition).

The legal foundation for the FTs was laid down in 1964, but significant amendments have been made in **2019**, which refined the procedures for handling appeals related to NRC claims and objections.

## CITIZENSHIP LAWS IN US & INDIA

#CITIZENSHIP

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The U.S. President has issued an executive order stating that U.S. citizenship will be granted in the future only to children with parents holding U.S. citizenship or a U.S. green card.

**Citizenship:** Citizenship refers to **full and equal membership** of a nation and owe allegiance to it. It grants individuals civil rights, political rights, fundamental rights, and responsibilities.

### CITIZENSHIP LAWS IN THE U.S.

- The **14th Amendment (1868)** guarantees citizenship to all persons **born or naturalised** in the U.S.
- The **U.S. Supreme Court (1898)** reaffirmed this right, regardless of parents' citizenship.

## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- The **Trump administration's executive order (2025)** sought to restrict **birthright citizenship** to children of **U.S. citizens or Green Card holders**.

### EVOLUTION OF CITIZENSHIP RULES IN INDIA

- Citizenship in India is governed by the **Citizenship Act, 1955**.
- **Before 1987**: India followed **jus soli** – anyone born in India was granted citizenship.
- **1987–2004**: At least **one parent** had to be an Indian citizen for the child to get Indian citizenship.
- **Since 2004**: Both parents must be Indian citizens, or one parent should be a citizen while the other **not an illegal immigrant** (to prevent illegal migration, particularly from Bangladesh).
- **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019**: It grants **accelerated citizenship** to Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Parsis from **Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh** if they entered India before **December 31, 2014**.

#### Note:

- In India, both citizens by birth as well as naturalised citizens are eligible for the office of President.
- In the USA, only a citizen by birth and not a naturalised citizen is eligible for the office of President.

## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY THEFT COMES UNDER SC/ST ACT

#WELFARE PROVISIONS #HUMAN RIGHTS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, the Supreme Court has held that **intellectual property theft** comes under the ambit of the **Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**.

#### KEY POINTS

- A Dalit researcher from Maharashtra sought relief for **intellectual property damage**, under **Section 15A(11)(d)** of the SC/ST Act. This provision charges the state with the duty to provide relief in respect of death or injury or **"damage to property"**.
- The SC/ST Act, 1989 aims to prevent **atrocities and hate crimes** against the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

### OBSERVATIONS OF COURT

- The SC observed that **"property"** under the SC/ST Act, include **both tangible and as well as intangible assets**, such as:
  - intellectual property (patents, copyright)
  - digital data
  - electronic material

### IMPACT OF THE JUDGMENT

- Intellectual property is now recognised as **"property" under the SC/ST Act** for compensation purposes, thus making such property eligible for protection and compensation under the Act.
- It will also strengthen legal protections for **researchers, scholars, and marginalised groups** against intellectual property theft.

## NATIONAL COMMISSION OF SAFAI KARMCHARIS

#WELFARE BODIES

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Union Cabinet approved the extension of the tenure of the **National Commission for Safai Karmcharis (NCSK)** for a period of three years up to March 2028.

### ABOUT THE NATIONAL COMMISSION OF SAFAI KARMCHARIS

- NCSK was set up as a **statutory body in 1994** under the National Commission for Safai Karmcharis Act, 1993. After the lapsing of the Act in 2004, the Commission became a **non-statutory body**.
- However, its **scope has been expanded** after the enactment of **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**.

**Organisation:** NCSK is a **non-statutory body** under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, it comprises of:

- **Chairperson** (in the rank and status of the Union Minister of State).
- **Vice-Chairperson** (in the rank and status of the Secretary to the Government of India).
- **Five members**, including a lady member (in the rank and status of the Secretary to the Government of India)

- **Secretary** (in the rank of Joint Secretary to the Govt. of India) along with other supporting staff.

**KEY MANDATE**

- Recommending to Central government specific programmes of action towards **elimination of inequities** in status, facilities, and opportunities for safai karamcharis.

- Make reports to the Central or State Government on any **matter, difficulties or disabilities being encountered by Safai Karmacharis.**
- Monitor the implementation of Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

### MCQS

**Q1. Which of the following provisions are associated with Article 22 of the Indian Constitution?**

1. Right of an arrested person to be informed of the grounds of arrest.
2. Provision for preventive detention.
3. Right to free legal aid for all detained persons.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

**Q2. Consider the following statements about provisions about the vacancy of a Member of Parliament's seat due to prolonged absence:**

1. Till date seats of four members in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have been vacated under Article 101.
2. The Speaker in Lok Sabha and the Chairman in the Rajya Sabha are the sole decisive authority in the vacancy of seat.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Q3. With reference to the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of**

**Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, consider the following statements:**

1. The Selection Committee for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner includes the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India.
2. Members of the Election Commission cannot be re-appointed after completing their term.
3. The Act provides for the Search Committee to directly recommend names for appointment as the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners to the President.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 2 and 3 only

**Q4. Consider the following statements regarding Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) in Assam:**

1. Foreigners Tribunals were established under the Foreigners Act, 1946.
2. The tribunals have the powers of a civil court to summon and examine individuals.
3. A case referred to an FT must be disposed of within 100 days.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

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## CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

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(d) 2 and 3 only

**Q5. With reference to the office of Lokpal in India, consider the following statements:**

1. The office of Prime Minister is excluded from the purview of Lokpal.

2. A complaint against a public servant cannot be made after the expiry of seven years.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

## DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

**Q1.** Decentralisation of power in India has changed the governance landscape at the grassroots. Comment.

**Q2.** Despite facing criminal charges, individuals can run for elections unless convicted. In your opinion, should there be a lifetime ban on convicted candidates to contest elections?

**Answers:** 1-a, 2-d, 3-b, 4-a, 5-b

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & SECURITY

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER II & III (MAIN)

## INDIA QATAR ELEVATE TIES TO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

#BILATERAL RELATIONS #MIDDLE EAST

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Amir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, made a state visit to India in February, 2025. During this visit, **India and Qatar elevated their bilateral relations to a strategic partnership** to deepen cooperation in trade, energy, investment, security and international forums.

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF INDIA-QATAR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

- India and Qatar have elevated their bilateral relationship to a **Strategic Partnership**. This brings Qatar on par with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait, all of which have strategic partnerships with India.



- Economic Cooperation and Investment:**
  - Qatar has committed to invest **USD 10 billion in India**, with the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) planning to open an office in India.

- India is Qatar's second largest trading partner, with bilateral trade of about **\$14 billion** in 2024. The two countries have set a target to **double bilateral trade to \$28 billion by 2030**.
- The countries have agreed to explore an **India-Qatar Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** and Bilateral Investment Treaty (**BIT**).
- The countries have signed a **revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement** and five MoUs on economic collaboration, youth and sports, archives and investments.
- Both sides are exploring opportunities to increase investments in infrastructure, technology, manufacturing, food security, logistics, hospitality and other areas of mutual interest.

### • Energy Partnership:

- India and Qatar are deepening their energy partnership through **trade and mutual investments**. Qatar is the **largest supplier of LNG to India, accounting for over 48% of India's global LNG imports**.
- An agreement between Qatar Energy and Petronet LNG Limited ensures the supply of 7.5 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG to India for 20 years starting in 2028.

### • Bilateral Mechanisms:

- The establishment of two Joint Ministerial Commissions, at the level of **Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Commerce and Industry**, to strengthen cooperation has also taken place.

**THE OUTCOMES**

- Expedite negotiations on the India-Qatar Bilateral Investment Treaty.
- Explore a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.
- Qatar's commitment to invest USD 10 billion.
- Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) to open an office.
- Nationwide rollout of UPI acceptance in Qatar.
- Celebrate India-Qatar Year of Culture, Friendship and Sports in the near future.
- Extension of e-visa facility to Qatari nationals.

**OTHER KEY OUTCOMES**

- Extension of the Indian **e-Visa facility** for Qatari nationals.
- India and Qatar have agreed to celebrate a Year of **Culture, Friendship, and Sports** in the near future.
- Operationalisation of India's UPI at Qatar National Bank (QNB) Point of Sales in Qatar.
- Expansion of Qatar National Bank's presence in India by setting up an **office in the GIFT City**.

**AREAS OF DISCUSSION**

- **Middle East Peace Process:** Discussions between the two leaders also included the Middle East peace process, with both sides appreciating each other's positions on the Israel-Hamas issue.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE INDIA-U.S. JOINT STATEMENT**

**DEFENCE**

**A NEW TEN-YEAR** Framework for the US-India Major Defence Partnership in 21st Century to be signed

**US PLATFORMS** rising in Indian services: US would expand defence sales and co-production with India to strengthen interoperability and defence industrial cooperation. Javelin and Stryker to be pursued

**REVIEW OF** International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), in order to streamline defence trade, technology exchange and maintenance, spare supplies and in-country repair and overhaul of US-provided systems

**OPENING NEGOTIATIONS**

this year for a Reciprocal Defence Procurement pact

**ACCELERATE DEFENCE** technology cooperation across space, air defence, missile, maritime and undersea technologies.

**US ANNOUNCING** a review of its policy on releasing fifth gen fighters and undersea systems to India

**NEW INITIATIVE:** The Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA) – scale industry partnerships and production in Indo-Pacific. ASIA refers to India-US cooperation in the area of underwater domain awareness technology



ANI

**US-INDIA COMPACT** – Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology for the 21st Century – to drive transformative change

across key pillars of cooperation – defence, investment and trade, energy security, technology and innovation, multilateral cooperation, people to people connection

- **Terrorism:** They also unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, agreeing to cooperate in combating this menace through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms.

- **UN reforms:** Both leaders emphasised the importance of a reformed and effective multilateral system, centered on a UN **reflective of contemporary realities**, as a key factor in tackling global challenges.

Qatar is a key strategic partner for India due to its geopolitical location, economic potential, energy resources, and a large Indian diaspora.

**INDIA-U.S. JOINT STATEMENT DURING INDIAN PM'S VISIT TO US**

#BILATERAL RELATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

Recently, the **Indian Prime Minister** and the **US President** held a **bilateral meeting** at the White House.

**TRADE AND INVESTMENT**

**NEW GOAL** for bilateral trade – “Mission 500” – aiming to more than double bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030

**FIRST TRANCHE** of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement by fall of 2025

**ENERGY SECURITY**

**RE-COMMITTED TO** the US-India Energy Security Partnership, including in oil, gas, and civil nuclear energy

**US SUPPORT** for India to join the International Energy Agency as a full member

**FULLY REALISE** the US-India

Demonstrate mutual commitment to address bilateral trade barriers

**RECOGNITION OF** Indian investments in US – Indian companies ongoing investments worth over \$7.355 billion – 3,000 high-quality jobs for local families

123 Civil Nuclear Agreement by moving forward with plans to work together to build US-designed nuclear reactors in India through large scale localisation and possible technology transfer

**ENABLE COLLABORATION** to develop, deploy and scale up nuclear power generation with small modular reactors

**TECH AND INNOVATION**

**LAUNCH OF** US-India TRUST initiative will catalyse gov-to-govt, academia and private sector collaboration to promote application of critical and emerging technologies in areas like defence, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum, biotechnology, energy and space

**FORWARD A** US-India Roadmap on Accelerating AI Infrastructure by end of year

**US AND** India will work together to enable industry partnerships and investments in next generation data centers, cooperation on development

and access to compute and processors for AI

**LAUNCH OF** INDUS Innovation – an innovation bridge modelled after the successful INDUS-X platform, that will advance industry and academic partnerships and foster investments in space, energy, and other emerging tech

**PHARMA:** expand Indian manufacturing capacity, including in US, for active pharmaceutical ingredients for critical medicines

**LAUNCH OF** the Strategic Mineral Recovery initiative – a new US-India cooperative program to recover and process critical minerals

**INDIA-US RELATIONS IN THE PAST FEW YEARS**

In the recent years, India and the US have shared a fair relation, enhancing the engagement with new geopolitical developments, like:

- **Indo-Pacific terminology gains prominence (2016)** emphasising India's importance in the region. Also, the evolution of the term challenges the China and Russia Asia-Pacific dominance.
- **QUAD:** Quad, a group of India, US, Japan and Australia witnessed the revival during Trump's first tenure (2017).
- **COMCASA:** India-US signed **COMCASA** (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) in 2018 to enhance the intelligence and communication channel sharing fostering deeper military engagement.
- **BECA:** India signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (**BECA**) with the US in 2020 to deepen Indo-US military cooperation.
- **Chabahar Port waiver:** India enjoyed a concession with respect to the engagement with Iran's Chabahar Port development.
- India and the US relations further strengthened by:
  - US joining the International Solar Alliance (ISA)
  - India joining Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)
  - India-NASA human space flight Gaganyaan engagement

With the Trump 2.0 government, India and the US may expect challenges in domains like immigration and deportation; trade and tariffs; climate change; de-dollarisation; and relations with external functionaries.

## INDIA'S EMPHASIS ON NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY

#INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

PRIMARY SOURCE | THE HINDU

*In the Union budget 2025, the Ministry of External Affairs has been allocated a sum of 20,516 crores, with an emphasis on **Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP)**.*

**EMPHASIS ON NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY (NFP)**

- Immediate neighbours of India have been allocated **Rs 4,320 crore** or 64% of the total scheme portfolio.
- The sum has been allocated for large infrastructure projects (hydroelectric plants, power transmission lines, housing, roads, bridges, integrated check-posts). The allocations highlight India's continued focus on **regional diplomacy**.

**ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD FIRST POLICY (NFP)**

- India's 'Neighbourhood First policy' guides its approach towards the management of relations with countries in its **immediate neighbourhood**: Afghanistan,

Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It officially came to being in **2008**.

- **Aim:** To enhance physical, digital and people to people connectivity across the region, as well as augmenting trade and commerce.
- **Focus:**
  - To create mutually beneficial, people-oriented, regional frameworks for stability and prosperity.
  - India engages with these countries on a **consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome-oriented basis**, driven by the principles of **Samman (respect), Samvad (dialogue), Shanti (peace), and Samridhi (prosperity)**.
- This policy has evolved into an **institutional priority** for all the relevant arms of the Government managing relations and policies with our neighbourhood.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY**

- **Countering Chinese influence:** By collaborating closely with neighbouring countries, India can counterbalance Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Support in multilateral forums:** Working with neighbouring partners strengthens India's leadership role in representing the **interests of the Global South** at international forums. This fosters better understanding and cooperation on global issues.
- **Ensuring territorial integrity:** Collaboration with neighbouring countries is essential for India to protect its **territorial integrity and tackle separatist** threats effectively.
- **Increasing maritime security:** Effective cooperation with neighbours is key to bolstering **maritime security**, which enables India to tackle transnational security challenges more effectively.
- **Addressing energy security:** Close cooperation with neighbouring countries is critical for **India's energy security, particularly concerning the import of oil and gas** through sea routes.
- **Bridging development deficits:** Actively engaging with neighbouring countries helps in the development of India's **northeastern states, thus narrowing development disparities in the region**.
- **Leveraging soft power diplomacy:** India's deep cultural and historical connections with its neighbours

strengthen people-to-people ties, solidifying India's influence in the region through **soft power diplomacy**.

#### **CHALLENGES**

- **Geopolitical tensions:** Issues like border disputes and political disagreements can complicate relationships.
- **Implementation issues:** Difficulties in executing cross-border projects due to logistical and bureaucratic challenges.
- **Economic differences:** Different levels of economic development among neighbouring countries can affect the balance and effectiveness of cooperation.

#### **Initiatives taken as a part of NFP:**

- Under NFP, India has been assisting neighbouring countries on development of infrastructure projects, augmentation of capabilities and extending **financial, budgetary, and humanitarian assistance**. Some important examples include:

##### **1. Afghanistan:**

- **Humanitarian Assistance-** Supply of Wheat, medical aid, vaccines, scholarship schemes for Afghan students.
- **Salma Dam-** Major hydroelectric & irrigation project
- **Zaranj-Delram Highway-** 218 km long road project connecting Delaram district in Afghanistan to the border of Iran.

##### **2. Bangladesh:**

- **Maitree Thermal Power project-** 1320MW coal-fired power station under construction in Rampal, Bangladesh.
- **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline-** 131.5 km long oil pipeline connecting Siliguri in North Bengal to Parbatipur in Bangladesh's Dinajpur province.
- **Agartala-Akhaura rail link-** Spanning 12.24 km and costing Rs 972 crores, designed to enhance trade between India's North-East and Bangladesh.

##### **3. Bhutan:**

- Expansion of **Paro International Airport**.
- **Introduction of RuPay card** in Bhutan as a cross-border payment initiative.
- **India-Bhutan SAT** (jointly developed by India and Bhutan) launched by ISRO in 2022.
- **Hydropower projects-** key collaboration in Mangdechhu, Chukha, Tala Project, Kuricchu hydro projects.
- Aid in building **Gelephu Mindfulness City**.

**4. Maldives:**

- **Greater Male Connectivity Project**- 6.7 km long bridge connects the capital city Male with the nearby islands.
- Grant Assistance of **USD 100 million** to ease financial challenges- 2022.
- **Coastal Surveillance Radar System** comprising 10 radar stations handed over to Maldives.
- **Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital** in Maldives (gifted by India)

**5. Myanmar:**

- **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project**- Enhancing connectivity to Mizoram & NE India from ports through Sittwe port in Myanmar.
- **Sittwe port**- deepwater port constructed by India at Sittwe, Rakhine State in Myanmar.
- **Border Area Development Program**- multifaceted development in the **international border** to bridge physical and social infrastructure gaps.
- **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project**- connect India's Northeast region with Thailand via Myanmar,
- **Humanitarian assistance**- supply of vaccines during COVID-19 and medical aid.

**6. Nepal:**

- **Jayanagar-Kurtha line**- 35 kms long **cross-border railway line** between India and Nepal to enhance connectivity.
- **Motihari-Amlekhgunj pipeline**- 69 km long **trans-border petroleum pipeline** between Amlekhgunj Oil Depot in Parsa, Nepal and Motihari, Bihar.
- **Hydropower projects**- key collaboration in Sapta Kosi dam project, Upper Karnali Project, Arun - III project etc.
- **High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP)** to build hospitals, colleges, drinking water facilities, sanitation, drainage, rural electrification etc.

**7. Sri Lanka:**

- **Colombo Port Terminal project**- expansion of Colombo Port.
- **Jaffna Cultural Centre**- promoting cultural ties.
- **Solar Energy Projects**- 135-MW solar power plant in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.
- **\$1 billion credit line** to Sri Lanka for financial assistance.

**OTHER MAJOR INITIATIVES****Major Infrastructure Projects:**

- **BBIN Initiative (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal):** Improving Road and rail connectivity.
- **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project:** Connecting India with Myanmar and further with Southeast Asia.
- **Chabahar Port:** Developing a strategic port in Iran to improve connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

**Regional Forums:**

- **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) aimed at promoting regional cooperation. However, the effectiveness of SAARC has been limited due to political differences, particularly between India and Pakistan.
- **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) has gained prominence as an alternative to SAARC, focusing on economic cooperation, security, and cultural exchange among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.

**India's comprehensive and longstanding ties** with its neighbouring countries also stand on their own footing and are independent of the relations of these countries with third countries.

## INDIA AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN GLOBAL NORTH AND SOUTH

#GEOPOLITICS

PRIMARY  
SOURCE THE HINDU

*The Prime Minister of India in his address at 18<sup>th</sup> Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in January 2025, emphasised India's role in **amplifying the voice of Global South**. Similarly, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Voice of Global South Summit 2024, he reiterated India's aspiration to **lead reforms for a more inclusive global governance structure**.*

**UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL NORTH AND GLOBAL SOUTH**

- **Global North:** Comprises nations such as the U.S., Canada, Europe, Russia, Australia, and New Zealand,

which share commonalities in **wealth, education, development, and healthcare.**

- **Global South:** Includes countries in Asia, Africa, and South America facing developmental deficits. Nations like India and China have experienced rapid economic growth, challenging the idea that the North is the global standard for development.

#### EMERGENCE OF THE GLOBAL NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

- The Cold War classifications lost relevance after the USSR's collapse in 1991, leading to new global alignments.
- The previous **East-West classification** oversimplified complex economic and political realities.
- Many **Global South nations share a colonial history** and remain underrepresented in global institutions like the UN Security Council.

#### India's motivations in championing the Global South:

- **Renewed focus:** Unlike the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), India's current motivation is not rooted in decolonisation or strong criticism of the West. Instead, India is expanding its influence in the Global South while strengthening relations with traditional partners such as the U.S. and Europe.
- **China factor:** India's proactive stance can also be seen as aimed at countering China's global dominance, particularly in Africa where both nations compete for influence. Additionally, industrialised nations may be strategically partnering with India to limit China's international expansion.
- **Strategic identity:** India seeks to establish itself as an independent emerging power that advances its strategic trade, defence, and geopolitical interests.
- **Indian value system:** Nations of Global South do not seek a replacement for Western influence but rather an alternative model of cooperation. India can serve as a bridge between the Global North and Global South because of its value system of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*.

#### CHALLENGES TO GLOBAL SOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- **High debt levels:** Most Global South countries struggle with substantial debt burdens, limiting investment in essential services and infrastructure.
- **Unequal trade patterns:** Dependence on exporting raw materials at **fluctuating prices, leaving them vulnerable to market fluctuations.**

- **Limited access to finance:** Difficulty in accessing international capital for development projects due to risk perceptions.
- **High population growth:** Rapid population growth can strain resources and infrastructure.
- **Climate change vulnerability:** Countries in the Global South are often disproportionately affected by climate change events like droughts, floods, and extreme weather, impacting food security and livelihoods.
- **Green Energy Fund:** Despite the Global North's greater role in climate change, they **neglect funding for green energy**, disproportionately impacting developing nations.
- **Russia-Ukraine War:** The war has exacerbated food, energy, and financial crises in the least developed countries (LDCs), threatening their economic stability.
- **China's Interference:** Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has expanded influence in the Global South, raising concerns about debt dependency.
- **US Hegemony:** Despite the perception of a multipolar world, the U.S. still dominates global affairs and institutions, limiting opportunities for other nations.
- **Inadequate access to resources:** Industrialisation has historically favoured advanced economies, perpetuating disparities in development outcomes.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** The pandemic widened economic divides, with countries like Argentina, Egypt, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka struggling with economic vulnerability.

#### STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN BY INDIA TO STRENGTHEN ITS ROLE

1. **Promoting an alternative development model:**
  - India advocates for **equal partnerships** rather than top-down approaches imposed by the Global North.
  - The '**Global Development Compact**,' aimed at fostering growth in the Global South, is rooted in Indian experiences.
  - To be perceived as an inclusive leader, India must **move beyond being a knowledge provider and engage in mutual learning with Global South nations.**

**SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION (SSC) CAN TAKE ON MANY DIFFERENT FORMS, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO:**

-  knowledge-sharing activities, including through research partnerships and technical assistance and capacity development activities;
-  mobilization of in-kind or cash resources (incl. twinning partnerships);
-  policy advocacy for achieving zero hunger;
-  support for collective intra- and inter-regional action and regional integration;
-  study tours and peer learning events, including with the support of demonstration sites.

**2. Focusing on Human-centric Development:**

- India promotes behavioural change via initiatives like **Mission LIFE** ('Lifestyle For Environment'), emphasising sustainable consumption.
- However, a broader human-centric development model should include:
  - Workforce capacity building through initiatives like **Skill India**.
  - Women's mainstreaming and entrepreneurship programs to foster economic growth.
  - Shift from **short-term sector-specific programs (like ITEC)** to long-term capacity-building efforts in partner nations.
  - Leveraging India's **micro, small, and medium enterprises** (MSMEs) expertise to facilitate knowledge exchange.
  - Strengthening cooperation in key areas such as digital infrastructure, climate and energy solutions, and food and water security.

**INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION**

- **Global Initiatives:**

- BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Forum
- IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Forum
- UN Day for South-South Cooperation (September 12)
- **Indian Initiatives:**
  - **TRIPS Waiver proposal (2020):** India and South Africa pushed for a temporary easing of intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines.
  - **Vaccine Maitri Campaign (2021):** India provided COVID-19 vaccines to neighboring and Global South nations under its 'Neighbourhood First' policy.
  - **Pan African e Network Project.**
  - **International Solar Alliance**

India aspires to be the 'Voice' of the Global South. It has the opportunity to shape a new, inclusive global order by fostering meaningful collaborations and establishing itself as a responsible global development player.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE DRC?

#GEOPOLITICS #AFRICA

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

**M23 Militia group** has captured the city of **Goma** which lies at the east of **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**.

**ABOUT THE ISSUE**

- **The M23 militia** (primarily composed of ethnic Tutsis) **backed by Rwanda**, has captured the **mineral-rich city of Goma** (a city in DRC), near the Rwanda-DRC border.
- The conflict which began in January 2025 has resulted in over **2,900 deaths**, displacement of nearly **700,000 people** and intensifying tensions between DRC and Rwanda.
- Moreover, clashes are spreading southwards **toward Bukavu, another resource-rich region in the South Kivu province** (a province in DRC).



**MOTIVATION BEHIND THE ACTION**

- **Traditional ethnic** conflict rooted in Hutu-Tutsi tensions.
  - Hutu & Tutsi are two ethnic groups primarily found in Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern DRC.

**THE M23 MILITIA**

- One of about 100 armed factions vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern DRC
- Rwandan-backed group which consists primarily of Tutsis who failed to integrate into the Congolese army
- Led major insurgency against the DRC government in 2012, took up arms again in 2022. The group is estimated to have 6,500 fighters



**Jan 27-28, Goma: While M23 rebels claim control of the city, they are reportedly facing resistance from army and pro-government militias**

▲ Mount Nyiragongo  
Direction of M23 advance

5km / 3 miles

UN experts estimate up to 4,000 Rwandan forces are fighting alongside M23

“Great Barrier” border crossing

■ Latest rebel advance has forced thousands to flee Goma. The city of two million people is a vital humanitarian aid hub for the region

■ The UN and other global powers fear that the conflict could spiral into a regional war similar to those of 1996-1997 and 1998-2003

- **Resource control:** Eastern DRC is rich in gold, **coltan** (a dull black metallic ore from which the elements niobium and tantalum are extracted) and rare minerals, crucial for electronics.

- **Goma’s strategic importance:** Goma is a vital trading hub, capturing which strengthens M23’s hold over trade routes and mineral supply chains.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CRISIS**

- **Colonial Rule:** Belgium and Germany ruled Rwanda through a **Tutsi monarchy**, granting privileges to the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority.
- **Hutu-Tutsi Conflicts** led to the 1959 **Hutu revolution**, overthrowing the monarchy and resulting in Tutsi persecution.
- **Rwandan Independence (1962):** Hutus gained political control, escalating ethnic divides.

**RWANDAN GENOCIDE (1994)**

- It was sparked by the **assassination** of President Juvénal Habyarimana (a Hutu), leading to mass killings. **800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus** were massacred within 100 days.
- The **Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)**, led by Paul Kagame, ended the genocide and took control of Rwanda.
- **Hutu Militants in DRC:** Two million Hutus, including genocide perpetrators, fled to eastern DRC.

**AFTERMATH OF GENOCIDE AND SPILLOVER INTO THE DRC**

- **First Congo war (1996-97):** Rwanda and Uganda invaded DRC, overthrowing **Mobutu Sese Seko**.
- **Second Congo war (1998-2003):** It involved nine countries and multiple armed groups, leading to **five million deaths**.
- The Eastern DRC region remains unstable, with over 120 armed groups involved in ongoing violence.

**ABOUT M23 REBELS**

- It is a group formed in **2012**, named after the failed **March 23, 2009, peace agreement** between the DRC government and former rebels.
- It claims to **defend the interests of Tutsis in the region**, but is also accused of war crimes.
- First captured Goma in **2012**, later defeated, resurfaced in **2022** due to the DRC government's failure to meet its promises.
- It is currently led by **Sultani Makenga**, operating in North Kivu province of DRC.

**CONSEQUENCES OF CAPTURING GOMA**

- Escalation could lead to **broader/full-scale regional war** in DRC, Rwanda and Uganda.
- Could lead to increased Western scrutiny on Rwanda's alleged support for M23.
- Ongoing humanitarian crisis due to mass displacement and violence.

# TRUMP'S PLAN TO OWN GAZA

#MIDDLE EAST #IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

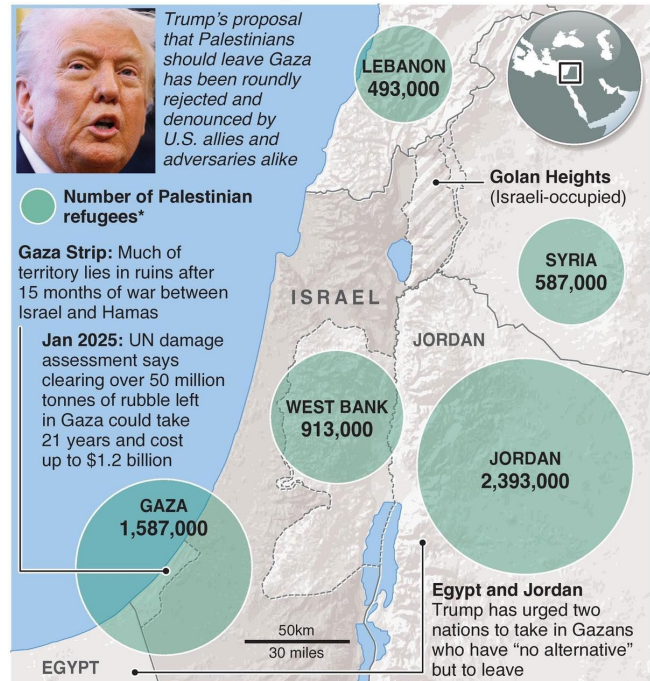
The US President has recently proposed that the US will take over Gaza and develop it as the **"Riviera of the Middle East"**.

**ABOUT TRUMP'S GAZA PLAN**

- Trump has proposed to **relocate the residents of Gaza** to Egypt and Jordan to redraw the demography from scratch.
- It includes the **development of Gaza as the 'riviera of the world'** by redeveloping the infrastructure of the region.
- The plan is likely to **enhance the US presence in the region** and will help the US in leveraging the **control over the regional powers** like Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- The US will gain a **critical geographical position** in the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic corridor** to foster the trade and diplomatic relations.

**Trump says U.S. will "take over" Gaza**

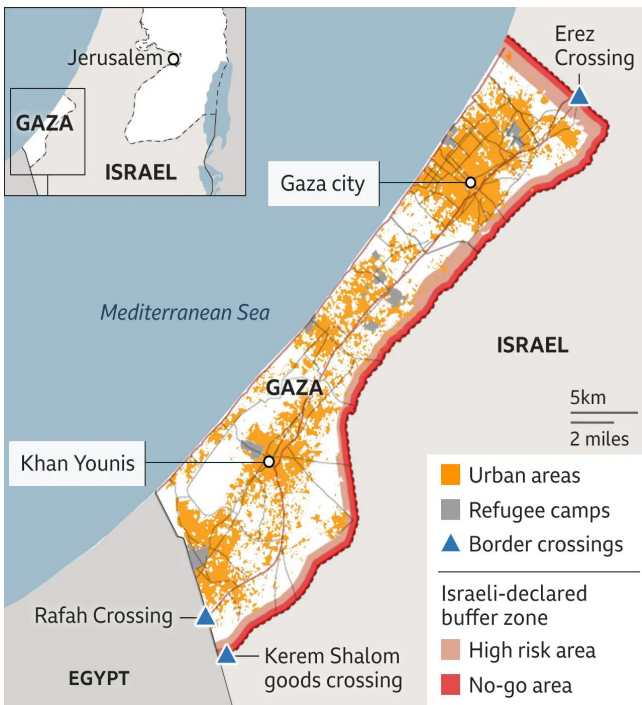
U.S. President Donald Trump has proposed taking ownership of the Gaza Strip and redeveloping it into the "Riviera of the Middle East" after resettling Palestinians elsewhere



**KEY POINTS ABOUT THE GAZA STRIP**

- **Geographical Location:**
  - It is a **coastal enclave** along the **eastern Mediterranean Sea**.
  - It borders **Israel (north and east)** and **Egypt (southwest, at the Rafah crossing)**.
  - Does **not** share a border with **Jordan**.
- **Political Status:**
  - One of the two Palestinian territories, the other being the **West Bank**.
  - **Governed by Hamas** since 2007 after a conflict with the Palestinian Authority.
  - Subject to an **Israeli and Egyptian blockade** since Hamas took control.
- **Historical Context:**
  - It was under **Egyptian control (1948-1967)** after the Arab-Israeli War.
  - After the **1967 Six-Day War**, it was captured by Israel.
  - **Oslo Accords (1993-1995)** gave partial control to the **Palestinian Authority**.

- Israel withdrew settlements in 2005 but still controls **airspace and maritime access**.
- **Strategic Importance:**
  - Highly **populated and densely urbanized** (~2 million people in ~365 sq. km).
  - A focal point of the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** with frequent clashes.
  - **Economic blockade** of the strip affects trade, employment, and humanitarian conditions.



Source: UN Ocha, 2023



**CONCERNS**

- The proposal risks violating long-standing UNSC and UNGA resolutions supporting the Palestinian right of self-determination (which India has proactively backed at the United Nations).
- There are concerns with respect to rehabilitation of the displaced population.
- It also risks several peremptory norms of international law (*jus cogens*) including those that **prohibit ethnic cleansing**.

Trump's Gaza proposal has faced strong resistance from regional players, humanitarian groups, and international allies.

**FREEZE ON USAID BY US**

#INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS #GEOPOLITICS



Recently, U.S. President imposed a **90-day freeze on foreign assistance** to assess its alignment with the U.S. foreign policy. This halted the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** from disbursing aid, placing most of its **10,000 personnel on administrative leave**, except for a few mission-critical staff.

**ABOUT UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

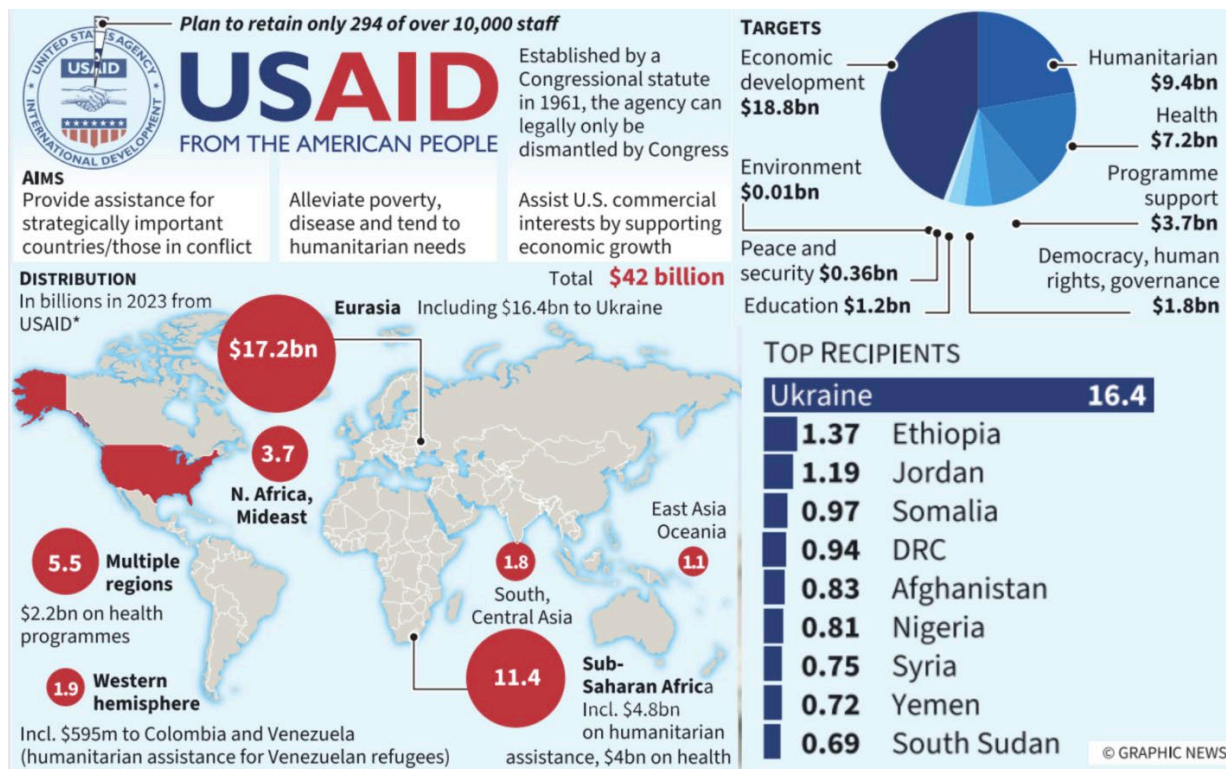
- USAID is an **independent agency of the U.S. government**.
- It is responsible for **administering civilian foreign aid and development assistance**.
- USAID is a key component of U.S. foreign policy and operates under the guidance of the President, Secretary of State, and the National Security Council.

**ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE**

- Established in **1961 by President John F. Kennedy** to unite existing foreign assistance organisations under one agency.
- Created to **administer humanitarian aid programs** and counter Soviet influence during the Cold War. Its primary focus is long-term socioeconomic development.
- It is one of the **largest official aid agencies in the world** with a budget exceeding \$50 billion.

**FUNCTIONS**

- Provides **assistance to over 100 strategically important countries** across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.
- Leads U.S. efforts to **alleviate poverty, disease, and humanitarian needs**.
- Provides **food** to starving populations and operates a global system for detecting famine.
- Manages relief efforts **after wars and natural disasters** through its Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.
- Provides **financial assistance** to developing country organisations and NGOs through **non-reimbursable grants**.



**EFFECTS ON INDIA**

- India's reliance on USAID has diminished, receiving **\$1.5 billion in the last decade** (0.2%-0.4% of USAID's global budget).
- Health remains the primary sector** for aid, with **\$79.3 million allocated by USAID in 2024** for HIV/AIDS, TB, maternal and child health, and immunisation programs.

**SHIFT IN US POSITION ON UKRAINE & NATO**

#INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS #GEOPOLITICS

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

Recently, the US President spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin and **dismissed the idea of Ukraine joining NATO as impractical**. Trump's statement marks a **major shift in US foreign policy**, moving away from previous administrations' support for Ukraine's NATO aspirations.

**NATO EXPANSION AND RUSSIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS**

- NATO is a 32-member military alliance** based on **collective defence**. Under Article 5 of NATO, an attack

on one member is considered an attack on all members and triggers a **joint military response**.

- NATO's expansion has steadily brought the **alliance closer to Russia's borders**, aggravating the tensions between NATO and Russia.
  - Russia has long opposed NATO's expansion, viewing it as a **direct security threat**.
  - Russia considers NATO a **tool of Western dominance**, designed to contain Russian influence in Eastern Europe.
- The **potential inclusion of Ukraine in NATO** has been a major factor in Russia's geopolitical strategy and military actions.



### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF NATO

- NATO was created by 12 countries from Europe and North America in **1949**.
- **1990**: US Secretary of State James Baker assured Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not expand eastward beyond its then-existing boundaries.
  - Despite these assurances, NATO has continued to expand, incorporating former Soviet allies and republics.
  - This perceived betrayal has fueled Russian distrust toward the West and contributed to ongoing geopolitical friction.
- **1999**: NATO admitted three former **Warsaw Pact countries**—Czechia, Hungary, and Poland.
- **2004**: NATO expanded to include Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia.
- **2009-2020**: NATO further expanded with Albania (2009), Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017), and North Macedonia (2020), significantly increasing NATO's presence in Eastern Europe.
- **2023**: Finland joined NATO.
- **2024**: Sweden became the **32nd** member to join NATO.

With each expansion, NATO has **moved closer to Russia's borders**, increasing Russia's security concerns.

### RUSSIA'S PERSPECTIVE ON NATO EXPANSION

- Russia views NATO's growth as a **violation of past agreements** and a **direct challenge to its national security**.
- The principle of collective defence under **Article 5** of NATO's charter means that any attack on a NATO member could trigger a military response from the entire alliance, including the US.

### 2022 RUSSIAN INVASION AND UKRAINE

- In 2008, President George W. Bush advocated for Ukraine's NATO membership, but opposition from France and Germany prevented immediate action.
- **Bucharest Summit** (2008) produced a compromise—offering Ukraine a **vague promise of future membership** without a clear timeline.
- Russia perceived this as a significant threat, which contributed to its **annexation of Crimea** in 2014.
- In 2022, Russia launched a **full-scale invasion of Ukraine**, citing NATO expansion as a key justification.

- In July 2024 (Biden Administration), NATO reaffirmed Ukraine's long-term membership aspirations, **further heightening tensions with Russia**.

### TRUMP'S DISRUPTIVE ROLE IN NATO

- Trump's rejection of Ukraine's NATO membership signals a **possible realignment in US foreign policy**.
- On one hand, his stance **may weaken NATO's unity** and might embolden Russia's strategic ambitions in Eastern Europe.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL POLITICS

- Trump's policy shift could **alter the trajectory** of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, which has been ongoing for nearly three years.
- The US has also criticised Europe's reliance on the US military support, which might make Europe nervous.
- If the US reduces its support for Ukraine, European NATO members may need to **increase their defence spending and strategic autonomy**.

The broader implications of this policy shift may **redefine transatlantic relations and global security structures in the coming years**.

## US VOTES AGAINST UN RESOLUTION ON UKRAINE WAR

#INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS #GEOPOLITICS



*For the first time, after three years of supporting Ukraine, the **United States made a sharp turn and voted against a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution condemning Russia for its invasion.***

### BRIEF BACKGROUND

- The US has voted to **block a UNGA resolution** brought in by Ukraine calling for the de-escalation, early cessation of hostilities and peaceful resolution of the war against Ukraine.
  - The final vote saw 93 countries, including major European powers and the G7 (minus the US), voting in favour, while 18, **including Russia, the US, and Israel, opposed it**.

- India **abstained from voting** on this UNGA resolution, along with China, Brazil etc.
- The US also filed its own resolution that did not explicitly blame Russia for the conflict and **called for an end to the war on neutral terms**.
- **Note:** UNGA resolutions/decisions are **not binding** for Member States. Rather they are viewed as expressions of the will of the international community on a given topic.

#### **GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS**

- **Evolving Multipolar world:** India's abstention highlights the evolving multipolar world order, where regional powers seek to maintain independent foreign policies.
- **Emerging powers:** The alignment of BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in abstaining suggests a broader trend of emerging economies resisting Western-led narratives.
- **Regional stability:** Abstention by Gulf nations, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, signals their shifting geopolitical calculus, prioritising regional stability over alignment with Western policies.

#### **INTERPRETATION OF INDIA'S VOTE**

- Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, **India has consistently maintained a neutral stance** in international forums.
- Abstention allows India to **avoid antagonising any major power bloc** while preserving its strategic autonomy.
  - While India acknowledges Ukraine's sovereignty, it also recognises Russia's critical role in **its defence sector and energy security**.
  - India's close **economic and strategic ties** with the US and Europe prevent it from **outright opposing Western resolutions**.

#### **FROM INDIA'S PERSPECTIVE, MAINTAINING NEUTRALITY SERVES THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES**

- **Strategic autonomy:** India continues to reinforce its status as a key player that does not align blindly with any major power bloc.
- **Defence and energy interests:** With Russia being a significant defence partner and oil supplier, India's stance avoids jeopardising these crucial ties.
- **Engagement with the West:** By abstaining rather than voting against, India ensures that its growing

engagements with the US and Europe remain unaffected.

- **Positioning for peace mediation:** As a country that has maintained communication with both Russia and Ukraine, India can position itself as a **potential mediator** should peace talks become a realistic possibility.

India's abstention underscores its effort to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape while upholding its foreign policy doctrine of non-alignment.

#### **ABOUT UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

- UNGA is **one of the six principal organs** of the United Nations (UN).
- It is the **main** deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN.
- It provides a unique forum for **multilateral discussion on international issues** covered by the Charter of the United Nations. Discussions on global issues like peace, security, human rights, and other international challenges.
- It comprises all member states of the UN (193 members).
  - UNGA is the **only UN organ** where all member states have **equal representation (vote)**.
  - UNGA can **grant observer status** to the non-member States.
- **Functions of UNGA:**
  - Responsible for the UN budget
  - Appointing the non-permanent members to the UN Security Council
  - Appointing the UN secretary-general
  - Making recommendations through resolutions (non-binding).
- **Key Achievements:**
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
  - Millennium Development Goals (2000)
  - Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030)
  - Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration (2018)
  - **The presidency rotates annually** among five geographic groups: African, Asian, Eastern European, Latin American and Caribbean, Western European and others.

# US SEC AND HAGUE SERVICE CONVENTION

#TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The U.S. **Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)** has sought assistance from the Union Law Ministry of India under the **Hague Service Convention** to serve summons to Gautam Adani and his associates in a securities fraud case.

## ABOUT HAGUE SERVICE CONVENTION

- The **Hague Service Convention** is formally known as the **Convention on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters (1965)**.
- It is an international treaty that standardises the process of **serving legal documents across borders**.

## KEY FEATURES OF THE HAGUE SERVICE CONVENTION

- **Established in 1965** to standardise the service of judicial and extrajudicial documents across borders.
- **Purpose:**
  - To facilitate the service of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil and commercial matters between signatory countries.
  - To ensure timely and actual notice of legal proceedings for defendants in foreign jurisdictions.
- **Central Authority:** Each member country designates a Central Authority to receive and process service requests.
  - It has been signed by **84 states**, including **India and the U.S.**
  - It is applicable **only when both the sending and receiving countries are signatories**.
- **Modes of transmission** vary by country but generally include:
  - **Primary method:** Service through the designated Central Authority.
  - **Alternative channels:** Diplomatic/consular service, postal service (if permitted), direct service by judicial officers, or direct contact between government authorities.

## SERVICE OF PROCESS IN INDIA

- **India acceded to the Convention on November 23, 2006**, with expressly opposing all alternative service methods under **Article 10**.
- **India opposes all alternative service methods, including postal service**, except for nationals of the requesting country.
- **Service must be done exclusively through the Ministry of Law and Justice** (India's Central Authority).
- Requests must be in **English or accompanied by an English translation**.
- India's **Central Authority can reject a service request** under **Article 13** if it compromises sovereignty or security but **not** based on exclusive jurisdiction claims.
- The service process typically takes **6 to 8 months** and is treated as an Indian court summons under **Section 29(c) of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**.

## DEFAULT JUDGMENTS UNDER THE CONVENTION

- A default judgment may be issued under the Convention if a foreign government **refuses to cooperate in serving summons** on a defendant residing within its jurisdiction.
- **Article 15** allows a default judgment if:
  - The document was transmitted using a Convention-approved method.
  - **At least six months** have passed without service confirmation.
  - The court deems that all reasonable efforts were made to obtain proof of service.
- **India allows default judgments** even without a service certificate, provided **Article 15 conditions are met**.

# IRAN ACCELERATES PRODUCTION OF NEAR WEAPONS-GRADE URANIUM: IAEA

#INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently released report by **International Atomic Energy**

**Agency shows that Iran's stock of uranium enriched to up to 60% purity has drastically increased.**

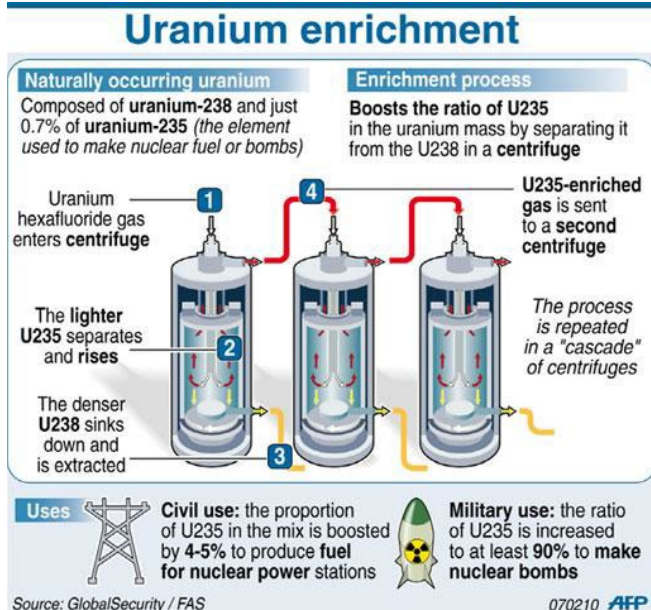
**BACKGROUND**

- **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA):**
  - **2015:** Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) was signed after **prolonged negotiations** between **Iran and P5+1** (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States + Germany).
  - Under the deal, Iran agreed to:
    - **Significantly cut its stores of enriched uranium** and heavy-water, the key components for nuclear weapons.
    - Implement a protocol that would **allow inspectors** from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to **access its nuclear sites** to ensure Iran would not be able to develop nuclear weapons in secret.
  - In return, the **West agreed to lift sanctions** related to Iran's Nuclear Proliferation.
- **2018:** The US under the Trump Administration unilaterally **abandoned the deal** (claiming JCPOA failed to curtail Iran's missile program and regional influence) and reinstated banking and oil sanctions on Iran. Thereafter, Iran has ramped up (accelerated) its nuclear programme.

- **Established in 1957** as an **autonomous international organisation** within the United Nations system. Through its IAEA Statute, the IAEA reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.
- **Members:** 180 members.
  - India is a **founding member** of the IAEA.
  - Signature and ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) are not preconditions for membership in the IAEA.
- **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria.
- **2005:** IAEA was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** for their work for a safer and more peaceful world.

**IAEA'S ADDITIONAL PROTOCOL**

- **Additional Protocol** is a legal agreement between IAEA and a country that expands IAEA's ability to verify a country's nuclear abilities.
- **India has signed the Additional Protocol (AP) to the IAEA safeguards agreement** in 2009, which entered into force in 2014.
  - The Protocol **covers only those facilities** which are monitored by the IAEA, and does not cover non-safeguarded facilities which are used for building weapons.
  - It **enhances transparency** of India's nuclear infrastructure. It will ensure **collection of data of India's nuclear exports** to guarantee that the material is not diverted for unauthorised use.



**NSCN (I-M) CALLS UPON PM TO UPHOLD 2015 FRAMEWORK**

#INTERNAL SECURITY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) has called upon the Prime Minister to uphold the 2015 framework agreement.*

**2015 FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT BETWEEN NSCN (I-M) AND GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

- Framework Agreement (FA) was signed in 2015, between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim- Isak-Muivah (NSCN-I/M).

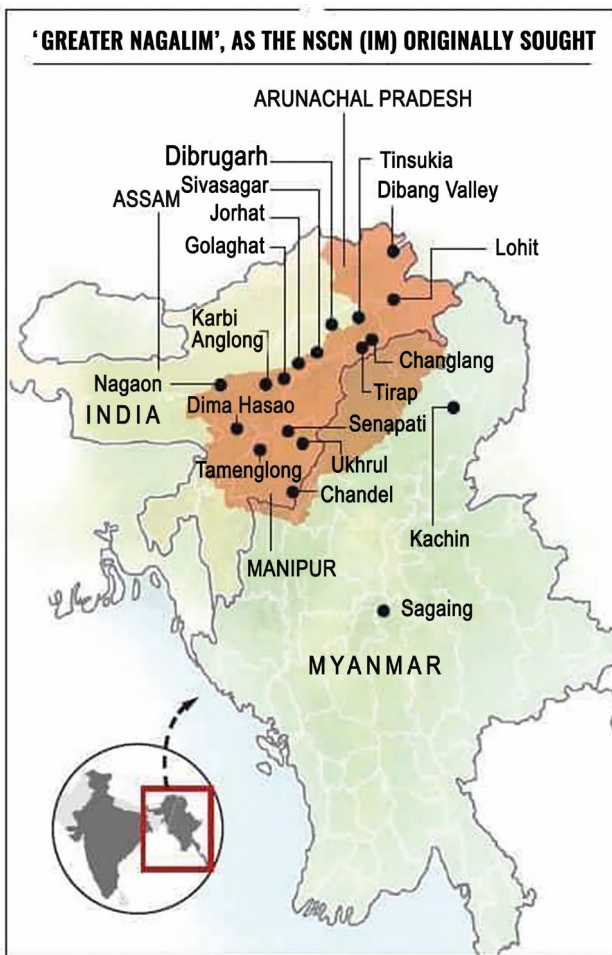
**INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY**

- IAEA is the **key agency** to promote cooperation in the field of **peaceful uses** of nuclear energy.

- It was a significant step in resolving the decades-old Naga insurgency and moving towards a permanent peace settlement.

**KEY FEATURES OF THE AGREEMENT**

- **Recognition of Naga Identity:** Indian government recognised the unique history, culture, and position of the Nagas.
- **Shared Sovereignty:** It introduced the idea of shared sovereignty, meaning that Nagas would have a special political and administrative status while remaining within India.
- **Peaceful resolution through Dialogue:** It was meant to lay the groundwork for a final peace settlement through further negotiations.



- **Autonomous Governance:** As per the interpretation of NSCN (I-M) the agreement has allowed for a special autonomous arrangement for Nagas, with enhanced legislative, executive, and financial powers.

- **No immediate Territorial change:** While NSCN (I-M) sought integration of all Naga-inhabited areas (including parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur) into a unified "Nagalim," the agreement did not explicitly promise redrawing of state boundaries.

**CONTENTIOUS ISSUES**

- **Separate flag and constitution:** NSCN (I-M) insists that the agreement included provisions for a Naga flag and constitution, which the Indian government has not accepted.
- **Impact of Article 370 Abrogation (2019):** Before August 5, 2019, Jammu & Kashmir had a separate constitution and flag, setting a precedent. After Article 370 was revoked, the Indian government hardened its stance, making it politically impossible to accept similar demands from NSCN (I-M).
- **Poor drafting of Framework agreement:** The vague wording of the 2015 Framework Agreement (FA) has led to contrasting interpretations by NSCN (I-M) and the Indian government. NSCN (I-M) interprets "sharing sovereign power" as an acknowledgment of separate sovereignty, which the government does not accept.
- **Lack of Clarity:** Full text of the Framework Agreement has never been made public, leading to differing interpretations.
- **Internal divisions among Naga groups:** During former interlocutor R.N. Ravi's tenure, smaller groups like the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) gained prominence. This strategy weakened NSCN (I-M) but also stalled the peace process, as NSCN (I-M) saw it as an attempt to divide Nagas.
- **No clear timeframe for final accord:** Despite reinitiating talks, there is no clarity on a final agreement due to the unresolved flag and constitution issue.

**CURRENT STATUS**

- **Stalemate:** Since 2019, negotiations have been stuck, primarily over the issue of the separate flag and constitution.
- **No Final Settlement yet:** Despite years of talks, a comprehensive peace accord is yet to be signed. There has not been a full-time interlocutor for the negotiations since 2021.
- NSCN (I-M) has demanded that the government honour the original spirit of the agreement.

**WAY FORWARD**

- **Inclusion of all factions:** Government must engage with all stakeholders, including Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) to ensure inclusivity and consensus.
- **Political & Administrative Autonomy:** Establishing a bicameral Assembly for Nagaland, with nominated members representing different Naga tribes. Granting greater legislative and financial autonomy to the Naga Assembly.
- **Autonomous Councils for Naga areas in neighboring states:** Setting up autonomous councils for Naga-dominated regions in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur. These councils should have powers similar to those under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- **Integration of Naga cadres:** Absorbing NSCN (I-M) cadres into local armed forces or Indian paramilitary units to prevent the resurgence of insurgency. Structured rehabilitation package to integrate former militants into mainstream society.
- **Cultural & Symbolic Recognition:** Promoting Naga identity through cultural institutions, local governance models, and linguistic rights.
- **Trust-building Measures:** Appointment of a full-time interlocutor to facilitate smooth negotiations. Confidence-building measures, such as greater economic investments, infrastructure development, and cultural exchanges, to reinforce peace efforts.
- **Clear roadmap** with deadlines for the final agreement to ensure transparency and commitment from both sides.

**PRACTICE QUESTIONS****MCQS**

**Q1. With reference to the United Nations General Assembly, consider the following statements:**

1. The UN General Assembly can grant observer status to the non-member States.
2. Inter-governmental organisations can seek observer status in the UN General Assembly.
3. Permanent Observers in the UN General Assembly can maintain missions at the UN headquarters.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

**Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the Gaza Strip:**

1. It shares a border with Egypt.
2. It is located along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.
3. It shares a land border with Jordan.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

**Q3. In the Indian context, what is the implication of ratifying the 'Additional Protocol' with the international Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)?**

- (a) The civilian nuclear reactors come under IAEA safeguards.
- (b) The military nuclear installations come under the inspection of IAEA.
- (c) The country will have the privilege to buy uranium from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- (d) The country automatically becomes a member of the NSG.

**Q4. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), recently in the news, is:**

- (a) a division of World Health Organisation
- (b) a non-governmental international organisation
- (c) independent agency of the U.S. government
- (d) a specialised agency of the United Nations

**Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Hague Service Convention:**

1. The Convention applies to the service of judicial and extrajudicial documents in both civil and criminal matters.
2. Each signatory country must designate a Central Authority to facilitate the service of documents.
3. India allows service of legal documents through postal channels under the Convention.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

## DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** Discuss the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of Qatar for India with a focus on global trade and energy flows.
- Q2.** India can play an important role in amplifying the voice of the Global South. Discuss how India can act as a bridge between Global North and South.

**Answers:** 1-d, 2-a, 3-a, 4-c, 5-b

# SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

# GS PAPER I & GS PAPER II (MAIN)

## SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT 1954: INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

#WELFARE PROVISIONS #MARRIAGE

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

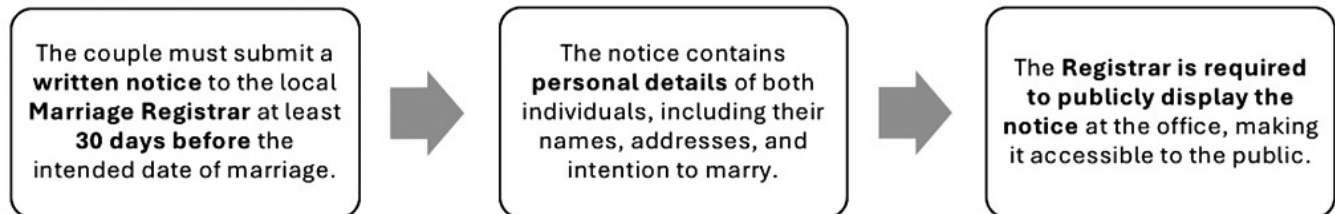
*The recent incident of violence against an **interfaith couple** in Madhya Pradesh, marrying under the **Special Marriage***

*Act 1954, has raised concerns about its provisions and efficacy.*

### ABOUT SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT, 1954

- The **Special Marriage Act (SMA) 1954** was enacted to provide a **secular legal framework** for marriages between individuals belonging to different religions, castes, or communities.
- SMA enables marriage between inter-faith or inter-caste couples **without them giving up their religious identity** or resorting to conversion.

### MANDATORY PUBLIC NOTICE REQUIREMENT



This provision was intended to allow for **transparency and objections**, ensuring that no fraudulent or unlawful marriages take place. However, it has led to serious **privacy concerns** and the **misuse of personal information**, particularly in cases of interfaith marriages.

### ISSUE WITHIN THE SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT (SMA)

- The conditions such as the **30-day notice period**, the requirement for an extra witness, and the need to inform families breach the right to privacy of the parties and exposes the couple to fear of hate crimes like honour killing and religious persecution as well as to social ostracisation.
- The fact that similar conditions are not applicable to Intra-faith marriages that are held outside the purview of the Act does not justify these conditions for interfaith marriages. It violates the right to equality given under **Article 14**.

### LAW COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROTECT INTERFAITH COUPLE

- **Expedite process** of registration of marriage by removing the time gap between marriage notice and registration.
- **Establish legal framework** to address the issue of interference of caste assemblies, councils, religious groups or any kind of group of assembly that threatens the couples or interferes with their right to marry.
- **Offence shall be made cognisable**, non-bailable and non-compoundable in order to have strict action against people involved.
- **Penal action** and prescribed punishment for acts such as social boycott, discrimination, or anything that endangers the liberty of the couple.
- **Provision of preventive action** and the same powers shall be granted to SDM or DM in order to protect the couple from any such unlawful assembly.

# MATERNITY BENEFITS IN INDIA

#HEALTH #VULNERABLE SECTIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Despite legal provisions under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013**, implementation of **maternity benefits** has been inadequate. **PM Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**, also has been restrictive and ineffective.

## PRADHAN MANTRI MATRU VANDANA YOJANA

- Due to economic and social pressures, many women work until late pregnancy and resume soon after childbirth, hindering recovery and exclusive breastfeeding. This affects maternal and infant nutrition.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** addresses this by providing financial support, promoting rest and breastfeeding to improve health outcomes.

## OBJECTIVE

- To provide partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child.
- To improve health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.

## BENEFITS

- All eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers would receive a cash incentive of **Rs 5000** in **three instalments** for **first child birth**.
- Conditions attached to these instalments are:
  - Early registration of pregnancy at the Anganwadi Centre (AWC)
  - Receiving at least one ante-natal check-up (ANC)
  - Registration of child birth and vaccination of first cycle vaccines (BCG, OPV, DPT and Hepatitis-B)
  - In addition, a pregnant woman also receives the cash incentive of INR 1,000 when she opts for an institutional delivery, under the **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)**.

## ISSUES WITH PMMVY

- **Violation of NFSA Provisions:**
  - PMMVY provides only **₹5,000** instead of ₹6,000.

- Limiting benefits to **one child** (or **two in case of a girl**) contradicts NFSA's universal entitlement.
- **Shrinking Coverage:**
  - Effective coverage peaked at **36%** in 2019-20 and crashed to **9% in 2023-24**.
  - **Budgetary allocation** for PMMVY fell to ₹870 crore in 2023-24, about **one-third of the allocation five years ago**.
  - **Required budget** to cover 90% of births at ₹6,000 per child: ₹12,000 crore.
- **Implementational challenges:** Lack of awareness within the intended beneficiaries about the scheme and cumbersome process to get the benefits made its implementation a challenging task.

## STEPS TO BE TAKEN

- **Increase the amount of cash transfer** to at least 12 weeks of wage compensation, amounting to about INR 15,000. This is especially important in the current context, as the lockdown has led to income loss not just for women, but for others in the household as well. Also 95% of the female workforce in India is employed in the informal sector, and does not have access to maternity benefits like paid maternity leave.
- **Universal Coverage:** Restore NFSA-mandated ₹6,000 benefit for every Pregnancy.
- **Increase budget allocation:** Align PMMVY spending with estimated needs.
- **Indexation to inflation:** Adjust maternity benefits in line with rising living costs.
- **Simplify the process to receive the benefit** as the current requirements for submission of multiple documents like Mother-child Protection Card (MPC), husband's Aadhar card, bank passbook, registration form etc. act as barriers to access the benefits.

Revamped scheme aligned with NFSA provisions is essential to ensure better maternal and child health outcomes. Strengthening maternity benefits is a social investment that benefits not just women, but the entire society.

# PM JAN AROGYA YOJANA

#HEALTH #VULNERABLE SECTIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

In a significant development announced in the Union Budget 2025, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) will now **extend its health coverage to gig workers**. This initiative marks a crucial step in ensuring broader access to healthcare for a growing segment of the workforce.

## KEY FEATURES OF PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA (PMJAY)

- **AB-PMJAY** provides a defined benefit cover of **Rs. 5 lakh per family per year**. This cover will take care of almost all secondary care and most of tertiary care procedures.
- **Inclusive:** To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children, and elderly) there will be **no cap** on family size and age in the scheme.
- **Benefit cover** will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses. All pre-existing conditions will be covered from day one of the policy. A defined transport allowance per hospitalisation will also be paid to the beneficiary.
- **Benefits are portable** across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- **Beneficiaries can avail benefits** in both public and empanelled private facilities. All public hospitals in the States implementing AB-PMJAY, will be deemed empanelled for the Scheme. As for private hospitals, they will be empanelled online based on defined criteria.
- To control costs, the payments for treatment will be done on a **package rate** (to be defined by the Government in advance) basis. The package rates will include all the costs associated with treatment.
- For beneficiaries, it will be a **cashless, paper less transaction**. Keeping in view the State specific requirements, States/ UTs will have the flexibility to modify these rates within a limited bandwidth.

## CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

- **Exclusion of Outpatients:** PMJAY does not cover outpatient care, forcing many to rely on expensive private facilities for such services.
- **Low Empanelment Rates:** Some states struggle to meet empanelment standards, resulting in fewer available hospitals. Additionally, some private hospitals opt out due to low package rates.
- **Inadequate Budget Allocation:** The allocation of ₹9,406 crores for FY2025-26 is insufficient compared to the ₹3.4 lakh crores in out-of-pocket health expenditures recorded in 2016-17.
- **High Private Hospital Uptake:** Many government empanelled hospitals lack the capability to handle expensive treatments, leading to higher reliance on private hospitals, which account for a disproportionate share of claims.
- **Shifting Responsibilities:** Some states depend on private sector solutions rather than enhancing their healthcare infrastructure, concentrating a majority of empanelled hospitals in just a few states.
- **Service Restrictions:** Instances of out-of-pocket payments arise when certain services are restricted to public hospitals, forcing beneficiaries to seek private care due to inadequate facilities.
- **Additional Charges:** Hospitals may impose additional fees for medical inputs, such as implants, that exceed standard compensation rates under PMJAY.

## WAY FORWARD

- **Regular Package Rate Revisions:** Updating package rates to reflect market realities can enhance affordability and accessibility.
- **Enhancing Public Provider Role:** Improving the role of public providers without restricting beneficiary choices is essential for a balanced healthcare system.
- **Revaluating Service Restrictions:** A review of blanket public hospital reservations is necessary to ensure beneficiaries can access required services without barriers.
- **Improving Beneficiary Identification:** Initiatives like "Aap Ke Dwar Ayushman" can enhance awareness and streamline the issuance of Ayushman cards, ensuring more families benefit from the scheme.

- **Focus on Primary Care:** Strengthening health and wellness centers to provide primary care is critical. An improved referral system connecting primary care facilities with PM-JAY hospitals will enhance overall healthcare delivery.

PM-JAY can improve health outcomes through robust implementation, fixing loopholes, building healthcare infrastructure and increased budgetary allocation to health.

## ATAL PENSION YOJANA

#FINANCIAL INCLUSION #VULNERABLE SECTIONS



The Union Government's ambitious **Atal Pension Yojana (APY)**, launched in 2015 to provide universal social security to India's unorganised workforce has witnessed a remarkable surge in enrolments.

### MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- APY enrolments have surged from 1.54 crore in March 2019 to 7.33 crore by January 2025, recording a CAGR of 29%.
- However, five states of India alone account for almost **48%** of the total enrolments under the scheme, highlighting **significant regional disparities** in pension coverage.

### ATAL PENSION YOJANA

- **Objective:** To create a universal social security system for all Indians, especially the poor, the underprivileged and the workers in the unorganised sector.
- **Administered by:** Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).
- Subscribers would receive the guaranteed minimum monthly pension of Rs. 1000 to Rs. 5000 at the age of **60 years** based on their age-specific contribution.

### ELIGIBILITY

- All Indians in the age group of 18 years to 40 years.
- Shall not be an income tax payee.
- Open to all bank account holders who are not members of any statutory social security scheme.

- In the case of a beneficiary's death before reaching 60 years of age, his/her spouse shall be entitled to receive a pension.

## CONTROVERSY OF THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

#INDIAN SOCIETY #REGIONALISM



The Centre Government has withheld **₹2,152 crore** in funds to Tamil Nadu under the Samagra Shiksha scheme due to the State's refusal to implement the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's three-language formula**. Tamil Nadu follows a two-language policy and views three-language policy as an imposition of Hindi and a threat to its linguistic identity.

### THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA UNDER NEP 2020

- The NEP 2020 recommends students learn **three languages**, with at least **two being native to India**. For example, a student in Mumbai learning Marathi and English must choose another Indian language.
- Greater **flexibility** is emphasised, with no language imposed on any state. Choices depend on states, regions, and students, ensuring at least two Indian languages are included.

### THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA IN NEP 2020

- **Flexibility:** States and students can choose the three languages, with at least two being native to India.
- **No Imposition:** No specific language is mandated for any State.
- **Emphasis on Mother Tongue:** Encourages teaching in the home language/mother tongue until Grade 5, preferably till Grade 8.
- **Encouraging Sanskrit:** Promoted as an optional language within the three-language formula.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

- **Promotes Multilingualism:** Encourages learning multiple languages for better communication and cultural understanding.
- **National integration:** Bridges linguistic divides and fosters unity across regions.

- **Global competence:** Retains English as a global link language while promoting Indian languages.
- **Cognitive benefits:** Research shows learning in the mother tongue enhances cognitive development.

#### CONCERNS WITH THE THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

- **Cognitive Burden:** Surveys like ASER show many children struggle to read and comprehend even one language. Expecting fluency in three languages is unrealistic.
- **Poor Implementation:** Earlier three-language formula was poorly executed in most regions. Varied adoption across States, with some prioritising Sanskrit over modern Indian languages.
- **Perceived Hindi imposition:** States like Tamil Nadu, which follow a two-language system, fear the policy may force Hindi into their curriculum.

- **Cultural Resistance:** Seen as a threat to regional languages and linguistic identities.
- **Teacher Shortage:** There is a scarcity of qualified non-Hindi language teachers nationwide.

#### WAY FORWARD

- **Constructive dialogue:** Centre and States must engage in discussions to address concerns and find common ground.
- **Flexible implementation:** Allow States to choose languages based on local preferences and needs.
- **Resource allocation:** Provide adequate funding and infrastructure for language teachers and materials.
- **Focus on multilingualism:** Promote learning of Indian languages without undermining regional identities.
- **Decentralised approach:** Respect State autonomy in education while aligning with national goals.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

### MCQS

**Q1. Consider the following statements with reference to Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:**

1. Eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers would receive a cash incentive of Rs 5000 in three instalments for first child birth.
2. Government employees and their spouses are excluded from the benefits under the scheme.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Q2. Regarding 'Atal Pension Yojana', which of the following statements is/are correct?**

1. It is a minimum guaranteed pension scheme mainly targeted at unorganised sector workers.
2. Only one member of a family can join the scheme.

3. The same amount of pension is guaranteed for the spouse for life after the subscriber's death.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

**Q3. With reference to the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), consider the following statements:**

1. It is an entitlement-based scheme that targets the beneficiaries as identified by latest Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data.
2. It provides primary health care to the bottom 40% of the Indian population.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q4. Consider the following statements with reference to the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954:**

1. The provisions of the Act provide protection to only interfaith couples.
2. A 30 days notice prior marriage is required to be submitted to the Marriage Registrar.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

**Q5. Consider the following statements:**

1. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends students learn at least three native Indian languages.
2. NEP 2020 does not mandate any specific language for any State.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

## DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** Enumerate the substantial implementation challenges faced by the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).
- Q2.** Intercaste marriages between castes which have socio-economic parity have increased, to some extent, but this is less true of interreligious marriages. Discuss.

**Answers:** 1-c, 2-c, 3-a, 4-b, 5-b

# GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) AND GS PAPER I & III (MAIN)

## FOUR MORE WETLANDS DECLARED RAMSAR SITES IN INDIA

#RAMSAR SITES #CONSERVATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE TIMES OF INDIA

Recently, India has added **four new Ramsar sites**, bringing the **total to 89**. With this move, **Tamil Nadu leads with 20 Ramsar sites** and it marks the **1<sup>st</sup> Ramsar sites for Sikkim and Jharkhand**.

### RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

- International agreement for the **preservation and responsible use of wetlands**.
- The agreement was signed on **February 2, 1971**, in the **Iranian city of Ramsar**. The date is annually celebrated as **World Wetlands Day**.
- **Wetlands** are the places where water either covers the soil or is present at or near the soil's surface year-round or for different parts of the year, including the growing season.
- Ramsar Convention categorises various **natural and human-made** diverse water bodies, and habitats as wetlands:
  - **Natural:** Oasis, estuaries, deltas, mangroves, coastal areas, coral reefs
  - **Human:** Fishponds, rice paddies, and reservoir.

### RAMSAR SITES IN INDIA

- By February 2025, India has 89 Ramsar sites.

### • Newly Added Ramsar Sites (February 2025)

- Sakkarakottai Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu)
- Therthangal Bird Sanctuary Tamil Nadu
- Khecheopalri Wetland (Sikkim)
- Udhwa Lake (Jharkhand)
- Previously in November 2024, Ramsar Site certificates were given away to:
  - Nagi Bird Sanctuary, Bihar
  - Nakti Bird Sanctuary, Bihar
  - Tawa Reservoir, Madhya Pradesh
  - Nanjarayan Bird Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu
  - Kazhuveli Bird Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu

### NEWLY ADDED RAMSAR SITES

#### 1. Udhwa Lake:

- **First Ramsar site in Jharkhand.**
- Falls within the **Gangetic Plains bio-geographic zone**.
- **Named after:** Saint Uddhava of Mahabharat times.
- **Udhwa Lake Wildlife Sanctuary** is identified as an **'Important Bird Area'**.
  - It has **two water bodies: Patauran and Berhale**, interconnected by a water channel.
  - It is connected to the Ganga River through a 25 km long water channel known as the **Udhuwa Nala, at Farraka**.
- Important birds found are:
  - Black-necked stork (**Near Threatened**)
  - Oriental white-backed vulture (**Critically Endangered**)

**2. Khecheopalri Wetland:**

- **First Ramsar site in Sikkim.**
- **Location:** Demazong valley, West **Sikkim**. Located at 1,700 meters above sea level in **Eastern Himalayas**.
- **Threats:** Under increased pressure from land-use changes and tourism, which have proved to cause sedimentation and pollution.
- **Other facts:** Khecheopalri is a **sacred site for both Buddhists and Hindus** and is often described as a "wish-fulfilling lake."

**3. Sakkarakottai Bird Sanctuary:**

- **Location:**
  - **Peri-urban wetland** located **within three villages** in **Tamil Nadu**.
  - Located close to the **Gulf of Mannar** on the **Central Asian flyway**, a regular route for the migratory birds from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- **Importance:**
  - **Breeding ground** for several Resident/Resident-Migrant species of waterfowl.
  - Supports more than 120 species of birds, abundant **babul** trees provide ideal nesting habitat for bird species.
  - It plays a **crucial role in:**
    - Maintaining the hydrological regime of the area
    - Preventing soil erosion
    - Replenishing groundwater
    - Serving as a buffer during floods and extreme rainfall.

**4. Therthangal Bird Sanctuary**

- **Location: Marshy lake** located within Therthangal village, Tamil Nadu.
- Lies along **Central Asian Flyway** (important flyways for migratory birds around the world).
- **Important species found:**
  - Egyptian vulture (**Endangered**)
  - Indian spotted eagle (**Vulnerable**)
- **Plays crucial role** in climate regulation, recharging of groundwater, and irrigation.



Delhi witnessed an **earthquake of 4.1 magnitude**, and the epicenter being within Delhi raised concerns.

**ABOUT DELHI EARTHQUAKE**

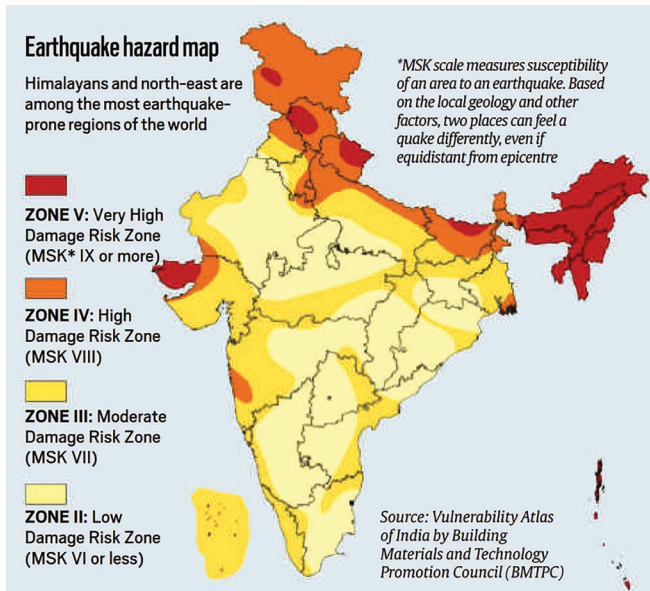
- Delhi witnessed an earthquake of 4.1 magnitude (strongest earthquake to have originated in Delhi in the past five years).
- **How is this earthquake different from previous ones?**
  - **Epicenter:** Originated within Delhi near **Dhaultan region**.
  - **Shallow depth:** Earthquake had a shallow focus of **about 5 km below the surface**.
  - **Peculiar sound:** The earthquake was reported to have a low-frequency sound produced due to the passing of vibrations and shaking of material. Such sounds are observed when the epicenter is shallow. The high-frequency seismic vibrations generate short-periodic vibrations in the air above the surface leading to a sound, which is often referred to as the **earthquake boom**.

**REASONS FOR EARTHQUAKES IN DELHI**

- **Aravalli-fold:** Delhi lies on the **Aravalli-Delhi fold belt**, which is a seismically-active geological belt extending from southern and eastern Rajasthan to Haryana and Delhi.
- **Presence of deformed rocks:** Possibility of earthquakes is intensified due to the presence of deformed layers of rocks that have folded or bent due to geological processes hundreds of millions of years ago.
- **Alluvial soil:** Delhi is dominated by alluvial soil type that has high potency to transfer vibrations without much loss of energy.
- **Proximity to risk zones:** Delhi is located near the **Himalayan seismic belt**, one of the world's highest risk zones for the earthquake. Himalayas lie at the active convergent boundary between **Indian plate** and **Eurasian plate**.

**DELHI EARTHQUAKE**

#DISASTER MANAGEMENT



Delhi falls in Earthquake Zone IV due to following vulnerabilities:

- **Geographical vulnerabilities:**
  - Delhi's location is near Aravalli-fold and High risk seismic zones like Himalayas.
  - Domination of alluvial soil.
- **Infrastructural vulnerabilities:**
  - Densely populated, closely placed buildings, lack of seismic resistant buildings.
  - Slums and unsafe constructions due to encroachments.

### EARTHQUAKES

- **Earthquake (EQ)** is any sudden shaking of the ground caused by the passage of seismic waves through Earth's rocks.
- **Seismic waves** are vibrations generated by an earthquake, explosion, or similar energetic source and propagated within Earth or along its surface.
- Earthquakes generate **four principal types** of elastic waves:
  - **Body waves** (P and S) travel within Earth.
  - **Surface waves** (Love and Rayleigh) travel along its surface.
- **Focus:** Point of origin of the vibrations below the surface of the earth.
- **Epicenter:** Point on the Earth's surface **directly above a hypocenter** or focus, the point where an

earthquake or an underground explosion originates.

- **Magnitude of EQ:** Measure of the size or **amplitude of the seismic waves** generated by an earthquake source and recorded by seismographs. Measured by Richter Scale (0-10).
- **Intensity of EQ:** Intensity measures **strength** of shaking produced by earthquake at a certain location and its impact. Measured by **Mercalli** scale and Medvedev-Sponheuer-Karnik (MSK) scale.

### EQ PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVES IN INDIA

- **Zonation:** Geological Survey of India has identified and zoned the various earthquake regions based on their risks and vulnerabilities.
- **BIS standards:** Bureau of Indian Standards has released the detailed guidelines for material and construction in various zones of India. (On the basis of recommendations of BIS and Gujarat earthquake, **India has reduced earthquake zones** from five to four, removing the Zone I)
- **International efforts:** India has founded Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (**CDRI**) to foster the investment and technological collaboration among the nations to enhance preparedness.

## MARINE HEAT WAVES

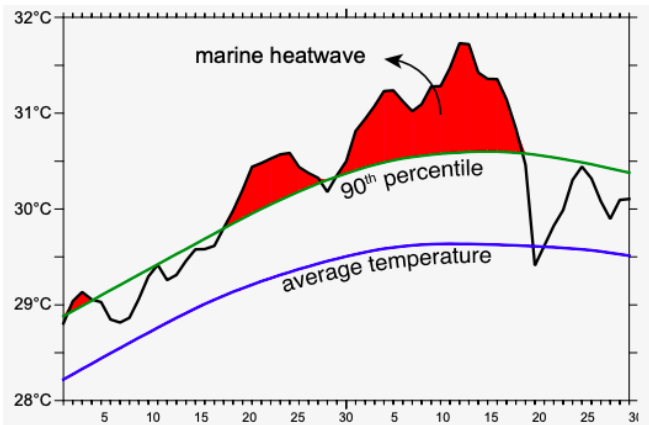
#CLIMATE CHANGE

PRIMARY SOURCE: The Indian EXPRESS

Marine heatwaves (MHWs) off the coastal Western Australia are linked to the death of more than 30,000 fish. Marine heatwaves can happen at different locations in the ocean and have become more frequent and intense over the last few decades.

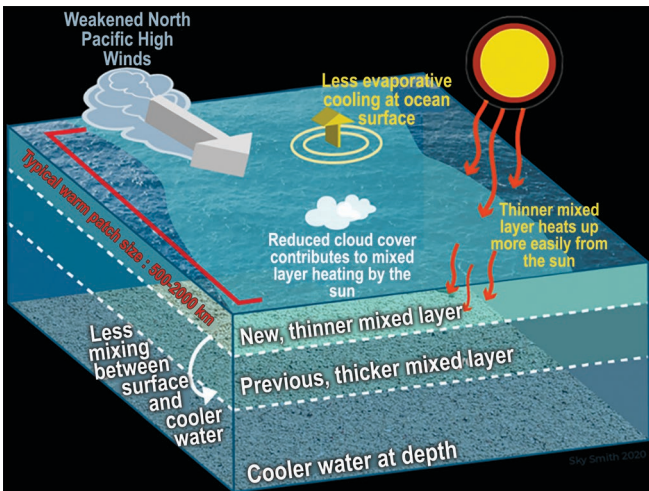
### MARINE HEATWAVE

- According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), Marine heatwaves are periods of **extremely high temperatures in the ocean** (above the 90th percentile).
- It occurs when the surface **temperature** of a particular region of the sea rises to **3 or 4 degrees Celsius** above the average temperature for **at least five days**.
- MHWs can last for weeks, months or even years.



**WHAT CAUSES MARINE HEATWAVES?**

- Marine heatwaves are caused by a **range of ocean processes**, acting either separately or in combination, but there are **two main drivers**:
  - **Surface heat flux**: Heating from the atmosphere, which tends to occur when an atmospheric high-pressure system sits above a region of water for an extended period.
  - **Advection**: Movement of warmer waters into the region by ocean currents.
- Marine heatwaves driven by **surface heat flux** tend to be shallower and shorter in duration, whereas that driven by **advection** can be deeper and longer in duration.



**RECENT TRENDS**

- In the past few decades, MHWs have become **longer-lasting, more frequent, and intense**. Their numbers have doubled between 1982 and 2016.
- IUCN has noticed a **rise of 50%** in just the last decade.

**IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

- Global temperatures have soared to 1.3 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial levels, 90% of the extra heat has been absorbed by the ocean.
- This has **increased the global mean SST** by close to 0.9 degrees Celsius since 1850, and the rise over the last four decades is around 0.6 degrees Celsius.

**CONSEQUENCES**

- **Ecosystems**: MHWs can have long-term harmful effects on marine ecosystems. For instance,
  - **Coral reefs** may **experience bleaching** due to prolonged exposure to high temperatures. **E.g.**, Coral bleaching on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef.
  - Seagrass beds and kelp forests can also be affected. Impaired photosynthesis, reduced growth, and hindered reproductive functions observed.
  - **Degradation** could lead to collapse of local marine food webs, affecting various marine species.
- **Marine Industries**: Fisheries and aquaculture can suffer due to changes in fish distribution and productivity caused by MHWs.
- **Human Activities**: Coastal communities and economies can be impacted by disruptions in fishing, tourism, and other ocean-related activities.
- **Rise in weather extremities**: Extremely warm waters act as a strong source of heat and moisture, helping cyclones to intensify. About 90% of the cyclones in the north Indian Ocean were preceded by marine heatwaves (1980–2020).

**ARAVALI SAFARI PARK PROJECT**

#INFRASTRUCTURE #CONSERVATION



*Aravali Safari Park Project is envisaged to be the world’s largest safari park. However, the project has faced stiff opposition ever since it was first mooted.*

**ARAVALI SAFARI PARK PROJECT**

- Ambitious project of **Haryana state government**.

- Envisaged to be the world's largest safari park, **spread across 3,858 hectare** (approximately 10000 Acre) **across Gurugram and Nuh districts.**

### CONCERNS WITH THE PROJECT

- Increased tourism in ecologically sensitive area:** Increased footfall, vehicular traffic and construction will **disturb aquifers under Aravali hills**, which are critical reserves for the water-starved districts of Gurugram and Nuh.
- Legal Protection:** The location of the project **falls under the category of "forest"**, protected under the **Forest Conservation Act, 1980**. Cutting of trees, clearing of land, construction and real estate development is prohibited on this land.
- Poor status of Forest in Haryana:** Haryana has **very low forest cover of 3.6%**, and therefore, the State needs rewilding of natural forests and not destructive safari projects.
- Experts question the **necessity of an artificial park** in the natural wildlife habitat of Aravallis.



### ARAVALI RANGE

- Mountain range in **western India.**
- One of the oldest mountain ranges in the world** (having its origin in the Proterozoic era).

- Runs approximately 670 km from north-east to south-west direction.
- Starts near Delhi, passes through southern Haryana, Rajasthan, and ends in Gujarat.
- Divided into two sections:** Sambhar-Sirohi ranges and the Sambhar-Khetri ranges.
- The range **gives rise to several rivers**, including Banas & Sahibi (Tributaries of Yamuna), Luni (flows into the Rann of Kutch), Sakhi, and Sabarmati.
- Significance:**
  - Combats desertification** by checking the spread of **Thar Desert** towards eastern Rajasthan.
  - Aquifer** with its highly fractured and weathered quality rocks allowing water to percolate and recharge groundwater.
  - Rich in natural resources** including minerals such as rock phosphate, lead-zinc-silver, talc, pyrophyllite, asbestos, etc.
- Guru Shikhar on Mount Abu is the highest peak** of Aravali range.

## TEESTA DAM AND CLIMATE CHANGE

INFRASTRUCTURE #CLIMATE CHANGE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has approved the **proposal for rebuilding the Teesta-III dam**, despite concerns over its design and stability. The new structure will be a **118.64-metre-tall concrete gravity dam.**

### TEESTA-III CHUNGTHANG HYDROELECTRIC DAM

- In October 2023, the original **1,200 MW Teesta-III Chungthang hydroelectric dam** was destroyed in a **flash flood.**
- The flood was triggered by a **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)** from the **South Lhonak Lake**, which washed away the 60-metre-tall concrete dam, claiming 40 lives.

### CONCERNS IN CONSTRUCTION OF TEESTA-III 2.0 DAM

- The dam's design and structural aspects are **still pending approval** from the Central Water Commission

(CWC), Geological Survey of India, and Central Soil and Materials Research Station.

- Reports on the risk assessment fail to account the erosion, sediment transport and riverbank collapse that have a significant impact on the flood behaviour.
- Local communities and environmental groups like affected citizens of Teesta **have highlighted potential risks** like Glacial lake outburst floods during project planning stages.

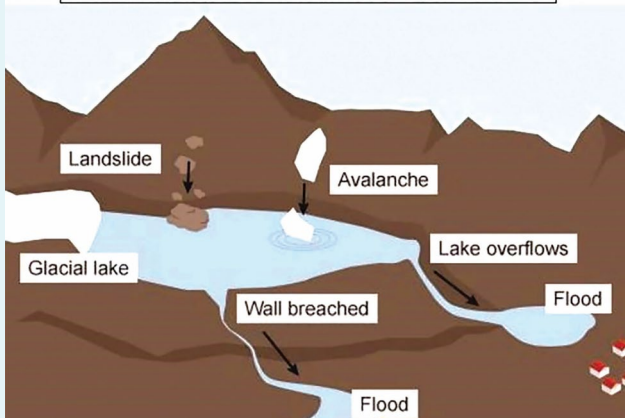
**MEASURES UNDERTAKEN IN THE LATEST DESIGN**

- **Enhanced spillway design:** The dam design is altered from a concrete face rockfill dam (a commonly used structure worldwide) to a **concrete gravity dam**, a design that relies on its own weight to bear loads.
- **The company claims that** the complete concrete design will lead to a rise in the spillway capacity from 7000 cubic metres per second (cumecs) to 19946 cumecs. This enhancement will **offer greater resilience to flash floods and GLOFs**.

**LINKS BETWEEN DAM FAILURE AND GLOBAL WARMING**

- **Reducing albedo:** Particulate matter, especially black carbon (soot) reduces albedo of ice and leads to absorption of solar insolation.
- **Accelerating melting of ice:** Global warming and rise in global average temperature accelerates the melting of ice and glaciers, this leads to creation of glacial lakes. **E.g.,** South Lhonak lake was formed in the early 1960s and **grew to 167 hectares by 2023**.

**GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOODS (GLOF)**



- **Rise in glacial lakes:** As per the Central Water commission, the number of glacial lakes in Himalayan region **grew by 10.8%** from 2011 to 2024.

- **High rate of glacial retreat:** Glacial retreat destabilises extant geological formations and creates new sources of risks.

**SUGGESTED MEASURES**

- **Deployment** of robust Early Warning System (EWS) for flood alerts in the river catchment.
- **Conduct thorough environmental impact assessments** (EIA) that incorporate climate change projections, glacial behaviour and potential GLOF risks to inform project design and location decisions.

**SOUTH LHONKA LAKE**

- South Lhonak lake is a glacial lake in **North Sikkim**.
- **Formation:** The proglacial lake formed due to the retreat of Lhonak Glacier.
- The National Remote Sensing Center showed a 40% increase in its size over the past three decades.

**TEESTA RIVER**



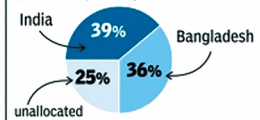
**What is the Teesta**

- Teesta originates in Sikkim from the Khangse and Zemu glaciers
- Its major tributary – Rangeet – joins it at Darjeeling's Teesta Bazaar
- At Mekhligunj in north Bengal's Cooch Behar, it enters Bangladesh, joins Brahmaputra
- Teesta is Bangladesh's fourth largest transboundary river for irrigation and fishing
- Teesta floodplain covers 2,750sq.km in Bangladesh
- Of Teesta's catchment, 83% in India; 17% in Bangladesh
- Its catchment supports about 10m people - and 14% of crop
- Nearly 1 lakh hectares across 5 districts impacted by upstream draws from the Teesta in India.

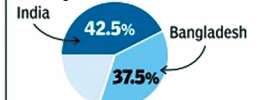
**What is the dispute**

▶ Bangladesh wants 50% of Teesta's water between Dec and May annually; India claims a share of 55%

Negotiations on since 1983, preliminary deal gave



In 2011, Delhi & Dhaka struck interim deal for 15 years – India would get



▶ But Banerjee opposed it; signing shelved to later that year  
▶ Teesta water-sharing agreement waiting to be signed since 2011

Hydropower on Teesta is another point of conflict; At least 26 projects on the river mostly in Sikkim, aimed at producing some 50,000 MW

- **Origin:** Teesta river originates from the **Tso Lhamo (lake)** in North Sikkim.
- **Course:** Flows through **Sikkim** and **West Bengal** in India and then enters Bangladesh. Here it merges with Brahmaputra river (known as **Jamuna** in Bangladesh). The total length is **414 km**.

- **Tributaries:** Ranget, Lachung, Lachen and Dikchu rivers.
- **Hydropower project:** Teesta-III, Teesta-IV and Teesta-V dams in Sikkim.
- **Water dispute:** Teesta water sharing treaty with Bangladesh, a key bilateral agreement that has **been pending** between the two countries for over a decade.

## NTCA'S CONCERNS ON MORAND-GANJAL IRRIGATION PROJECT

#INFRASTRUCTURE #CONSERVATION

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

*The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has warned that the construction of the **Morand-Ganjali Irrigation Project** in Madhya Pradesh will submerge a crucial tiger corridor between the **Satpura** and **Melghat Tiger Reserves**.*

### MORAND-GANJAL IRRIGATION PROJECT

- The project involves a dam on Morand and Ganjal rivers of **Madhya Pradesh**.
- The project was proposed in 1972, and got approved in 2017 by the Madhya Pradesh government.
- **Benefits of project:** Provide irrigation to 211 villages in Hoshangabad, Betul, Harda and Khandwa districts. The project will provide irrigation to over 52,000 hectares of agricultural land.

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS RAISED BY THE PROJECT

- **Loss of vital Tiger habitat:** The NTCA's 2022 Tiger Estimation report confirms that the proposed project area is an active tiger habitat.
- **Forest submersion:** The dam construction will cause large areas of forest land to be submerged under water, which is a major wildlife corridor between Satpura and Melghat Tiger reserve.
- **Disruption to wildlife movement:** Tigers rely on connected forest migration and genetic exchange leading to:
  - Reduced tiger population due to inbreeding, leading to risk susceptibility of pandemic in tiger population
  - Increased human-animal conflict as displaced tigers might enter human population regions.

- Biodiversity loss, affecting other wildlife leopards, deer and smaller species.

### IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- **Displacement:** The project will directly displace over 600 members of the **Korku tribal community**. **Korku tribe** is an indigenous community in **Central India** that depends on forest for food, medical, plants and cultural practice.
- **Loss of livelihood:** Displacement will force tribals to leave their ancestral land leading to:
  - Loss of traditional farming methods of tribals.
  - Cultural erosion of tribals as they will be forced to relocate to unfamiliar areas.
  - Possible relocation of tribals may lead to protests and social unrest.

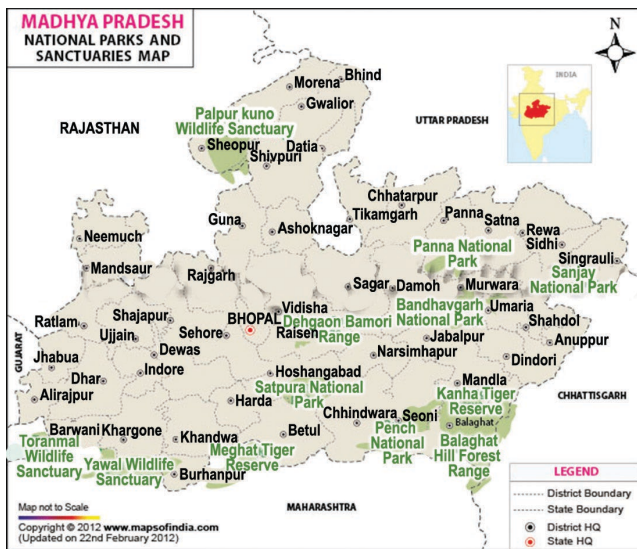
### RECOMMENDATION FOR THE PROJECT

- **Alternative method:** NTCA has suggested to the Madhya Pradesh government to explore the alternative site for the project to avoid the negative implications on wildlife.
- **Tiger movement corridor:** Alternate tiger movement corridors to be established for fostering the movement of tigers.
- **Redesign project:** The project can be redesigned by reducing reservoir size or use tunnel-based irrigation design.
- **Implementing government review steps:** Forest Advisory Committee reviewed the project in 2025 and gave a proposal to **divert 2250 hectares** of forest land for the project.
- **Rehabilitation of tribals:** A fair compensation, alternative housing and providing livelihood training to tribals can help in rehabilitation of the displaced Korku Tribal community.
- **Long-term methods:** Promoting eco-friendly methods like micro irrigation, dry land agriculture and agroforestry to reduce requirement of irrigation and promote water-use efficiency.

### NATIONAL TIGER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

- NTCA is a **statutory body** established in 2005 under **WildLife Protection Act, 1972**.
- It is the overarching body focused on **conservation of tigers** in India.

- NTCA is administered under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
- **Conservation Initiatives by NTCA:**
  - **M-STripES** to monitor tiger movement using technology.
  - Tiger relocation program to reintroduce tigers to balance population.
  - Community-based conservation by involving communities in habitat protection and sustainable livelihood.



**ABOUT MENTIONED TIGER RESERVES**

- **Satpura Tiger reserve (Madhya Pradesh)**
  - **Geographical features:** Hilly terrain, deep valet, sandstone peaks and dense forests
  - **Vegetation:** dry deciduous forest, moist deciduous forests and grassland.
  - **Fauna:** Bengal Tigers, leopard, sloth bear Indian giant squirrel, gaur and wild dog
  - **Rivers:** Denwa river (main river), Sonbhadra and Nagdwari river.
- **Melghat Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra):**
  - **Geographical features** include rugged hills, deep gorges and plateaus.
  - **Vegetation:** Dry deciduous forest, teak dominated forests, and bamboo grooves.
  - **Fauna:** Bengal tiger, leopard, Indian bison, sambar deer, porcupine, and Malabar pied hornbill
  - **Rivers:** Tapti (main river), Khandu, Sipna and Gadga river.

# IMPACT OF ETHANOL PRODUCTION ON ENVIRONMENT

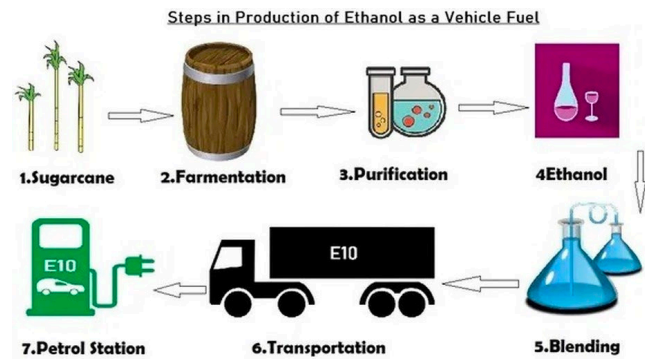
#POLLUTION #ETHANOL BLENDING

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Concerns about the **Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme** refuse to die down in Andhra Pradesh, with scientists and farmers saying **water resources are depleting** and **emissions from factories are polluting the air, water, and soil.**

**ETHANOL BLENDING**

- Ethanol blending in petrol refers to the **practice of mixing ethanol**, a type of alcohol/biofuel, **with petrol** to create a blended fuel.
  - **E10**, is the most common blend, which consists of 10% ethanol and 90% petrol.
  - **E20**, is a higher ethanol blend, which has 20% ethanol and 80% petrol.



- Ethanol is naturally produced by the **fermentation of sugars by yeasts** or via **petrochemical processes** such as ethylene hydration.

**ETHANOL BLENDING TARGET**

- India launched its **Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) in 2003**. It is aimed at reducing the country's dependence on crude oil imports, cutting carbon emissions and boosting farmers' incomes.
- The **National Policy of Biofuels 2018** provided indicative targets of 20% ethanol blending in petrol and 5% biodiesel blending in diesel by 2030.
  - Encouraged by the past 7 years performance under EBP, the Government **advanced the targets of 20%**

**ethanol blending from 2030** to Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2025-26.

- In 2022, India's blending programme achieved the significant milestone of **10% ethanol blending in petrol**.
- As of 2024, the blend percentage is **15%**.
- **First-generation (1G) Ethanol** is sourced from food crops like sugarcane and foodgrains (broken rice, corn).
- **NITI Aayog** reports that **20% ethanol blending reduces carbon monoxide emissions** by 30% in four-wheelers and 50% in two-wheelers.

#### CONCERNS ABOUT ETHANOL PRODUCTION

- **Water Resource Depletion:**
  - Ethanol plants require **8-12 litres of water/litre of ethanol**. **Over-reliance on groundwater** is reducing availability for drinking water and agriculture.
  - Factories **located near rivers** (like Krishna river in Andhra Pradesh) add pressure on already lean water flows.
- **Pollution from Ethanol Factories:**
  - Ethanol plants fall under the '**red category**' of polluting industries (pollution score of **60+**).
  - **Hazardous emissions** from ethanol factories include acetaldehyde, formaldehyde, and acrolein cause **air, water, and soil pollution** and pose significant **health risks**.
  - **Lokayukta** officials have criticised **pollution control failures** from Ethanol factories (particularly in East Godavari, Krishna, and NTR districts of Andhra Pradesh).
- **Risks Food Security:**
  - Primarily Ethanol to meet blending targets is procured from grain-based ethanol. **E.g.**, Developing an organised maize-feed supply chain for ethanol.
  - This **risks food** security as more area under the food grains can be diverted for growing food grains for ethanol production.
- **GHG emissions from Ethanol feedstock:**
  - Diverting food crops towards fuel production increases greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the agriculture sector, counteracting **the goal of reducing emissions** in the transport sector.
- **No Reduction in NOX Emissions:**

- Use of Ethanol Blended Petrol reduces emissions of carbon monoxide. However, there is **no reduction in the emission of nitrous oxides**, which is one of the major environmental pollutants.

#### WAY FORWARD

- **Stronger pollution monitoring:** Clearances must include emission impact assessments.
- **Sustainable water management:** Strict groundwater usage regulations for ethanol plants.
- **Sustainable Biofuels** produced from crop residues and other low-impact sources, have a lower water and GHG footprint. **Global Biofuels Alliance** initiative aims to develop these sustainable alternatives and promote ethanol use.
- **Balancing Industrial growth and Environmental safety:** Ensuring affordable pollution control measures for ethanol plants.

The EBP programme aims for a **greener future**, but its **implementation must align with sustainability**.

## STUBBLE BURNING CONTRIBUTES ONLY 14% PM 2.5 IN DELHI-NCR: STUDY

#POLLUTION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*A study published in the journal Climate and Atmospheric Science highlighted that **stubble burning only contributes about 14% of PM 2.5 in Delhi-NCR** and is therefore not a primary source of particulate matter concentration in Delhi-NCR.*

#### KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

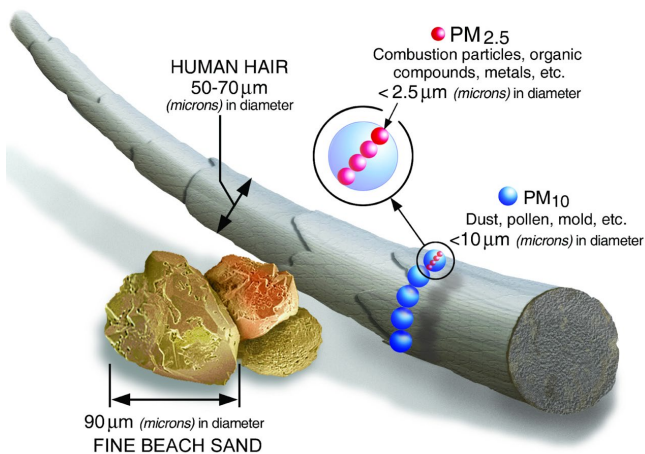
- **No linear correlation** between stubble-burning events in Punjab and Haryana and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) concentration in Delhi-NCR.
- **PM 2.5 concentration remained stable**, despite stubble burning in the Punjab and Haryana declining by over 50% from 2015 to 2023.
- **Contradictory trends:**
  - Stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana declined by 31% and 37% respectively in 2023 compared to 2022.

But a 20% increase in PM2.5 (as per sensor in the U.S. Embassy in 2023).

- o Stubble burning ceased after November. But the Air Quality Index in Delhi-NCR in December to February has remained in the 'very poor' to 'severe' category since 2016.
- **Visible reflection of interventions:** Reduction in the pollution and improvement in air quality after implementation of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) reduced PM 2.5 levels significantly.
- **Another study of IIT Kanpur** also supported the claim that stubble burning contributes about 13% PM2.5, and that too only during October and November.

**REASONS FOR PM 2.5 APART FROM STUBBLE BURNING**

- **Alternate pollution sources:** Transport sector is the largest contributor of the PM 2.5 (30%), followed by local biomass burning (23%), construction industry (10%) and industry (5-7%).
- **Stagnant winds:** Delhi-NCR region has stagnant winds, lower mixing heights and inversion conditions from the month of December to February intensifies the pollution in the region.
- **Land-locked conditions of Delhi-NCR** and delayed mobilisation of pollutants leads to the constant degradation of the air quality in the region.



- **Dip in temperature:** Temperature in North India faces a dip from months of November to January. Further, dry conditions during winters intensifies the severity of the pollution.
- **Unsustainable practices:** Sectors like constructions follow unsustainable practices by violating the

construction by-laws. This further aggravates the condition of pollution in India.

- **Laxed enforcement of laws:** Vehicle control and pollution control rules lack proper implementation. Old diesel vehicles and poor monitoring of pollution norms leads to the intensification of PM 2.5 and CO concentration, impacting air quality negatively.

**ABOUT PM 2.5**

- Fine particulate matter ( $\leq 2.5$  micrometers) suspended in air.
- Sources: Vehicle emissions, biomass burning, construction dust, and industrial pollution.
- Remains airborne for long periods and travels deep into the respiratory system.
- **Direct impacts of persistent exposure to PM2.5:**
  - o **Respiratory Issues:** Triggers asthma, bronchitis, lung infections, and reduces lung function.
  - o **Cardiovascular Diseases:** Increases risk of heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, and arrhythmia.
  - o **Neurological Effects:** Linked to cognitive decline, memory loss, and increased risk of dementia.
  - o **Impact on Children & Pregnant Women:** Causes low birth weight, preterm births, and hampers lung development in children.
  - o **Eye & Skin Irritation:** Leads to eye redness, itching, and skin allergies.
  - o **Reduced Life Expectancy:** Long-term exposure can cause chronic illnesses, lung cancer, and premature death.

There should be constant enforcement of pollution control laws, promotion of public vehicles and installation of mitigative equipment like Smog towers to reduce the menace of pollution in Delhi-NCR.

**FAECAL BACTERIA LEVELS SURPASS SAFE LIMITS:**

**CPCB**

#POLLUTION #HEALTH

PRIMARY SOURCE THE TIMES OF INDIA

As per the recent report by **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** to **National Green Tribunal**, the multiple spots in Prayagraj (the venue of Maha Kumbh Mela) have failed to

meet primary bathing standards due to **high levels of faecal coliform in water**.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS**

- As per CPCB, **Faecal coliform** —a key indicator of sewage contamination— has exceeded the **permissible limit of 2,500 units per 100 ml**.
- High levels of faecal bacteria in the waters pose **significant risks of waterborne diseases**, while excessive organic pollution **threatens aquatic life and overall river health**.

**FAECAL COLIFORM BACTERIA**

- Coliform is a **group of bacteria** commonly found in the **intestines of warm-blooded animals and humans**. Faecal coliform bacteria is present in human or animal wastes.
- While **not all coliform bacteria are harmful**, presence of faecal coliform bacteria in water **suggests contamination** from sewage or animal waste.
  - They are **commonly used as indicators** of potential contamination in water.
  - Their presence suggests that the **water may also contain other harmful pathogens**, such as viruses, parasites, or other bacteria (Salmonella, and E. coli), that originate from faecal matter.

**Implications:**

- **Health risks:** The pathogens can enter the body via the mouth, nose and ears. Exposure to such contaminated water can lead to a range of health issues, including:
  - Nausea, gastrointestinal infections, vomiting, diarrhoea.
  - Skin rashes and eye irritations.
  - Serious conditions like typhoid and hepatitis A.
  - Respiratory issues due to inhaling water droplets containing bacteria.
- Individuals with low immune systems, the elderly, and children are most vulnerable.

**CLIMATE RISK INDEX 2025**

#INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

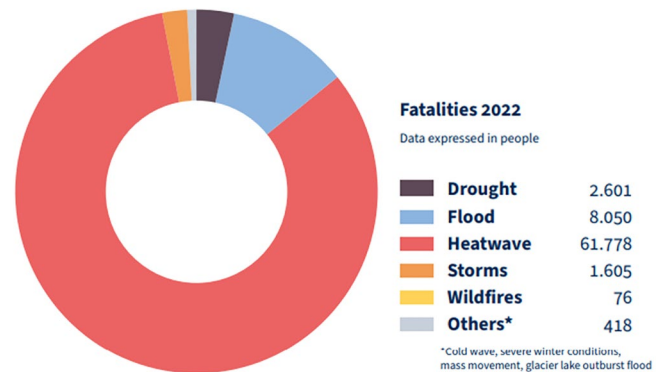


The **Climate Risk Index 2025** published by **Germanwatch**, an environmental think tank puts **India** in the **top 10 countries** most affected by climate change from 1993 to 2022.

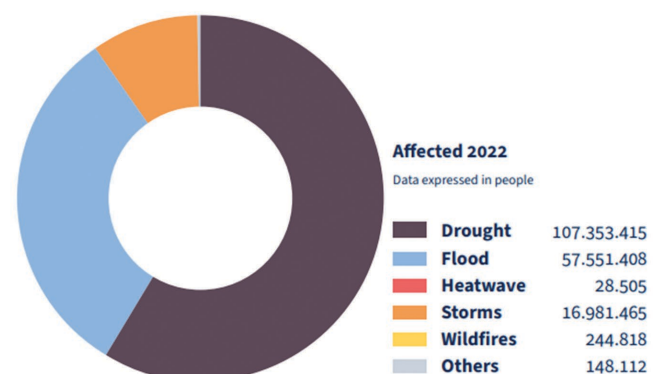
**KEY FINDINGS ABOUT THE WORLD**

- **Extreme events:** There have been more than 9,400 extreme events across the world from 1993-2022.
- **Life loss:** Events like cyclones, droughts and heatwaves have claimed more than 7,65,000 lives in the past three decades.
- **Heatwave** claimed the most i.e., 61,778 lives (83% fatalities) in the **year 2022**, followed by floods and droughts.
- **Droughts** affected the most number of people in 2022, i.e., 59% of people in the past three decades. Maximum impact was witnessed in seven nations of Africa.
- **Economic loss:** Extreme climate events have **cost more than \$4 trillion** in the past three decades. Storms followed by floods claimed the highest economic loss in the world.

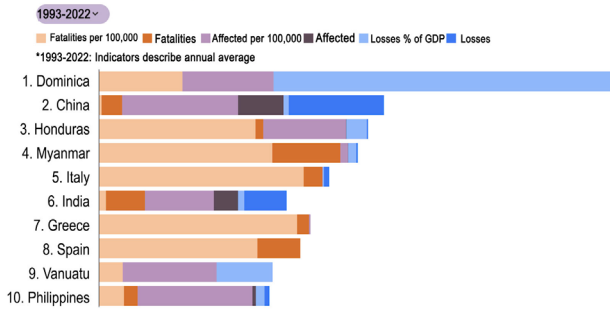
**Figure 3: Fatalities by event in 2022**



**Figure 5: Number of people affected by event in 2022**



Climate Risk Index: Top 10 Most Affected Countries



**KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT ABOUT INDIA**

- India ranked 6th in the most affected nation by climate change, whereas the Dominican Republic is 1st in the ranking.
- **Risks to India:** India has faced various incidents of extreme weather events, including floods, heat waves, cyclones and drought. Floods and landslides resulting from heavy monsoons displaced millions and damaged agriculture. Notable events include:
  - 1998 Gujarat and 1999 Odisha cyclones.
  - Cyclone Hudhud in 2014 and cyclone Amphan in 2020.
  - Uttarakhand floods of 2013.
  - Intense heat waves with temperatures around 50 degree celsius claimed many lives in 1998, 2002, 2003 and 2015.
- **Frequent extreme events:** India witnessed more than 400 extreme events in the last three decades.
- **Economic loss:** India has faced USD 180 billion loss due to these climate change induced extreme events.

# TRANSLOCATION OF AFRICAN CHEETAHS: NEITHER ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE NOR ETHICAL

#IMPORTANT SPECIES #CONSERVATION



A new study by the **Centre for Wildlife Studies** (which examines the ethical, ecological and welfare challenges associated with the translocation of African cheetahs to India)

has expressed concern over the translocation of the animals.

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS**

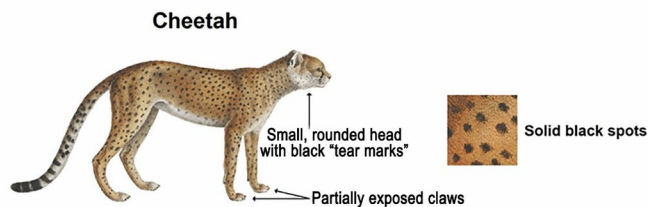
- Translocation of African cheetahs to India has resulted in **significant challenges**:
  - **High mortality rate** of 40%-50% in the first phase of the project, far below the expected survival rate of 85%.
  - **High levels of stress** for Cheetahs with over 90 chemical immobilisations and regular veterinary interventions, raises concerns about their physical and mental health.
  - **Reliance on a continuous supply of cheetahs** from southern Africa, is neither ecologically sustainable nor ethical. **African cheetah populations** are already under pressure with only around 6,500 mature individuals remaining in the wild.
- This raises concerns about scientific rationale and **long-term viability** of the **Cheetah translocation project (Project Cheetah)** in India.

**PROJECT CHEETAH (CHEETAH REINTRODUCTION IN INDIA)**

- Project Cheetah is an initiative to **reintroduce cheetahs into the wild** after their extinction in the country in 1952.
- **Initiative of:** National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** provides technical assistance, coordinating the reintroduction project.
- Under Project Cheetah, so far **20 adult African cheetahs**, eight from Namibia in September 2022 and 12 from South Africa in February 2023, were introduced into the **Kuno National Park (KNP)** in Madhya Pradesh.
- As of February 2025, **26 Cheetahs survive** (including 12 Adults and 14 cubs), and other adult Cheetahs died. There were **various causes of their death** including **starvation** and **bacterial infection** (blood poisoning/septicaemia) due to wounds caused by the tracking radio collar.
- Under the **Cheetah Action Plan**, the government is planning to relocate a new batch of Cheetahs from Africa to the **Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh**.

### ABOUT CHEETAH

- The cheetah is a **large cat** and the world's **fastest land animal**.
- **Characteristics:**
  - They have a slender body with long legs, a small round head, and **distinctive black spots on their tan fur**.
  - They are **carnivorous animals** and hunt mainly small to medium-sized antelopes such as gazelles and impalas.
  - They **inhabit** diverse scrub forests, dry grasslands, savannas and other arid and semi-arid open habitats.



### DISTRIBUTION OF CHEETAHS

- Historically, Asiatic Cheetahs had a very **wide distribution in India** (from Punjab to southern Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan to Bengal). **In 1952**, the cheetah was **declared officially extinct** in India.
- Today, **four subspecies of Cheetahs** are recognised that are native to **Africa** and **Central Iran**. (present in fragmented habitats in Iran, Sahara Desert, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa etc.)

### THREATS AND CONSERVATION STATUS

- **Threats:** Habitat loss, conflict with humans, poaching and high susceptibility to diseases.
- **Protection Status:**
  - **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
  - **CITES:** Appendix I
  - **Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972:** Schedule II
- **Cheetah Conservation Fund (1990):** An international non-profit organization headquartered in Namibia, founded in 1990 for the conservation of cheetahs and their ecosystems.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF CONSERVING KEYSTONE SPECIES

- Cheetahs, a **keystone species**, have been reintroduced in India owing to their ecological and economic significance.

- A keystone species **helps to keep an ecosystem together and functioning** by shaping it in various ways, from being apex predators to ecosystem engineers.
- Without them, their ecosystems **would be dramatically different** or even cease to exist. A keystone species is often, but **not always, a predator**. **E.g.**, Cheetah, Wolf, Sea otters etc.
- The significance of key stone species conservation includes:
  - **Restores degraded ecosystem:** Many Keystone species are at the top of the food chain and naturally control the prey base population, thus reducing the pressure on ecosystems. **E.g.**, Cheetahs can restore open forest and grassland ecosystems.
  - **Bio-diversity:** Keystone species prevent species at lower trophic levels from monopolising critical resources, such as competition for space or key producer food sources, thereby enabling multiple species to survive. **E.g.**, Abundance of sea otters controls sea urchin population, thereby reducing pressure on kelp forest which support diverse fish species.
  - **Ecosystem services:** Conservation of these species are economically beneficial as they ensure the ecosystems to deliver crucial ecosystem services. **E.g.**, According to the IIFM report, every rupee spent on tiger conservation will yield returns of ₹ 2500 through ecosystem services of tiger reserves such as water provisioning, soil conservation, gene pool protection, tourism etc.

By revisiting India's conservation ethos, **Project Cheetah aims to revive** the lost splendor of the cheetah, contributing to the country's rich biodiversity and ecological balance.

## CROCODILE SPECIES IN INDIA

#IMPORTANT SPECIES #CONSERVATION

PRIMARY SOURCE DownToEarth

Recently, the two-day long census to **count the number of marsh crocodiles in Vishwamitri river** has concluded and the data is being analysed.

**ABOUT VISHWAMITRI RIVER**

- Vishwamitri originates from the Pavagadh hills in Panchmahal district, **Gujarat**.
- Primarily it is a **rain-fed river**. It flows around 80 kms, merges with Dhadhar river and eventually drains into the **Gulf of Khambhat, Arabian Sea**.
- The Vadodara-stretch of the Vishwamitri is home to a **large population of mugger or marsh crocodiles**.
- The river is highly **polluted** as it receives a large amount of sewage and industrial pollutants.

**Crocodiles in India:**

- India is home to **three crocodile species** – Gharial, Mugger, and Saltwater Crocodiles.
- Usually spotted on banks of the aquatic systems, crocodiles are **cold-blooded animals**.
- Crocodiles are **apex predators**. These reptiles play a critical role in the ecosystem by maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance: they control the population of other aquatic animals.
- India launched the **Crocodile Conservation Project** in Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park in 1975, with the aid from the United Nations Development Programme.
- All three crocodile species in India are placed under the **Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.

**1. Mugger:**

- They have a **broad-snouted nose**.
- They are also known as Marsh crocodiles. They are found in **freshwaters** like rivers and also in estuaries and marshy areas.
- Mugger has a diverse and broad diet. They are known to dig burrows or holes for **nesting purposes**.
- Muggers have stronger **legs** which allow them to bask mainly on river banks choosing steeper slopes and elevated platforms.
- Their **tough keratin scales** are known to be sensitive to even the slightest motion in the water and this helps them detect prey easily.
- **IUCN status:** Vulnerable



**2. Gharials:**

- They are **endemic** to the **Indian subcontinent**.
- They are shy-natured and the most aquatic of all the species.
- They are the longest **living crocodile species**, native to northern India and are distinguished by their long, narrow snouts.
- The gharials are predominantly a **fish-eater**.
- Gharials prefer to bask on mid-river sand islands on gentle slopes as they have **weaker legs** and can only crawl.
- **Chambal River** (tributary of river Yamuna) holds the **largest population of Gharials** in the wild.
- **IUCN status:** Critically Endangered



**Note:** Both the species are **freshwater** and have overlapping habitats in the northern rivers (Ganges, Chambal, Son, Ramganga and Girwa) and eastern (Mahanadi) river systems of India. They have shown systematic **resource partitioning** in their aquatic environments.

**3. Saltwater crocodiles:**

- Largest crocodile species, also recognised as man eater. Largest reptile in the world.
- Also known as **estuarine crocodiles**. Its habitat includes regions such as Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park, West Bengal's Sundarbans, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- **IUCN status:** Least concern.



**LOGGERHEAD TURTLES**

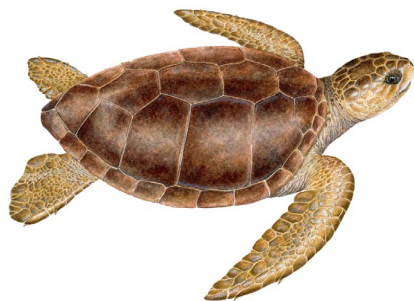
#IMPORTANT SPECIES #CONSERVATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

A research identified various facts and information about the migratory species like **Loggerhead turtles**.

**ABOUT LOGGERHEAD TURTLES**

- Loggerhead turtle is a species of **oceanic turtle** found in the Atlantic, Pacific, and **Indian Ocean**, as well as the Mediterranean Sea.
- They are named loggerhead turtles for their **large heads** and **powerful jaws** that can crush their prey.
- **Key characteristics:**
  - Reddish brown shell and large powerful jaws.
  - Omnivorous.
  - **Temperature dependent sex determination:** Warmer temperature produces females and cool temperature produces males.
- **Threats:**
  - Low survival rate i.e., only 1 in 1000 hatchlings will survive to adulthood.
  - Habitat destruction along with the bycatching (accidental capture in fishing net).
- **Conservation status:**
  - **IUCN status:** Vulnerable
  - **CITES:** Appendix I
  - **Wild Life Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I
- **Conservation efforts:** Turtle excluder device in fishing gear, protection of breeding grounds and rescue of captivated turtles.



**FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

- Loggerhead turtles are known for their **large migration routes** and often return to feeding sites, even after seasonal journeys and displacements.
- The findings suggest that migratory species such as loggerhead turtles use the **geomagnetic field** (magnetic field of the Earth) **as a map and compass**, when navigating large distances.

**EURASIAN OTTERS**

#IMPORTANT SPECIES #CONSERVATION

**PRIMARY SOURCE** BusinessLine

*Eurasian Otters, once thought to be nearly extinct, have resurfaced in the Kashmir Valley.*

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS**

- Eurasian Otters have reemerged in the **Gurez Valley** i.e., 123 km north of Srinagar.
- It represents the first live documentation of species for the last 25 years.



**ABOUT EURASIAN OTTERS**

- Eurasian otter is a **semi-aquatic mammal** native to Eurasia.
- They have dense and water repellent furs for insulation in cold water.
- **Adaptations:** Webbed feet for swimming, streamlined body and muscular tail for propulsion.
- **Habitat:**
  - Europe, North America, and some parts of Asia.
  - In India, confirmed in Himalayas, Western Ghats, Odisha.
  - Prefers clean freshwater ecosystems.
- **Carnivorous:** Primarily eats fish, amphibians, crustaceans and small mammals.

**Conservation Status and Threats:**

- **IUCN status:** Near Threatened
- Population decline due to:
- **Habitat loss** (urbanisation, river pollution)
- **Poaching** (fur trade, conflicts with fishermen)
- **Pesticide contamination** affecting fish populations
- **Climate change** impacting freshwater sources.



# SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER III (MAIN)

## NUCLEAR ENERGY SECTOR IN UNION BUDGET 2025-26

#NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY  
SOURCE 

*Union Budget 2025-26 announced Rs 20,000 crore allocation for Nuclear Energy Mission which aims to develop indigenous Small Modular Reactors (SMR).*

### MAJOR INITIATIVES IN BUDGET

#### 1. Nuclear Energy Mission:

- The mission is focused on R&D of **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)**.
- **Aim:** To develop at least **five** indigenously designed and operational **SMRs by 2033**.
- The government will enter into **partnerships with private sector** to:
  - Set up Bharat Small Reactors
  - R&D of Bharat Small Modular Reactors
  - R&D of newer technologies for Nuclear Energy. Introduce **new nuclear reactors** including:
    - **high-temperature gas-cooled reactors** for hydrogen co-generation.
    - **molten salt reactors** aimed at utilising India's abundant Thorium resources.
- **Private Entities** would provide land, cooling water, and capital.
- **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** will handle design, quality assurance, and operation and maintenance.

#### 2. Energy-sector Reforms:

- **Amendments to the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010** will be done.
- **Aim:** To facilitate implementation of the **Nuclear Energy Mission** and encourage private-sector investments in nuclear power projects.

### SIGNIFICANCE

- As of January 30, 2025, **India's nuclear capacity is 8180 MW**.
- The initiatives align with India's commitment to achieving:
  - **100 GW** of Nuclear energy capacity by **2047**.
  - **500 GW** of non-fossil fuel-based energy generation by 2030, meeting 50% of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030, as pledged at COP26 Summit in Glasgow in 2021.

### BHARAT SMALL REACTORS

- **220 MW Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** with a proven safety and performance record.
- These reactors are being **upgraded** to reduce land requirements, making them suitable for deployment near industries such as steel, aluminium, and metals, serving as captive power plants to aid in decarbonisation efforts.

### BHARAT SMALL MODULAR REACTORS

- **Advanced Nuclear Reactors** with a power generation capacity ranging from less than **30 MWe to 300+ MWe**.
- Provide **flexible, scalable, and cost-effective alternatives** to conventional large nuclear reactors.
- **Applications:** Electricity generation in remote locations, energy requirements for industrial processes, water desalination, nuclear submarines etc.
- **Advantages:**
  - Adaptable: can be scaled up or down to supply more or less power.
  - Only need to refuel every 3-7 years, as opposed to every 1-2 years for conventional nuclear plants.
  - Extensive use of passive safety features to shut down and cool reactors under abnormal circumstances, reducing the risk of catastrophic failures.
  - Having relatively lower-capital requirements, can make nuclear power more accessible.

- Can complement renewable energy sources and stabilise the grid.
- **Challenges:**
  - Higher cost per unit of electricity production in SMRs due to supply-chain issues and the absence of economies of scale.
  - SMRs are inferior to conventional reactors with respect to radioactive waste generation and require spent fuel storage & disposal facilities.

## INDIA PLANS TO AMEND NUCLEAR LIABILITY LAWS

#NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

India has announced **plans to amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act 2010 and the Atomic Energy Act, 1962**, to enable active participation of the American and French nuclear power firms in the Indian Nuclear Energy sector.

### CIVIL LIABILITY FOR NUCLEAR DAMAGE ACT (CLNDA), 2010

- **Aim:** To provide a **quick compensation mechanism** for victims of a nuclear accident.
- The Act establishes a **strict and no-fault liability for nuclear plant operators**, meaning they are liable for damage regardless of fault.
- However, the operator of the nuclear installation, after paying the compensation for nuclear damage shall have the **right to recourse** where:
  - The nuclear incident has resulted as a consequence of **an act of supplier or his employee**, which includes supply of equipment or material with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services.
  - The nuclear incident has resulted from the act of commission or omission of an individual done with the intent to cause nuclear damage.
- The operator will have to **maintain a financial security** to cover its **maximum liability of ₹1,500 crore** for civil nuclear damage and requires the operator to cover liability through insurance or other financial security.

- In case the **damage claims exceed ₹1,500 crore**, the gap will be bridged by the Central Government. The government liability amounts to the rupee equivalent of 300 million Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) or about ₹2,100 to ₹2,300 crore.

### ATOMIC ENERGY ACT, 1962

- The Act provides for the **development, control and use of atomic energy** for the welfare of the people of India and for other peaceful purposes.
- **Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL)** holds the authority for activities related to nuclear energy, including its production, development, use, and disposal.
- The **Act restricts private companies** from owning and operating nuclear power plants in India.
- The **2015 amendment** to the Act, allows NPCIL to form **joint ventures with other public sector units (PSUs)** to secure funding for new projects. However, this does not extend to private or foreign companies.
- Currently, **private companies can participate in specific areas** like supplying components and reactors, but not owning or operating plants.
- Discussions are ongoing about allowing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). This would require amendment to the Act.

### IMPEDIMENTS IN NUCLEAR COOPERATION

**1. India's Side:** India has signed the **Civil Nuclear Agreement** with the U.S. and France. Despite this several impediments hinder the progress of their collaboration. This includes:

- **Nuclear Liability law of India:**
  - The **strict liability law (CLNDA 2010)** places the **burden of compensation for nuclear accidents on the plant operator**, which can deter private companies from investing in nuclear power.
  - As per the Act, the **liability can be shifted from the operator to the vendor or supplier** in case the accident is due to equipment or material. The Act contradicts the **International Convention for Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear**

**Damage** (CSC) which focuses only on the liability of operators of the plant.

- This has delayed India's ambitious nuclear energy plans. **E.g.**, Delay in the deal to install French EPRs at Jaitapur.
- **The Atomic Energy Act, 1962** prohibits investments by the private sector in nuclear power plants.

## 2. From the US's side:

- **Limitations of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954:**
  - On the American side, a significant impediment is the '**10CFR810**' **authorisation** (Part 810 of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954), which gives US nuclear vendors the **ability to export** equipment to countries such as India under some strict safeguards.
  - The '810' authorisation **explicitly restricts US companies** from manufacturing any nuclear equipment or performing any nuclear design work outside of the US.
- The US has signalled to **give an exception** on '810 authorisation' to India to fully realise the **US-India 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement** and move forward to build American-designed nuclear reactors in India.

### US-INDIA NUCLEAR DEAL: 123 AGREEMENT

- US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement is a bilateral agreement signed between the **US & India in 2008**.
- **Benefits:**
  - **Ends India's nuclear isolation** and technology denial regimes against India.
  - Enables India to have **civil nuclear cooperation** as an equal partner with the US and the rest of the world.
  - Allows US companies to supply **nuclear fuel and dual-use nuclear technology** (including materials and equipment that could be used to enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium) for **India's civilian nuclear energy program**.
  - Enables India to meet the **twin challenges of energy security and environmental sustainability**.

- India agrees to allow inspectors from the **International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA)**, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog group, access to its civilian nuclear program.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS OF INDIA'S ACTS

- CLNDA would be amended to **separate operator's liability from supplier's liability** to bring it in line with the International Convention for Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. It will resume the progress of:
  - Electricite de France (EDF) **MoU** to build **six** EPR1650 reactors at **Jaitapur in Maharashtra**, signed in 2009.
  - American Westinghouse Electric Company's **MoU**, to build six AP1000 reactors at Kovvada in Andhra Pradesh, signed in 2012.
- Help **India tap into new nuclear power technologies and collaboration** (with domestic private sectors as well as foreign firms) to build advanced **small modular reactors**.
- Amendment in **Atomic Energy Act would liberalise investment** in power projects in India.

## CHANDRAYAAN-4 MISSION

#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

India is set to launch the **Chandrayaan-4 Mission in 2027**, marking a significant step in the nation's space exploration efforts.

### CHANDRAYAAN-4 MISSION

- **Chandrayaan-4** is a **planned lunar sample return mission** expected to **launch around 2027**.
- **Initiative of:** ISRO.
- **Aim:** To collect samples from the moon's surface and bring them back to the Earth.
- **Landing site:** planned near **Statio Shiv Shakti** (landing site of Chandrayaan-3) located near to the lunar south pole region.

### Chandrayaan-4 Mission

**Lunar Spacecraft**  
5 Modules in 2 Stacks

**Stack 1**

- Ascender Module  
Ascent with Lunar Sample
- Descender Module  
Lunar Sample Collection

**Stack 2**

- Propulsion Module  
Thrust for Integrated stack
- Transfer Module  
Sample Reception & Hold
- Re-entry Module  
Sample Return to Earth

Upgraded LVM3 (2 Nos.)

- Demonstration of technologies for future Moon and return to Earth.
- Developing capability of collecting samples to Earth and scientific studies of Lunar samples in the country

**Salient Features**

- Two separate Spacecraft stacks in two Launch vehicle missions and docking in-orbit
- Landing on Lunar surface, Lunar sample collection and containerization
- Ascent of spacecraft module from Lunar Surface
- Docking and undocking in Lunar Orbit
- Return and re-entry to Earth for sample delivery

**Scope : Development of Technologies & Flight**

**Total Cost : Rs. 2104 Cr.**

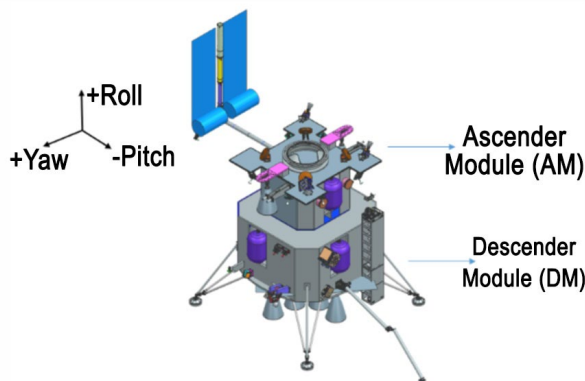
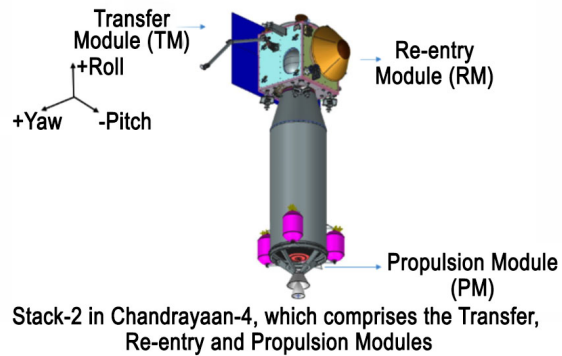
**Schedule : 36 Months**



### SPACECRAFT DESIGN AND MISSION

#### 1. Design:

- The spacecraft would **comprise five modules** across two separate launches, onboard two separate Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM-3).
  - Ascender Module (AM), Descender Module (DM) in one launch.
  - Re-entry Module (RM), Transfer Module (TM), and Propulsion Module (PM) in second launch.
- After two launches, the stacks will be **docked together in elliptical Earth orbit** to form an **integrated stack**.



Stack-1 in Chandrayaan-4, which comprises the Ascender and Descender Modules

#### 2. Lunar landing:

- Subsequent to docking, the Integrated Stack will perform the **first set of Earth-bound maneuvers** with the PM propulsion system.
  - In the final lunar orbit, DM + AM will get separated from TM + RM.
  - DM + AM will undergo powered descent to **achieve soft landing** on the lunar surface.
- After lunar landing, a **robotic arm** (Surface Sampling Robot) will scoop around **2-3 kg samples around the landing site**. A drilling mechanism will collect sub-surface samples. The samples will be sealed and **brought back to Earth**.

#### 3. Re-Entry into Earth's Atmosphere:

- Once sample collection is completed, AM would ascend to the lunar orbit and dock with the parked TM + RM.

- Samples will be transferred from AM to RM. After sample transfer, the TM + RM will be undocked from AM. Later, the TM + RM will **perform maneuvers to return to Earth**.
- At a suitable entry corridor, RM would get separated from TM and perform **ballistic re-entry into Earth's atmosphere** and finally **land onto Earth** along with Lunar Sample.

#### CHALLENGES

- Demonstration of successful docking capabilities in the Earth's orbit and undocking in the lunar orbit.
- Successful re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere by withstanding intense heat and pressure.
- Preserving the lunar samples in an uncontaminated state on their way back to Earth.

## PRIVATE LUNAR LANDER BLUE GHOST SOFT-LANDS ON MOON

#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Firefly Aerospace's uncrewed **Blue Ghost lunar lander** has successfully soft-landed on the **Moon's Mare Crisium region**. This makes Firefly Aerospace only the **second private-sector company** ever to complete such a feat.

#### FIREFLY'S BLUE GHOST MISSION 1

- Firefly's Blue Ghost Mission 1 is a part of **NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative**.
- **Initiative of:** Firefly Aerospace (US-based private space company)
- **Soft-landing on Moon:** March, 2025.
- **Landing site:** Mare Crisium region- a prominent lunar basin visible from Earth.
- **Milestones:**
  - Firefly becomes the **second private firm** to **achieve a moon landing**.
  - First commercial mission to achieve a **fully successful soft-landing on the Moon**.
- **Payloads:**
  - Scientific and technological payloads to study lunar dust, radiation and surface materials.

- Lander will **operate for approximately 14 Earth days**, equivalent to one lunar day.
- Firefly plans **two additional Blue Ghost missions** in 2026 and 2028.
- **Note:** NASA's CLPS initiative aims to conduct science on the Moon for the benefit of all and improve understanding of the lunar environment.

#### IMPORTANT PRIVATE SPACE EXPLORATION MISSIONS

##### 1. Axiom Mission:

- Privately-funded and operated crewed mission to **International Space Station (ISS)**.
- **Launched by:** Axiom Space
- **Utilised:** SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft; Falcon 9 rocket.
- **Launched from:** NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, US.
- **Axiom Mission 1:**
  - World's first **commercially crewed private spaceflight** to ISS.
  - Launched in April 2022 for a 17-day stay.
- **Axiom Mission 2:** Launched in 2023, spent 8 days in orbit.
- **Axiom Mission 3:** Launched in 2024, stayed docked for 18 days.
- **Axiom Mission 4:** To be launched in 2025.
  - **Shubhanshu Shukla**, an Indian Air Force (IAF) officer and ISRO astronaut, has been named the pilot for Axiom Mission 4.

##### 2. Polaris Dawn Mission:

- **Private human spaceflight mission** launched in September 2024.
- **Utilised:** SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft; Falcon 9 rocket.
  - **Crew Dragon** is a spacecraft developed and manufactured by SpaceX as part of NASA's Commercial Crew Program. It can carry up to seven astronauts. For NASA missions, it typically carries four astronauts and some cargo.
- The **crewed mission** consisted of four astronauts.
  - Five-day spaceflight mission. The crew travelled further into space than any humans since the **Apollo 17 mission** (1972).

- Passed through **parts of Van Allen radiation belt** to study the health effects of space radiation and spaceflight on the human body.
- The crew performed the **first commercial spacewalk**.

**3. Odysseus:**

- **First commercial spacecraft** to reach the Moon in February 2024.
- **Initiative of:** US-based **Intuitive Machines**.
- The mission was short-lived as the spacecraft **hard-landed** on the slope of a crater, and damaged onboard instruments.

## SCIENTISTS DISCOVER 'EINSTEIN RING' AROUND NEARBY GALAXY

#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

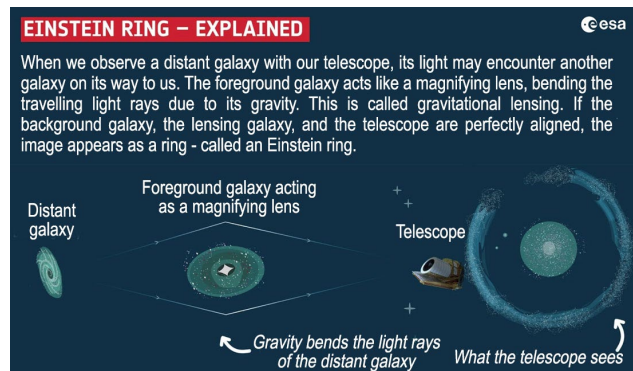
The **European Space Agency's (ESA) Euclid space telescope** has discovered a **rare ring of light** (known as an Einstein ring) around a galaxy nearly 590 million light-years away from Earth.

**EINSTEIN RING**

An Einstein ring is a **ring of light** around a form of dark matter, galaxy or cluster of galaxies. It is an **example of strong gravitational lensing**.

**GRAVITATIONAL LENSING**

- Phenomenon which occurs when a massive celestial object (such as a galaxy, cluster of galaxies or black hole) creates a strong gravitational field which **distorts and amplifies the light** (causes the light to bend/curve) from a distant object positioned directly behind it.
- The object which **causes the light to curve** is called a **gravitational lens**.
- Gravitational lensing can result in several types of image configurations, including an **Einstein ring**.



**WHY STUDY EINSTEIN RINGS?**

- Help scientists indirectly **investigate dark matter**. Dark matter and dark energy together make up 95% of the universe.
- **Study distant galaxies** which otherwise might not be visible.
- Provide information about the **expansion of the universe**.

**EUCLID SPACE TELESCOPE**

- Launched in 2023 by the **European Space Agency**.
- **Location: 1.5 million km away** from the Earth at the **Lagrangian Point 2**.
- It will observe the shapes, distances, and motions of billions of galaxies spanning **over 10 billion light-years** over the **next six years**.
- **Objective:**
  - To create the **largest cosmic 3D map** of the universe to better understand the distribution of dark matter and reveal the influence of dark energy.
  - To understand the **evolution of the Universe** by looking at the light emitted from galaxies 10 billion years ago.

## LIFE'S BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS FOUND IN ASTEROID BENNU

#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

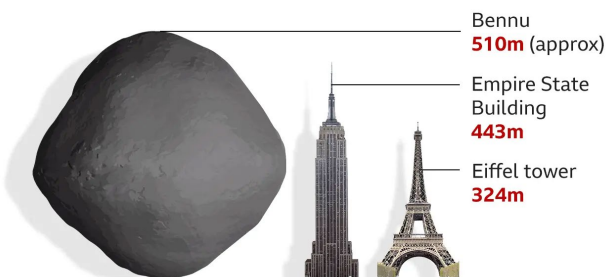
As per a recent study, the **samples of the asteroid Bennu** transported to Earth contain the **basic building blocks** for life.

**ASTEROID BENNU**

- Bennu is a **carbon-rich near-Earth small asteroid** (~500 metres).
- Expected to have formed **around 65 million years ago**, from the debris of a parent asteroid dating back some **4.5 billion years**.
- **Near-Earth object** because it passes relatively close to planet Earth, every six years.
  - Closest asteroids which travel within **1.3 AU (Astronomical Unit) of the sun** are called near-Earth objects.
  - 1 AU is approximately equal to **93 million miles** - the distance between the Sun and Earth.
- Samples from Bennu (around 122 grams of dust and pebbles) were brought to Earth in a capsule by the **OSIRIS-REx mission** in 2023.

**RECENT FINDING**

- Initial analysis of the sample from Bennu revealed **evidence of high-carbon content and water**.
- Latest research has found **evaporated water on Bennu's parent asteroid left behind** a "briny broth" of salts and minerals. This indicates that Bennu's parent asteroid once had **pockets of liquid water**.
- The samples **contain sodium-rich minerals** and confirm the **presence of amino acids, nitrogen** and traces of **real extraterrestrial organic material** formed in space (and not a result of contamination from Earth).
- **Significance:** The analysis suggests life's building blocks of **non-terrestrial origin** and provides the **strongest evidence** that asteroids may have planted life on Earth.



Source: Nasa



**ULTRA-HIGH ENERGY NEUTRINO DETECTED**

ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Astrophysicists have observed the **most energetic neutrino ever seen**. The particle was spotted by the **Cubic Kilometre Neutrino Telescope (KM3NeT)**, still under construction at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.*

**MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS**

- KM3NeT detected an **ultra-high energy neutrino** having **30 times more energy** than any previously detected neutrino. The energy was **220 petaelectronvolts**.
- The neutrino had:
  - **Ten billion** times more than the most dangerous radioactive particles.
  - **Twenty thousand times** more energetic than any particle generated in the most powerful particle collider (Large Hadron Collider).
- It is anticipated that the **neutrino came from outside the Milky Way galaxy**.

**NEUTRINOS**

- Neutrinos belong to a group of fundamental particles called **leptons** in the Standard Model of Particle Physics.
- **Characteristics:**
  - No electric charge
  - Very little mass (nearly massless).
  - Second-most abundant particles after photons.
  - Most abundant among particles that make up matter.
  - Ghost particles; very rarely interact with matter.
  - Travel through vast distances (including entire planets) almost undetected.
- **Source of Neutrinos:** Stars, Supernovae, Galaxies, Nuclear reactions.

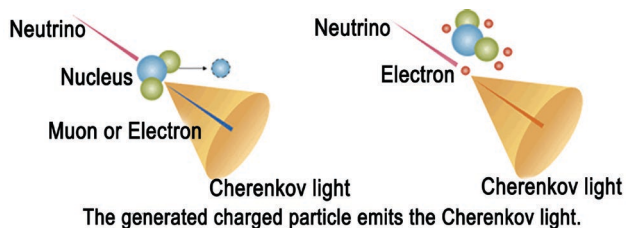
**CUBIC KILOMETRE NEUTRINO TELESCOPE (KM3NeT)**

- **Gigantic deep sea neutrino telescope**, under construction, being built by an international collaboration of around 21 countries.
- KM3NeT consists of **two deep-sea components:**

- **ARCA** (Astroparticle Research with Cosmics in the Abyss): 3.4 km deep near Sicily, Italy, focused on detecting high-energy neutrinos.
- **ORCA** (Oscillation Research with Cosmics in the Abyss): 2.4 km deep near Provence, France, to study low-energy neutrinos.
- KM3NeT will have **more than 6,000 light detectors** inside the ocean. After completion, it will cover about a **cubic kilometre of sea**.

#### WORKING OF KM3NeT

- Under water optical sensors or light detectors of KM3NeT's will detect **Cherenkov radiation**, to detect a neutrino.
  - In rare events, a neutrino will collide with a water molecule.
  - This collision will produce secondary particles (like muons etc.).
  - These secondary particles travel faster in the water than the speed of the light in the water. This produces a faint bluish glow known as **Cherenkov radiation**.
  - Light detectors of KM3NeT's will detect the Cherenkov radiation.
  - By studying the pattern of Cherenkov radiation, scientists can reconstruct/ study the original energy of the neutrino and its direction.



#### SIGNIFICANCE

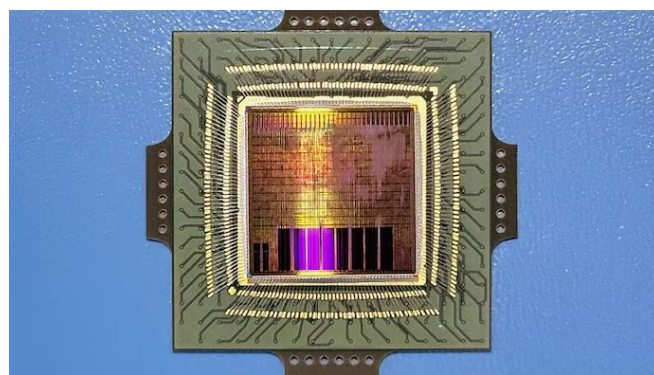
- Studying neutrinos can provide insights into the universe's evolution.
- Shed light on the Higgs mechanism and mass generation in general.
- Discovery of new physics beyond the Standard Model.

## IIT MADRAS DEVELOPS SHAKTI-BASED SEMICONDUCTOR CHIP

#INTERNET AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have developed an indigenous aerospace quality Shakti-based semiconductor chip.*



#### ABOUT SHAKTI-BASED SEMICONDUCTOR CHIP

- The chip is named **IRIS** (Indigenous RISC-V Controller for Space Applications).
- It is based on the **SHAKTI microprocessor** and is part of **India's push for self-reliance** in semiconductor technology.
  - SHAKTI systems use **RISC-V** (an open-source processor technology).
  - Supported by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology under the '**Digital India RISC-V**' (DIRV) initiative.
  - **The DIRV initiative** aims to promote **indigenous development** of microprocessor-based products for users adopting RISC-V technology.
- IRIS is the **third SHAKTI chip** successfully fabricated in India after RIMO (2018), and MOUSHIK (2020).
- **Utility:** IRIS can be used for applications on launch vehicles, ground stations and Internet of Things (IoT) and industrial IoT applications.

#### KEY FEATURES OF IRIS CHIP

- Developed to support ISRO's command and control systems and other critical functions.

- Designed for fault tolerance and reliability, making it suitable for space missions.
- Includes custom modules like watchdog timers and advanced serial buses.
- Can be expanded for future missions through multiple boot modes and hybrid memory extensions.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

- IRIS marks a milestone in indigenisation of semiconductor design and fabrication.

**ABOUT RISC-V**

- RISC-V is an **open standard Instruction Set Architecture (ISA)** based on established RISC principles. Each computer hardware will support a particular ISA.
  - Unlike most other ISA designs, RISC-V is provided under open-source licenses that do **not require fees to use**.
  - RISC-V can be extended or customised for a variety of hardware or application requirements.
- India has developed **two series of microprocessors**:
  - SHAKTI series of microprocessors by IIT Madras.
  - VEGA microprocessors by C-DAC.

# MICROSOFT UNVEILS NEW QUANTUM CHIP MAJORANA 1

#QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY



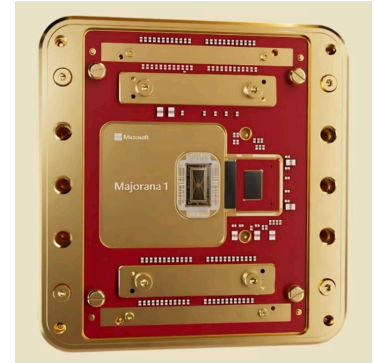
Microsoft has **unveiled a new quantum chip called Majorana 1**. Microsoft has claimed to have **found a novel way to create qubits** (quantum bits) that produces more stable and error-resistant qubits, than those produced by existing methods.

**QUANTUM CHIP MAJORANA 1**

- **Material Innovation:**
  - The chip is built using **indium arsenide** (semiconductor) and **aluminum** (superconductor at low temperatures).
  - When cooled to **near absolute zero** (-273.15 °C) and tuned with magnetic fields, this material exhibits topological superconductivity, leading to

the emergence of **Majorana zero modes**. Two Majorana zero modes encode (act as) a **single topological qubit** in this chip.

- **Majorana 1 chip** contains **eight qubits** with the **potential to scale to 1 million qubits** on a single chip.



**Superiority:**

- The chip utilises **topological qubits** to be **more stable and scalable**, than existing quantum computers developed by Google and IBM.
- The chip's **design reduces error susceptibility**, making it more reliable for practical applications.
- Its supposed fault-tolerant abilities come from the **properties of an exotic subatomic particle called the Majorana fermion**, which was first theorised in the 1930s.

**MAJORANA ZERO MODES**

- Majorana Zero Modes are **exotic quasiparticles** (not fundamental particles like electrons) that arise in certain types of topological superconductors.
- They exhibit unique behaviour and **possess topological protection** (inherent stability i.e., their quantum state is resistant to small disturbances). This makes them promising candidates for fault-tolerant qubits in quantum computing.
- Unlike traditional qubits which are prone to errors, Majorana zero modes offer a path to **more stable and error-resistant qubits**.

**SIGNIFICANCE (WHY BREAKTHROUGH BY MICROSOFT IS IMPORTANT)**

Microsoft has claimed that the qubits created through its novel process are more resilient and error resistant.

- **Resilient qubits and their scalability** will fast-track the development of a **million-qubit system** within a few years.
  - Quantum computers using other methods have **barely managed to reach 1,000-qubit systems**.

- For fully-functional efficient quantum computers, they need to **operate a million or ten million qubit systems**.
- **Error-resistant qubits:**
  - In existing quantum systems, roughly one million physical qubits are required to create a few thousand logical (error-corrected) qubits.
  - The advanced qubits by Microsoft will **lower the error rates**, and thus increase **the ratio of physical qubits to logical cubits**.
  - This would drastically **reduce the number of qubits needed** for robust computations, and further speed the scalability of quantum computers.
- **Potential applications** in various fields like drug discovery, energy optimisation, material science etc.

## AI ACTION SUMMIT 2025

#ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Sixty countries, including **India, China, Brazil, France, and Australia**, signed a joint statement on **“Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet”** at the **AI Action Summit in Paris, 2025**.

### AI ACTION SUMMIT 2025

- Held in **Paris, France**. Co-chaired by **India and France**.
- **Focus on:** Inclusive and Sustainable AI development.
- **60** countries signed the joint statement, including **India, China, Brazil, France, Canada and Australia**.
- The United States and United Kingdom were **non-signatories**.
- **Provisions of Joint Statement:**
  - Ensuring accessibility, trust, and safety in AI deployment.
  - Promoting AI for industrial growth and labour market development.
  - Encouraging global collaboration in AI innovation.
  - Building AI capacity in developing countries.
  - AI should be human-centric, ethical, safe, secure, and trustworthy.

## TRAILGUARD AI

#ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

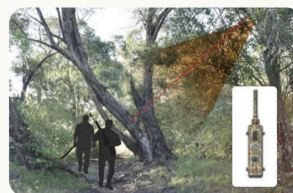
PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

**TrailGuard AI** has helped wildlife officials at the **Similipal Tiger Reserve, Odisha** to **arrest 96 poachers and seize more than 86 country-made guns**.

### ABOUT TRAILGUARD AI

- TrailGuard AI is an **end-to-end AI-powered camera-based alert system** to enhance wildlife conservation and promote human-wildlife coexistence in remote areas.
- It **autonomously detects target objects** and **transmits real-time alerts** that can trigger rapid-response.
- TrailGuard system **comprises of two units:**
  - The camera unit is of size less than a pen.
  - The battery/communication unit is the size of a notepad.

TrailGuard AI transmits human and wildlife activities in remote areas in under 30 seconds, enabling real-time interventions.



Intruders detected by tiny hidden camera



Designated party receives the alert instantly

### KEY FEATURES OF TRAILGUARD AI

- **Real-Time Alert:** Upon detecting the target, TrailGuard AI transmits human and wildlife activities in **under 30 seconds** to designated devices via various networks, enabling real-time interventions. These network transmissions include GSM, long-range radio or satellite, facilitating prompt intervention by authorities.
- **Extended Battery life** of at least 6 months reduces frequent maintenance.

### UTILITY- MULTIPLE USE CASES

TrailGuard AI can be utilised for monitoring:

- Human-wildlife conflict
- Wildlife monitoring
- Illegal logging in protected areas
- Mine security
- Border security
- Building intrusion monitoring.

# DDoS ATTACK ON KAVERI 2.0 PORTAL

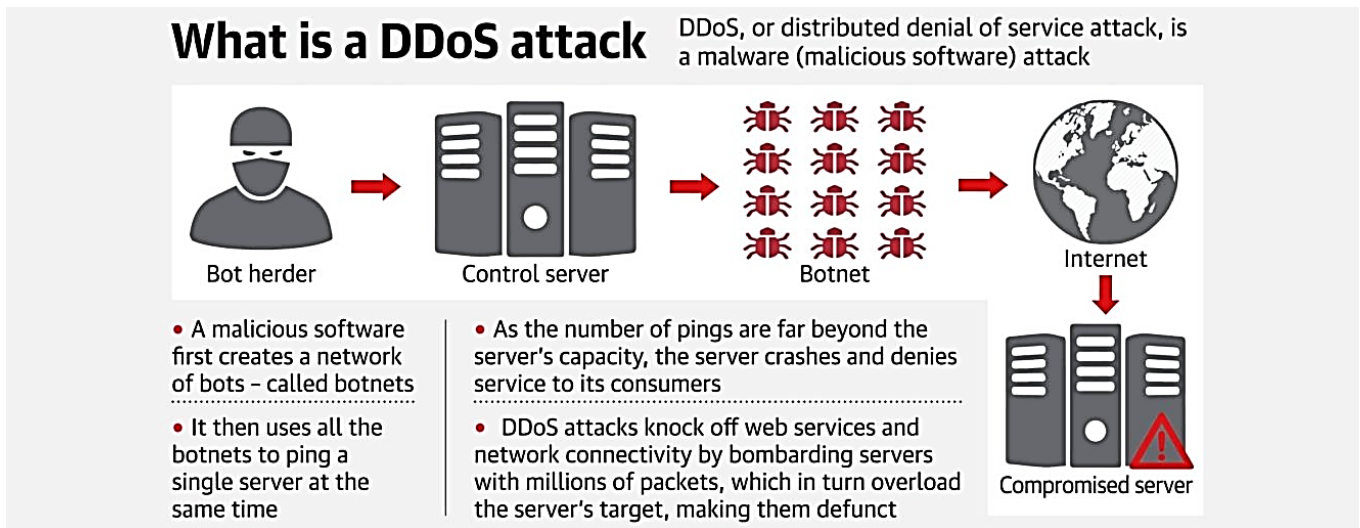
#INTERNET AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, **web-based portal Kaveri 2.0** (which streamlines property registrations in Karnataka) faced server outages and performance issues. The issue was due to a motivated **Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack** using automated tools or bots.

## DDoS ATTACK

- DDoS attack is a **malicious attempt to disrupt the normal functioning** of a targeted server, service, or network by overwhelming it with a flood of internet traffic.
- Unlike a Denial of Service (DoS) attack, which typically involves a single source, a **DDoS attack leverages multiple compromised systems**, often infected with malware, to generate the traffic.



## IMPLICATIONS OF DDOS ATTACK

- **Disruption of services** leads to service downtime and potential loss of revenue.
- **Distraction to execute** other forms of cyberattacks, such as data breaches.
- **Reputational damage** for organisations falling victim to DDoS attacks.

- **About:** Life-threatening disease caused by **plasmodium parasites**, transmitted to people through the bites of infected **female Anopheles mosquitoes**.
- **Transmission through:** mosquito bites, blood transfusion, organ transplant, shared use of syringes contaminated with blood (malaria parasite is found in **red blood cells** of an infected person).
- **Symptoms:** Fever, chills, sweats, headaches, muscle aches, and fatigue. Rarely, complications like organ failure and death.
- **Medications:** Chloroquine, combination therapies (drug resistance is a growing concern).
- **Vaccine:** RTS,S/AS01 (brand name Mosquirix) and R21/Matrix M.
- **Malaria Eradication:**
  - **WHO:** Reduce incidence and mortality rates by 75% in 2025 and 90% in 2030.
  - **India:** Malaria-free by 2027 and elimination by 2030.

# MALARIA ELIMINATION EFFORTS

#BIOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY #HEALTH

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** has **officially certified Georgia as Malaria-free**. Despite decades of global efforts, **Malaria still causes over 240 million cases and more than 600,000 deaths annually**.

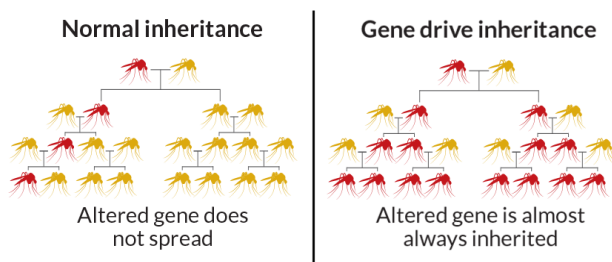
## ABOUT MALARIA

**CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING UNIVERSAL MALARIA VACCINE**

- **Plasmodium masters detection** by the immune system. It frequently changes its surface proteins, making it difficult for immune cells to recognise it and respond (annihilate).
- **Plasmodium's genetic adaptability** enables it to evolve resistance. When one vaccine is developed to combat one strain, the parasite alters its proteins and genetic structure to bypass immunity.

**CRISPR AND GENE DRIVE**

- **Under normal law of inheritance**, a specific trait from an organism has a 50/50 chance to be passed.
- **Gene Drive** is the **use of gene-editing techniques to alter the law of inheritance** to pass on a particular genetic trait from one generation to the next generation, faster than the normal rate.
  - This is achieved by **editing a particular gene**, so that it can copy and paste itself into its corresponding location on the other chromosome, instead of the 50/50 inheritance pattern that occurs naturally.
  - This **copying and pasting occurs during the production of reproductive cells** (sperm or egg), resulting in a higher probability that the gene will be passed down to the next generation.



- **CRISPR** is being used to edit a gene called '**doublesex**' in **female mosquitoes** which are the main transmitters of Malaria.
- When the female mosquitoes inherit two copies of the disrupted gene, they **develop like males** and are unable to bite or lay eggs.
- This **genetic tweak of double-sex gene** follows gene drive inheritance. With this, in 8 generations female mosquitoes are completely eliminated.

**DARJEELING ZOO GETS BIOBANK**

#BIOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*India's first 'bio bank' in a zoo has been set up at Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park or Darjeeling Zoo in West Bengal.*

**BIOBANKS**

- **Biobank** is a repository of biological samples, such as blood, DNA, cells, tissues, and/or organs alongside their genetic data.
- It **collects and preserves samples** from animals and consenting individuals (humans) to carry out research.
  - As of 2024, there are **19 registered biobanks in India**, hosting many biological specimens, including cancer cell lines and tissues.

**DARJEELING ZOO BIOBANK**

- The facility **collects and preserves:**
  - Cell and tissue samples from endangered animals.
  - Reproductive cells (gametes) from dead animals.
- The samples are **preserved in minus 196 degree Celsius in liquid Nitrogen in cryogenic state** (Cryo-preservation). The samples can be stored in the biobank for at least 40 to 45 years.
- **Initiative of:** Darjeeling Zoo, in collaboration with the **Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB)**, under the **Ministry of Science and Technology**.

**UTILITY**

- Provide **access to diverse genetic information** enabling development of targeted therapies.
- Samples can be **preserved for future research**. **E.g.,** Study on mutations, impact of climate change on the organisms.
- **Wildlife conservation:** Can be used to potentially **bring back critically endangered species** and extinct species.

India needs **comprehensive biobanking regulations** to govern the collection, storage, sharing, and ethical use of biological samples at par with global standards.

# INDIA'S VSHORADS MISSILE SYSTEM

#DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

The **Defence Research and Development Organisation** has successfully conducted three successive flight-trials of the **Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)** from Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

## ABOUT VSHORADS MISSILE SYSTEM

- VSHORADS is a **fourth generation** technically-advanced miniaturised **Man Portable Air Defence System (MANPAD)**.
- **Indigenously developed by:** DRDO's Hyderabad-based premier facility Research Centre Imarat.



## KEY FEATURES

- **Range:**
  - **Interception Range:** up to 6 kms
  - **Limiting altitude of effective target destruction:** 3.5 km

- **Maximum speed:** Mach 1.5
- The missile is propelled by a **dual-thrust solid motor** that incorporates many technologies including:
  - dual-band Imaging Infra-Red Seeker
  - miniaturised **Reaction Control System** (to increase mid-air manoeuvrability)
  - integrated avionics.
- The design focuses on **portability and ease of control.**

## UTILITY

- Can **neutralise low altitude aerial threats** like **drones and high-speed targets** at short range.
- **Hit-to-kill capability** in various target engagement scenarios covering approaching, receding and crossing modes.

### Overview of MANPADS

MANPADS (Man-Portable Air Defense Systems) are surface-to-air missiles that are lightweight enough to be operated by a single person. The system consists of a missile inside a disposable tube, a gripstock, and a battery to charge the missile.



## SIGNIFICANCE

- **Man-portable and lightweight**, can be deployed quickly in rugged and hilly terrain and maritime domain.
- Capability to meet the needs of the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force.
- **Replaces aging systems like the Igla missile system (1980s)** not well suited for evolving modern threats.
- Underscores India's commitment to **self-reliance in defence technology and manufacturing.**

# PRACTICE QUESTIONS

## MCQS

**Q1. The term "Majorana Zero Mode" is mentioned in which of the following contexts?**

(a) Shortwave Radio Communication

(b) Space Mineral Exploration

(c) Quantum Computing

(d) Malicious Software

**Q2. Which of the following statements best describes Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack?**

- (a) Installing malware on pretext of enticing offers like free software upgrade.
- (b) Misusing a computer system or network for a socially or politically motivated reason.
- (c) An attack to shut down a network making it inaccessible to its intended users.
- (d) Malicious software injected into the computer to encrypt the data.

**Q3. Consider the following statements:**

1. Neutrinos are elementary subatomic particles with net positive electric charge.
2. Cubic Kilometre Neutrino Telescope is located at the Arctic Circle.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2

- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Q4. 'CRISPR-based gene drive system' is sometimes talked about with reference to which one of the following?**

- (a) Controlling vector-borne diseases like Malaria
- (b) Converting crop residues into packing material
- (c) Producing biodegradable plastics
- (d) Producing biochar from thermo-chemical conversion of biomass

**Q5. Consider the following statements:**

1. 'VSHORADS' is a surface-to-surface missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation.
2. 'VSHORADS' is propelled by a 'dual-thrust solid rocket motor'.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

## DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

**Q1.** DRDO's VSHORAD missile system is a game-changer for the Indian Armed Forces. Comment.

**Q2.** Despite the fact that India has signed the Civil Nuclear Agreement with the U.S. and France, there are several impediments in their fullest utilisation. Discuss.

**Answers:** 1-c, 2-c, 3-d, 4-a, 5-b

# HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER I (MAIN)

## GYAN BHARATAM MISSION: MISSION FOR MANUSCRIPT CONSERVATION

#GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Union Budget 2025-26 announced a special mission for the survey, documentation, and conservation of India's manuscript heritage, launched as the 'Gyan Bharatam Mission'.

### GYAN BHARATAM MISSION

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Culture
- **Objective:** To focus on the **survey, documentation and conservation** of India's manuscript heritage.
- **Coverage:** To cover **more than one crore manuscripts** held by academic institutions, museums, libraries, and private collectors.
- **A National Digital Repository of Indian knowledge systems** for knowledge sharing will be set up.
- The mission will be **executed under the National Mission for Manuscripts. Budget allocation** for the NMM has been increased from ₹3.5 crore to ₹60 crore.



National Mission for Manuscripts

### NATIONAL MISSION FOR MANUSCRIPTS (NMM)

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Culture
- **Establishment:** 2003.
- The Mission has the **mandate** of identifying, documenting, conserving and making accessible the manuscript heritage of India.

### Objectives:

- **Locate manuscripts** through national level Survey and Post-Survey.
- **Document each and every manuscript** and manuscript repository, for a National Electronic Database.
- **Conserve manuscripts** incorporating both modern and indigenous methods of conservation and training a new generation of manuscript conservators.
- **Train the next generation** of scholars in various aspects of Manuscript Studies.
- **Promote access to manuscripts by digitizing** the rarest and most endangered manuscripts.
- **Promote access to manuscripts through publication** of critical editions of unpublished manuscripts and catalogues.
- **Facilitate the public's engagement** with manuscripts through lectures, seminars, publications and other outreach programmes.
- NMM presently **functions as a unit under the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.**
- The NMM uses technology for preservation and digitisation of manuscripts.
- The digitized manuscripts are uploaded to an **online portal** (<https://www.pandulipatala.nic.in>)
- **Methodologies for preservation:** Lamination, restoration, and deacidification of manuscripts.

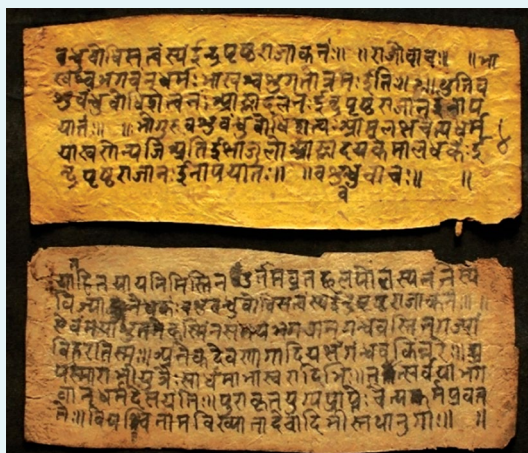
### CHALLENGES BEFORE THE MISSION

- Manuscript wealth of India is **estimated at around ten million manuscripts** and is perhaps the largest collection in the world. Manuscripts are found in a **vast number of languages and scripts many of which can no longer be read.**
- Manuscripts are found in **different kinds of repositories** - ranging from museums, institutions of learning to private homes and houses of worship, big and small.

- Manuscripts are **often found to have been neglected for decades and in very poor physical state** - insect ridden, fungus infected or brittle, fading and fragile.
- Scholars who can study and use manuscripts are fast disappearing and a new generation of scholars is not able to rise to the challenge.
- Often, the **knowledge in manuscripts is not seen as relevant** to our times, thus neglected.

**MANUSCRIPT**

- A manuscript is a **handwritten composition** on paper, bark, cloth, metal, palm leaf or any other material **dating back at least seventy-five years** that has significant scientific, historical or aesthetic value.



- **These writings deal with a wide range of subjects** like Veda, Vedanta, Darshan, Ayurveda, Aesthetic, Astronomy, Astrology, Yoga, Vaastu, Mathematics, Linguistics etc.
- **Lithographs** (drawing on a flat surface i.e. stone/metal and then transferring the image to paper) **and printed volumes are not manuscripts.**
- Manuscripts are found in **hundreds of different languages and scripts.**
  - 70% of manuscripts are in the Sanskrit language.
  - Other 30% of manuscripts are in languages like Assamese, Bengali, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Meithei /Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Newari/ Nepal Bhasa, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Chakma etc.
- Manuscripts are **distinct from historical records such as epigraphs on rocks, firmans, revenue records** which provide direct information on events

or processes in history. Manuscripts have knowledge content.

## IRON AGE IN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

#ANCIENT HISTORY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Releasing a report on the antiquity of iron, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.K. Stalin proclaimed that the iron age began on "Tamil soil", placing the **date 5,300-odd years ago** (4th millennium BCE). He asserted that the history of the Indian subcontinent could no longer overlook Tamil Nadu.*

**ABOUT IRON AGE**

- The iron age is the period of human history (pre-history) where iron became a regular metal to be used by the masses.
- 1. North India:**
  - **For North India**, the early evidence suggests iron use around 1800 BCE. The **Iron age likely began from the 1200 BCE** i.e., after the Bronze Age. (Rakesh Tiwari, 2003)
    - Iron artefacts, furnaces, and tuyeres, carbon-dated between **1800 BCE and 1000 BCE**, were found during the excavations conducted at Raja Nalaka-tila, Malhar, and Dadupur archaeological sites in **Uttar Pradesh**.
    - In Malhar, especially, the presence of tuyeres, slags, and finished iron artefacts, hinted at a large-scale manufacturing of iron tools.
    - Technical studies on materials found at several places suggested that **iron smelting in India** could have begun as **early as the 16th century BCE**.
  - **Iron age in North India co-existed with Painted Grey Ware** (1300-300 BCE) and Northern Black Polished Ware (700-200 BCE) civilisations. It also coincided with the Later Vedic Period and period of Mahajanapadas.
- 2. South India:**
  - The recently released report by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department, 'Antiquity of Iron: Recent radiometric dates from Tamil Nadu', has placed the **introduction of the iron age at 3,345 BCE to 2,953 BCE** (fourth millennium BCE) in the State.

- The report suggests that when cultural zones to the north of Vindhyas experienced the copper age, the south might have already entered into the iron age, owing to the limited availability of commercially exploitable copper ore.

**3 RESEARCH LABS ANALYSED SAMPLES**

**Porunai (Tamiraparani) river**

**SIVAGALAI**

Adichanallur

SRIVAIGUNTAM

TUTICORIN DISTRICT

Gulf of Mannar

Two charcoal samples found at Sivagalai in Thoothukudi district dated to 3,345 BCE and 3,259 BCE

More than 85 iron objects including knives, arrowheads, rings, chisels, axes and swords collected

We have scientifically established that iron was introduced 5,300 years ago in the Tamil landscape. The Iron Age began from Tamil land – **M K Stalin**, chief minister

**SIGNIFICANCE OF DISCOVERY OF IRON**

- The presence of Iron helped in the development and expansion of **2<sup>nd</sup> phase of urbanisation in India** (1<sup>st</sup> phase was Indus Valley civilisation).
- Iron helped in **clearing forest** and iron plough boosted agricultural productivity and surplus crops were produced.
- Iron age is also characterised by social stratification, polity diversification, literary developments, Economic expansion and Trade and craft specialisation.

**PARASNATH'S MARANG BURU**

#HERITAGE #JAINISM

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

There has been a controversy due to the **development plan at Parasnath Hill** leading to a tripartite dispute between the state government, Jain community and Santhal tribal group.

**ABOUT PARASNATH'S MARANG BURU**

- Parasnath Hill is the highest peak in Jharkhand (1,365 meters). It is named after **Lord Parshvanatha**, the 23rd Jain Tirthankara.
- It is located towards the eastern-end of **Chota Nagpur Plateau**.

- It falls within the **Parasnath Wildlife Sanctuary** and is part of the **Madhuban Forest Area**.
- Significance in Jainism:**
  - It is known as **Sammed Shikharji**, one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites for Jains.
  - According to Jain beliefs, **20 out of 24 Tirthankaras** (spiritual teachers) attained Moksha (liberation) here.
- Marang Baru:**
  - The **Santhal tribe** considers the hill as **Marang Buru**, their Supreme Deity and Chief God.
  - The site is an important place of worship for tribals, where they perform traditional rituals and celebrations during the **Sohrai festival**.



**DISPUTES REGARDING THE LOCATION**

- Religious conflict** between Jain community and Santhal tribals on developing location as pilgrimage site.
- Opposition to Tourism** and commercialisation of the location, as the Jain community consider it as sacred.
- Declaration of eco-sensitive zones** by the government neglects the traditional rights of the Santhal tribal communities.

**ABOUT JAINISM**

- Origin & Founders:** Rishabhanatha (1st Tirthankara) and Mahavira (24th Tirthankara, 540-468 BCE).
- Core Beliefs:**

- **Triratnas:** Right Faith, Right Knowledge, Right Conduct.
- **Five Vows:** Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha.
- **Anekantavada:** Multiple perspectives of truth.
- **Sects:**
  - **Digambara:** No clothes (skin clad).
  - **Shwetambara:** Wear white clothes.
- **Jain Literature & Architecture:**
  - **Texts:** Kalpasutra, Tattvartha Sutra.
  - **Temples:** Dilwara (Rajasthan), Gomateshwara (Karnataka).
- **Patronage:** Chandragupta Maurya, Kharavela, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas

## FORT WILLIAM TO BE RENAMED AS VIJAY DURG

#MODERN HISTORY

PRIMARY SOURCE | THE HINDU

In the latest step toward eliminating colonial practices and mindsets within the armed forces, **Fort William in Kolkata**, the headquarters of the **Eastern Army Command**, has been renamed **Vijay Durg**.

### MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- The new name, **Vijay Durg**, is derived from the oldest fort along the Sindhudurg coast in Maharashtra. It served as a **naval base** for the **Marathas under Chhatrapati Shivaji**.
- Additionally, Kitchener House inside Fort William has been renamed Manekshaw House, and South Gate, formerly known as St. George's Gate is now Shivaji Gate.

### ABOUT FORT WILLIAM

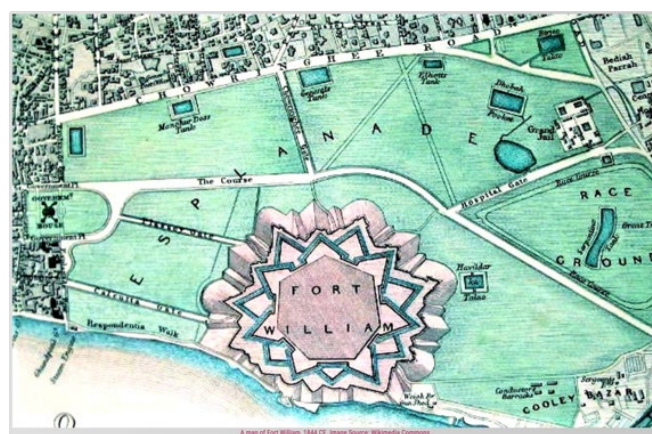
- **Location:** It is situated on the banks of Hooghly River, Kolkata, West Bengal.
- **Built:** The fort was completed between 1696-1702, by the British East India Company.
- Construction work started under the supervision of **John Goldsborough**.
- It was named after **King William III of England**.



Oil painting of Fort William 1828 CE

### THE FORT WAS BUILT TWICE

- **Old fort building:**
  - Built in **1696 CE**. The permission to build the fort at this location was granted by **Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb**.
  - It was associated with the infamous '**Black hole tragedy**'(1756). In 1756 the then Nawab of Bengal, **Siraj Ud Daulah**, took over the fort and the city by conquering the British East India Company.
  - He named the city **Alinagar** after his grandfather Aliwardi Khan.
- **New Fort Building:**
  - Robert Clive along with Admiral Charles Watson took the fort back in 1757. Siraj Ud Daulah was defeated and killed in the Battle of Plassey (1757) and Bengal came entirely under the control of the British East India Company.
  - The foundation to rebuild the fort was laid in **1758 by Robert Clive** (the first British Governor of Bengal).



## HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

- The fort also remained as a centre for Indian Ordnance factories since 1775.
- At present Fort William is the property of the Indian Army and is the **headquarters of Eastern Army Command**. It has provisions for accommodating 10,000 army personnel.

### VIJAYDURG FORT, MAHARASHTRA

- It is situated in the Sindhudurg District of Maharashtra.
- This fort was built in the 12th century and was conquered by **Chhatrapati Shivaji** in the 17th century.



- It is the oldest fort on the Sindhudurg coast, constructed during the regime of Raja Bhoja II of the Shilahar dynasty (construction period 1193-1205).
- The fort was earlier known as "Gheria", as it is situated close to the village of "Girye".
- Shivaji captured this fort from **Adil Shah of Bijapur** in 1653 and renamed it as "Vijay Durg".
- Vijaydurg Fort was called the "Eastern Gibraltar", as it was virtually impregnable.
- It served as a naval base for the Marathas under Chhatrapati Shivaji.

## TEA HORSE ROAD

#HISTORY AND CULTURE

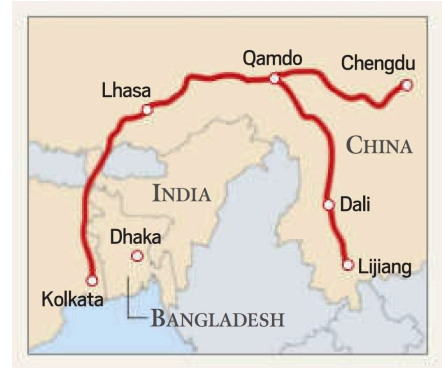
PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

*China's Ambassador to India posted about the **historic Tea Horse Road** which spanned more than 2,000 km, and connected China to India via Tibet.*

### TEA HORSE ROAD/ ANCIENT CHAMA ROAD

- **Origin:** It can be traced back to the 618-907 CE during the rule of Tang Dynasty.

- **Route:** It was not a single road, but a network of paths that **started from Southwest China and ended in the Indian Subcontinent**.
  - The **main pathways** passed through Chinese cities like Lijiang in Yunnan Province and Chengdu in Sichuan Province.
  - Then it reached Lhasa in Tibet, from where it branched into India, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- Though it is not known as the Silk Road (China-Europe), the Tea horse road was a **crucial commercial trade route** for centuries.



### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROUTE IN TRADE

As per the writings of Buddhist Monk and traveler I-Tsing/ Yijing (635-713 CE):

- **From China to India:** Products like Sugar, Textiles and Rice Noodles were transported from Southwestern China to Tibet and India.
- **From India to China:** Horses, leather, Tibetan Gold, Saffron and medicine herbs.
- From the times of Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) **trade mainly focused on Tea from China and Horses from India**.
- By 1912, the route gained significance as it became a tool for bringing new techniques and goods to the less developed mountainous regions of Yunnan (China) which helped in expanding the tea industry rapidly.



- During World War II, Japan gained control over the entire Chinese coastline and airspace. **The road became crucial for transporting supplies to the frontline battlefield in China.**
- **Decline in significance:** With establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the road witnessed decline in significance. This happened mainly because of **Mao Zedong's land reforms, after which porters mostly stopped the backbreaking work of carrying the loads.**
- **Contemporary significance:** China has **promoted tourism** along the historic path and **Lijiang became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997.**

## JHUMOIR BINANDINI

#FOLK DANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Jhumoir Binandini* event was organised at the Sarusajai Stadium, Guwahati, Assam. More than 8,000 artists from tea garden areas across Assam performed the **traditional Jhumoir dance.**

### ABOUT JHUMOIR/JHUMAR DANCE

- It is a **traditional dance** performed in Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Bihar and West Bengal.
- In Jharkhand and surrounding areas, it is mostly performed by both the **Indo-Aryan groups of Chotanagpur region** and **tribal groups** during the harvest season.
- **Musical instruments** used are Mandar, Dhol, Nagara, Bansuri (flute).



- **The dance style** consists of performers standing in a row holding hands, singing couplets, swaying their bodies, clapping their hands and occasionally adding timed jumps.

### ASSAM'S CASE

- In Assam Tea tribes are the main performers of this dance form. Jhumoir Binandini or Jhumar Nandini is an event that will **commemorate 200 years of the tea sector** in Assam.
- The dance is **usually performed in groups**, most of which are made up of women, who dance to the rhythms of traditional instruments like flute, cymbals and dhol.
- The dancers **move in circular patterns**, with coordinated footwork and hand gestures that depict various aspects of daily life, nature and folklore.
- **Traditional attire** includes bright red & white sarees and dhoti with jewellery for women and white kurta-dhoti for men.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

### MCQS

Q1. **With respect to 'Gyan Bharatam Mission'; Consider the following statements:**

1. The mission aims at enhancing the awareness regarding traditional medicines among the youth.
2. The mission will be executed under the overall supervision of the Ministry of Ayush.

Which of the statements given above are **incorrect**?

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

Q2. **Consider the following statements with respect to the Parasnath hills:**

1. Gond tribes consider it Marang Baru or the local deity.
2. 23 tirthankaras of Jainism took samadhi at this spot.
3. It falls in Mayurbhanj forest region in Odisha.

How many statements are correct?

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| (a) Only one  | (b) Only two |
| (c) All three | (d) None     |

**Q3. With respect to Fort William (Kolkata); Consider the following statements**

1. The fort is associated with the infamous Black hole tragedy of 1756.
2. Foundation for the second fort complex of fort William was laid by Robert Clive.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

**Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Iron Age in India:**

1. The Iron Age in North India likely began around the 12th century BCE.
2. The Iron Age in North India co-existed with the Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware cultures.
3. The use of iron contributed to the second phase of urbanisation in India by aiding agricultural productivity and deforestation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

**Q5. With respect to Tea Horse Road/Chama Road; consider the following statements**

1. It was a network of land trade paths connecting southwest China to the Eurasian Region.
2. Horses and Tea were exported from China to Mongolia and Eastern European regions.

Which of the statement(s) given above are correct?

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

**Answers:** 1-c, 2-d, 3-c, 4-d, 5-d

## **PART TWO**

# **ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE**

**Coverage from varied sources**

# JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORY FOR MANIPUR

#ETHICS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Manipur has been affected by ethnic violence for the past two years. More than 250 people have been killed and around 60,000 people displaced in the ethnic violence between the tribal Kuki-Zo and the Meitei people in the State that erupted on May 3, 2023. Following the resignation of the Chief Minister of Manipur, President's Rule has been imposed in the state.*

**1. Justice as Fairness (John Rawls):** Advocates for a society where the most vulnerable are protected and inequalities are arranged to benefit the least advantaged.

**2. Reconciliation and Restorative Justice Model:** Focuses on healing and rebuilding relationships between conflicting groups through dialogue, forgiveness, and mutual understanding.

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa:** Post-apartheid South Africa established the TRC to address human rights violations through truth-telling, forgiveness, and reconciliation, promoting healing and unity.

**3. Kohlberg's Moral Development Model:** Stage progression from obedience to universal ethical principles guides communities from fear-based compliance to principled peace.

- **Nagaland Peace Accord (2015):** After decades of insurgency, Naga groups progressed from violent resistance to principled negotiation, showing moral evolution from opposition to shared ethical principles for coexistence.

**4. Noddings' Ethics of Care:** Peace-building must center relational ethics and responsiveness to victims' needs rather than abstract justice principles.

- **Gulabi Gang in Uttar Pradesh:** Women-led movement addressing domestic violence through community intervention demonstrates relational ethics prioritizing responsiveness to suffering over abstract legal principles.

- **Dongria Kondh Resistance to Mining** in Niyamgiri Hills Tribal community's successful protection of sacred

lands established precedent for indigenous self-determination in development decisions.

**5. Human Development Model:** Focuses on improving the well-being, education, and health of all individuals, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities.

- Kerala's focus on education, healthcare, and social welfare has resulted in high human development indices despite lower economic growth. The state's emphasis on literacy and public health serves as a model for human-centric development.

**6. Sustainable Development Model:** Emphasises balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social equity, ensuring long-term viability for future generations.

- **Costa Rica** has become a global leader in sustainable development by prioritizing renewable energy, forest conservation, and eco-tourism, balancing economic growth with environmental protection.

**7. Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful":** Appropriate development respects local cultures while meeting material needs during reconstruction.

- **Himalayan Environmental Trust Sustainable development initiatives** in Uttarakhand employing appropriate technologies respecting local ecological knowledge and cultural values.

**8. Capability Approach (Amartya Sen):** *Development as freedom* requires expanding *substantive choices* for conflict-affected communities beyond security to social participation.

- **Brazil's Bolsa Família Program:** This social welfare program provides financial aid to poor families conditional on children's school attendance and healthcare, enhancing their capabilities and breaking the cycle of poverty.

- **Kerala's Kudumbashree Program:** This women-centered poverty eradication initiative expanded substantive freedoms through self-help groups, enabling choices beyond basic survival to political participation and economic independence.

- **Participatory Development:** Involves local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed.
- 9. Gandhian Development Model:** Stresses self-reliance, rural development, and non-violent conflict resolution, promoting harmony and sustainability.
- **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India:** SEWA, inspired by Gandhian principles, empowers women through self-reliance, cooperative models, and sustainable livelihoods, particularly in rural areas.
- 10. Ethical Leadership:** Encourages leaders to act with integrity, transparency, and accountability, fostering trust and ethical governance.
- **New Zealand under Jacinda Ardern:** Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's leadership during crises, such as the Christchurch mosque shootings and the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplified ethical leadership through empathy, transparency, and decisive action.
- 11. Ubuntu Ethics (African Communalism):** "*I am because we are*" philosophy centers interdependence and reconciliation in community rebuilding.
- **Rwanda's Gacaca Courts** Community-based justice system after genocide emphasized reconciliation through community participation, reflecting "I am because we are" philosophy.
- 12. Buddhist Dependent Origination:** Peace emerges from understanding the interconnectedness of suffering and working to break cycles of violence.
- **Ladakh's Traditional Conflict Resolution Systems:** Buddhist communities employ understanding of interconnectedness to resolve water disputes between villages, breaking cycles of resource conflict.
- Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Development model** cultivates collective practices valuing environmental preservation and cultural integrity over material accumulation alone.

## CASE STUDIES FOR PRACTICE

MAINS GS PAPER IV

**Case Study 1:** You are the head of a multinational humanitarian relief mission deployed to a remote border region experiencing a complex humanitarian emergency. The area is characterized by prolonged armed conflict between ethnic groups, massive population displacement, severe breakdown of local infrastructure and extreme environmental challenges.

Approximately 150,000 people have been displaced from their homes. There is a critical shortage of food, water, and medical supplies. Widespread malnutrition among children and vulnerable populations has been documented. Active conflict zones are disrupting relief efforts. Multiple ethnic and political tensions are complicating rescue operations.

Local militia groups are blocking relief convoys. Sporadic armed confrontations in relief operation zones are also witnessed. Among the locals there is extreme distrust of external intervention. On top of these there has been a breakdown of local governance structures.

In your team there is mounting fear among relief workers, increasing psychological stress. There are conflicting perspectives on mission continuation with potential for team fragmentation. Personal safety concerns seem to overshadow humanitarian objectives. (250 words)

**In such trying circumstances, what will be your response? Examine the qualities of a public servant which will be required to manage the situation.**

### SOLUTION

The case involves a complex humanitarian crisis that requires multiple ethical and administrative frameworks.

### COGNITIVE RESPONSE

- Categorical imperative to protect human dignity. Universal duty to alleviate suffering.
- Understanding moral obligation transcends personal safety.
- Maximum benefit for greatest number. Cost-benefit analysis of risk vs humanitarian impact. Balance team safety with population needs.

- Wisdom in decision-making. Compassion balanced with prudence.

### AFFECTIVE RESPONSE

- Motivation and Courage in the face of danger
- Integrity under pressure
- Empathy towards victim suffering
- Emotional resilience under pressure
- Cultural sensitivity management
- Team morale maintenance
- Stress regulation capacity
- Compassion fatigue awareness
- Fear management
- Moral courage cultivation
- Emotional intelligence application

### BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE

#### 1. Leadership Actions:

- Clear direction setting
- Decisive crisis intervention
- Team cohesion building
- Conflict resolution
- Cultural bridge-building
- Risk mitigation implementation

#### 2. Operational Management:

- Resource optimization
- Security protocol enforcement
- Communication channel establishment
- Local engagement initiatives
- Supply chain protection
- Team safety measures

#### 3. Ethical Implementation:

- Humanitarian principle adherence
- Impartial aid distribution
- Transparency maintenance
- Cultural respect demonstration
- Trust-building actions
- Professional boundary setting

**QUALITIES REQUIRED IN A PUBLIC SERVANT**

**Ethics:**

- Moral courage under pressure
- Impartiality in aid distribution
- Ethical reasoning capacity
- Commitment to public good
- Respect for human dignity
- Humanitarian principles adherence
- Professional ethics maintenance
- Accountability mindset
- Transparency in operations

**Integrity:**

- Incorruptible decision-making
- Steadfast value system
- Unwavering commitment to truth
- Personal-professional congruence
- Moral consistency under stress
- Resource stewardship
- Trust maintenance
- Ethical boundary setting
- Professional conduct standards

**APTITUDE**

**1. Intellectual:**

- Strategic thinking
- Complex problem-solving
- Risk assessment ability
- Cultural intelligence
- Crisis management skills
- Resource optimization
- Analytical decision-making

**2. Emotional:**

- Stress resilience
- Empathy management
- Cultural sensitivity
- Team psychology understanding
- Emotional intelligence
- Conflict resolution capacity
- Psychological fortitude

**3. Administrative:**

- Leadership under pressure
- Resource management
- Team coordination
- Stakeholder engagement
- Communication effectiveness
- Operational efficiency
- Crisis response capability

These qualities together enable ethical service delivery while maintaining personal integrity and operational effectiveness in challenging humanitarian contexts.

**Case Study 2:** Mr. Kumar is well known in his department

for integrity and uprightness. On the merit of his service record he was appointed as the district collector of a remote district. The region is under-developed and needs infrastructure development. Mr. Kumar stated the bid for a bridge over the village river for better connectivity. The bridge construction work was awarded to a contractor after following the due process of open bidding.

The construction work of the bridge was under progress. One day, due to heavy rainfall the construction site got severely affected. The contractor had not taken adequate precautions to protect the construction site from heavy rain.

Mr. Kumar immediately visited the site and took stock of the situation. He directed the contractor to restore the damaged sections, with no extra payment by the government. The contractor was asked to take all necessary steps to protect the construction site from such rainfall in future. However, the contractor was unable to resume work, and the construction work remained stalled for a few weeks. He was sent notice by Mr. Kumar.

Some politicians and contractors with vested interests, unhappy with Mr. Kumar's strict adherence to the rules and regulations, started to spread rumors against Mr. Kumar. They alleged that Mr. Kumar was bribed by the contractor to win the contract for the bridge construction. The rumors gained momentum and reached the higher authorities. Mr. Kumar was called to explain the matter. (250 words)

**(a) How can such incidents affect the functioning of the civil services?**

**(b) What qualities a civil servant needs to have to handle such a situation?**

**SOLUTION**

**IMPACT ON CIVIL SERVICES**

**1. Individual Civil Servants:**

- Professional vulnerability
- Career progression impact
- Psychological stress
- Decision-making hesitancy
- Risk-averse behavior
- Reduced administrative initiative
- Personal reputation damage
- Family life disruption
- Health implications
- Financial stress from legal defense

**2. Institutional Impact:**

- Weakens public trust
- Affects service delivery
- Compromises efficiency
- Demoralizes officers
- Weakens credibility
- Creates systemic inertia
- Reduces innovation
- Impacts policy execution

**3. Administrative Function:**

- Delays development
- Creates procedural delays
- Slows decision-making
- Reduces administrative courage
- Affects implementation
- Increases documentation burden

- Hampers project execution
- Resource allocation inefficiency

**REQUIRED QUALITIES**

**Ethics:**

- Moral courage to face allegations
- Integrity in decision-making
- Professional ethics adherence
- Transparency in operations
- Accountability mindset

**Aptitude:**

- Documentation discipline
- Procedural knowledge
- Communication skills
- Crisis management ability
- Stakeholder management

**Emotional Intelligence:**

- Stress resilience
- Composure maintenance
- Reputation management
- Team morale sustenance
- Public perception handling

**Administrative Skills:**

- Evidence-based decision-making
- Clear record keeping
- Effective communication channels
- Stakeholder engagement
- Professional boundary setting

Integrity-based leadership faces systemic challenges, which require both ethical fortitude and administrative competence to navigate complex situations while maintaining public service effectiveness.

## **PART THREE**

# **ESSAYS OF THE MONTH**

**Selected essays from Rau's GSI students**

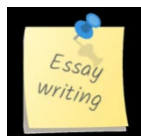
# WHAT IS RIGHT IS NOT ALWAYS POPULAR AND WHAT IS POPULAR IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT.

#PHILOSOPHY

SUBMITTED BY: PRATEEK SHARMA

**Disclaimer:** The viewpoints in the topic are strictly personal of the writer above. The role of Rau's IAS Study Circle is to present the write-up in its original form, hence the study circle neither endorses nor rejects any viewpoint in the submission. The purpose is only to showcase the manner of writing.

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Popularity and right does not always go hand in hand. They sometimes appear

on different sides of coin. Since Ancient times, practice of Sati was popular in Indian society to die in the pyre of husband and those who didn't follow this Popular practice had a socially excluded life that was more miserable.

But it was rationality & Conscience of Raja Ram Mohan Roy to point out the wrong in the practice that denied woman basic human right to live. His Courageous efforts led to the Bengal sati (Regulation) Act, 1829 banning the practice of Sati.

His struggle against practice of Sati, advocating of widows right and widow remarriage is a testament to the fact that What is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right.

But what makes something Popular or right? What are the key qualities or Characteristics to say that this is only popular or this is right ?

## Popularity shaped by norm

The Popular nature of acts are shaped by societal norms, What society collectively believes to be right. For instance, ancient and medieval society believed that Raja is representative of God and his actions are beyond discussions. These perceptions were shaped by societal norms at that time that may not always be right.

Further, popularity is supplemented by cultural and religious norms and these norms are beyond discussions for some. For instance female genital mutilation was considered right by Dawoodi Bohra community even in 21st Century, neglecting its effect on health & bodily autonomy of women.

Additionally, Lack of knowledge and rational Outlook to judge right or wrong adds fuel to illegitimate Popularity of their unfair & unjust practices like prevalence of child marriage about which Akshay Kumar Dutta gave scientific evidence to aware people about ill effects of Child marriage from 19th Century which led to its reduction subsequently.

However, popularity don't guarantee that practice is right: There are multiple principles through which we can identify What is right and what is wrong ?

## Right: always right & universally applied.

The criteria for judging right is that its consequence must yield good. i.e. doesn't harm anyone, and the practice can be universally applied. For instance the practice of sati' was wrong because it denied right to live to widows. Alternatively, if we take women education, it will yield good results giving women Liberty to express herself. Earn financial independence and a place in society.

Further, right practice yields good not for self, but for others too and helps achieve peace &

progress in society. Like Gandhiji's adherence to non-violence & respect even for the oppressor earned him respect among the masses, avoiding violent conflicts i.e. harm to anyone in society.

Furthermore, it must supplement human rights & promote equality in society giving all opportunities to grow oneself as well as society. In this Context, abolition

of Triple Talaq is worth mentioning that was based on gender - inequality & hence wrong against the popular perception.

Let's explore Some key issues and check whether based on these principles, they are right or wrong i.e. popular only.

### **Right but not popular: Contemporary Issues**

First key issue is that of Reservation. Popular opinion about it is it denies meritocracy and promotes race to backwardness. But the broad picture is meritocracy is a Social construct and those with privileges have higher chances to be meritorious. Additionally, reserved classes have been denied these basic privileges of education for centuries that led to their exploitation. For undoing historical injustice, promoting equal protection of injustice, promoting equal protection of law, giving them full opportunity to grow is right.

Secondly issue of constitutional morality vs social morality is in the recent debate because of Sabari mala Temple case. Popular opinion is women in their menstrual cycle must not be allowed to enter temple. but again Universal principles of equality & human rights proved practice is wrong and the right but unpopular thing to do would be equal access to temple entry.

Thirdly, in economic sphere, privatisation of firms have negative Popular opinion that it reduce jobs, denies fair treatment to employees, leads to higher prices for same good. Which is true to some extent but not universal. The right picture is hot universal. The right picture is through privatisation, competition has increased. People are paying less for world quality services as well as reduced expenditure for government. i.e. win-win situation for all (good consequences) proves it may not be popular but it right.

However, multiple issues are there which are popular but not right harming society, that are still prevalent harming society, that are still prevalent reflecting status of society.

### **Popular but nor right: Contemporary issues**

Divisive politics based on narrow vote bank is popular practice in Indian polities. but its multi-faceted disadvantages such as communal violence (Nuh Violence),

cow-vigilantism, race to backwardness (Maratha, Jat reservation demands) divides society making it wrong and a Gandhian Sin of politics without principles.

Similar Gandhian sin such as Commerce without morality as seen in Patanjali's effort to gain out of people's fear to Covid-19. Recent, popular practice of cyberbullying and trolling affecting mental health of Other is not right. Present situations demands harmony between popular & right. The question is How ?

### **Harmony between popularity & right : How?**

The answer is simple, make right practices popular. It can be achieved bottom up approach of raising kid with right ethics to respect elderly, have kind attitude, be honest and above all never harm anyone.

Further adhering to rationality & conscience serves purpose having empathy and compassion for all makes us realise harms of cyber bullying, trolling etc.

Finally, promoting right through leading by example is need of present times. As Mr. U. Sagayam (IAS) did by disclosing financial assets to demonstrate probity encouraging others to do so. To make it popular. This leads us to question what happens if we continue to follow popular and not do right ?

### **Consequences of not following right**

Adhering to popular practices, not following right will lead to Stagnation in society, economy & polity of a nation. As it did with Taliban State of Afghanistan. Their continuous following of Popular morality law led to denying of human rights to women, attracted global criticism and a sliding down economy.

Similarly, Popular social Stigma against LGBTQ + has led to their exclusion, denying them social, economic or political participation and taking toll on their mental health. Their conditions makes us question our rationality. On one hand we are committing ourselves to protect non-living environment to fight climate change which is right but we are not able to give due respect & equal acceptance to LGBTQs people. But we must remain hopeful of our young and rational youth who understand this and is able to fight for their cause as seen in Supriyo

case for legal rights of marry. Inheritance and adoption to LGBTQ+.

In a nutshell, popular perception must be examined through rationality. Universal moral principles and consequences of these practices to prevent social Stagnation and intolerance and promote social harmony. As the abolition of Sati has led to chain reaction of reforms

for women i.e. abolition of child marriage, allowing widow remarriage, education to girls to name a few. Similar rationality and efforts are needed in all spheres of society to build an egalitarian and prosperous society to build an egalitarian and prosperous society following right practices and making them popular.

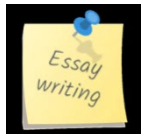
## THE WINDS AND THE WAVES ARE ALWAYS ON THE SIDE OF THE ABLEST NAVIGATOR

#MOTIVATIONAL

SUBMITTED BY: VIDWAN H S

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India after Independence followed a protectionist, socialist, Economic policy. This was known as License Raj. These policies resulted into 1991 economic crisis.

With low exports, low FOI India had balance of payment crisis.

The Prime Minister at the time and finance minister took a bold decision to liberalise Indian economy. They were the navigator of reforms. The winds and waves were the balance of payment crisis, structure of Indian economy and legacy of socialism.

The finance minister used the crisis to highlight the limitations of socialist policies. The Prime Minister took a dramatic decision to wager India gold reserves abroad. Thus they were able to steer the shifts of Indian Economy towards reforms (destination).

The winds and waves in the context can be obstructions or facilitations. The skill of the navigator to overcome the obstruction or utilise the opportunities to reach the

destination. In hindsight it would look as if winds and waves were only the side of navigator.

The ablest navigator is skilled, experienced and has aptitude to analyse the situation. In 2011 cricket World Cup final, India had to chase Sri Lanka's score to lift the world cup. But India lost two early wickets. It was clear that waves and winds were not to India's favour.

But the most ablest navigator in the form of Gambhir's and MS Dhoni analysed the situation and led India to victory (destiny). They analysed the situation and navigated the course.

Therefore we can see navigator needs to be a good leader. Leadership quality determines the morale of the crew in the ship. Even if waves and winds are harsh the mental strength of the crew can help to navigate.

Gandhi during the freedom movement faced repression, violence from the colonial government, illiteracy and lack of political education among masses.

He acted as leader who at times took decisions that were unpopular like calling off Non Cooperative movement. But he boosted the morale of people through constructive work. He was good navigator because he was a good leader.

However many like USSR leader Stalin accused Gandhiji of being collaborator. Many called congress to be safety value, This was because of them the waves and winds of

the colonial repression looked like favouring Gandhi and Congress.

Although it was not favourable but the skill of Gandhiji that made it look that he helped British, however he unified the nation against British.

The navigator when charting unknown waters must be brave and be self confident. For a single mother the hardships of raising a kid alone, facing the bad eyes of the society are the waves and winds. The uncharted waters are the financial independence and working in outside world.

The destination for her is wellbeing of her kids and survival of her family. Her being the navigator has to be brave and self-confident to navigate and reach destination.

Sometimes the winds and waves are actually favourable but the navigation would not be the ablest. When he fails the ship sinks.

During 1970's the Kodak company that was leader in camera business mainly dependent as camera film sales for profit. They had virtual monopoly. In Early 1975, a employee had come up with the idea of digital camera. But fearing loss of sale of films Kodak Management patented the technology but did not start production and sale.

But later different companies like Nikon and Sony started production of cheaper digital cameras. Kodak then lost the market and stopped camera manufacturing in later year. They had favourable winds and waves but their ships sank due to bad navigator at helm.

The able navigator makes unfavourable conditions look favourable whereas, a bad navigator makes favourable conditions look unfavourable.

Our mind is navigator of our lives. The experiences we have, the environment we grow up in, the friends, groups are all the inputs the mind has. The decision we take is navigation through the society.

So for us to be an able navigator we must inculcate values of empathy, compassion, show integrity in life and have aptitude to overcome any hardships.

Without these qualities it becomes difficult to navigate through life. We can see the increasing mental illness among people for whom the waves and winds are overwhelming. With help of therapy, guidance and role modelling they can be trained to overcome their obstacles.

Thus sometimes waves and winds can cause storms and make navigation for every the most ablest navigation difficult. There storms could be so violent that could make the shifts sink.

We saw this happening during COVID-19 pandemic. When humans had achieved so much growth economically, research capability where the highest in history. The humans who had reached moon, succumbed to a virus. The biggest and most developed nations with best healthcare systems failed to contain the virus. This resulted into death of millions across the world. This show the strengths of waves and winds in comparison to most about human navigator.

But we should not forget the fighting back nature of humans. Unlike previous pandemics. We were able to minimise deaths by taking precaution and going thorough lockdown. Humans being the ablest navigators discovered vaccines within couple of years. We also produced in large scale and vaccinated millions.

This shows that, even the wildest storms can be overcome when lesson are learnt. When humans come together to navigate and reach the destination. For them no problem is too big to find desirable outcomes.

Thus waves and winds can appear to be on side or be against, They might be storms and thunder storms, They might even be Tsunamis. The most ablest navigators with courage intelligence and adapting to condition will navigate and reach the destination.

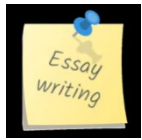
# YOU CANNOT ESCAPE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TOMORROW BY EVADING IT TODAY.

#MOTIVATIONAL

SUBMITTED BY: RISHAV KUMAR CHAUDHARY

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Europe in 1940's was going through a deep crisis. Rising wave of Nazism had pushed entire Europe into instability. It was humble beginning of Hitler's militant nationalism. suddenly he captured Austria and Sudetenland, and all big European power were striving to appease him by evading their responsibility in establishing balance of power and promotion of peace. Consequently, Hitler continued with his expansionist Policy that finally reflected in the form of second world war. It proved very destructive tolling millions of death and debilitate entire world. If they had stopped Hitler earlier than this would not have happened. It signifies the responsibility of tomorrow by evading today.

This ass essay would delve into the importance of today, weight of tomorrow, consequences of evading and correlation among them in life. It would also deal with challenges in performing responsibility.

Evading here can be interpreted as Non-performance of duty, Procrastination for tomorrow while seeking comfort in present, not having sobering realisation of the fact that path to tomorrow is paved with the brick of responsibility laid today.

Weight of tomorrow tempts individual to avoid tackling responsibility hoping that tomorrow will be somehow less demanding or forgiving. But when we avoid our responsibility the pressure mounts and ultimately we feel

sense of being overwhelmed, powerless etc. Procrastination although alluring but a futile endeavour.

In administration, fairness, objectivity, transparency, professional competence are core values and ultimate responsibility of a civil servant. Instances of administrative apathy, Corruption, negligence of duty, lack of objectivity often denigrates the public trust, moral authority and legitimacy to government. It denotes consequences of evading responsibility in future. For instance, corrupt administration and irrational laws led to uproot of monarchy in France. Similarly, mismanagement of COVID-19 w.r.t adequate resources, poor enforcement of guidelines led to surge in cases and led to death of lakhs of people.

In a similar fashion, Environmental integrity demands wise use and nature-friendly, sustainable consumption and Production activities. It endow responsibility on every individual to protect its components. But, non-performance of responsibility reflects in the form of climate change induced threats like disasters, ecosystem, degradation etc. Despite decades of scientific warning, we continued emission of greenhouse gates unabated. Now the entire humanity is facing the wrath of evasion of responsibility in the past

In pursuance to the above, the wave of Industrial revolution 4.0, Artificial intelligence, machine learning is dominating the technological domain today. To tap its potential, skill is required but due to poor capital formation, lack of education facility and availability of training institute, we are lagging behind developed countries. Despite having demographic dividend, our employment rates are high, economic productivity is low, poor labour force participation, high cost of operation, Inadequate innovation and entrepreneurial Spirit etc.

Non-addressal of these issues would lead to insurmountable challenges tomorrow.

Similarly, A historical case study, "decline of Mughal empire" demonstrates the consequence of evading duty, maintenance of equality, treating subjects with humility, development of trade and commerce, strengthening security architecture and friendly relations are some duties of an emperor / state. Mughals after Aurangzeb failed to fulfil these responsibilities and it led to power vacuum in Indian Subcontinent which was later filled by East India company. It led to colonial subjugation and fall of mighty empire.

Moreover, non-adherence to principles of social equity, inclusive growth, economic justice etc led to growth in inequality. Recently published report of world inequality Lab reveals that top 4% of people in India has 40% of wealth. This stark picture manifested the inherent weaknesses in Policies pursued by our growth model.

This reflects mounting challenge due to evading duties in Past.

### **Failure in grasping long-term consequences**

Our failure to grasp consequences is influenced by various individual, social, economic and Political factors.

At individual level, poor moral reasoning, Lack of critical thinking, poor development of cognitive ability, lack of farsightedness, Moderate wisdom, absence of knowledge and experience etc. We often prioritise immediate benefit. Allurement of instant Pleasure eclipse the consideration of future well-being e.g. growing drug abuse, criminal activities, trafficking etc.

At social level, Social and cultural norms Share the behaviour of individual. Various Philosophy even focuses on evasion of duty and negligence of future considerations. e.g Charvaka philosophy advocates getting pleasure in current moment having no regard to future consequences similarly, cultural and traditional role of women contributes to gender inequality as society creates barriers in realising the goal. Social institutions are often reluctant to modify due to inherent belief and unhealthy work culture.

In sphere of economy, we prioritise maximisation of wealth at cost of environment, growing inequality, It reflects in form of anti-Competitive Practices like cartelization, Greenwashing, high carbon emission, poor Social security to labours, Harassment of women at workplace etc. we often neglect. inclusivity, sustainable goals, spiritualism, ecological integrity.

At Political level, unfair electoral practices, horse trading of legislators, criminalisation of Politics, vote bank politics, communal polarisation etc often undermines tenets of democracy, social cohesion, social capital and intra party democracy. It results into Communal riots, electoral rigging, despotism, threat to rights and disregard to rule of law. It manifests consequence of non-fulfilment of responsibility of awakened citizenry, non-performance on part of Judiciary, Civil society, government officials, media etc.

### **Significance of performance of duty today**

It would lead to sustainable development and inclusive growth to all segment of society with the mantra of "No one left behind". It would tackle impending challenges instantly and not letting it to be insurmountable to deal with. It ensure judicious use of resources and thereby led to inter-generational equity. It would ensure consistency and coherence in administration gathering public trust and confidence. It has potential to avert disaster challenges by active preparedness through community partnership, technological advancement etc.

In diplomacy, it has cardinal role to maintain friendly relations with pro-active and constructive engagement. It would lead to enhancement of global Cooperation over issues related to global commons, Space, climate change, terrorism, international law, multilateral reforms etc.

### **Tools to perform responsibility today**

Learning from past is vital component for Performing today as reality of present always get shaped by modalities of past. It endow experience which shapes our wisdom and enhance decision making ability.

Self-awareness, high order of emotional intelligence, Positive attitude endow capability and motivate to fulfil

our duty through sense of obligation is of cardinal importance.

High order of courage, strand determination, Perseverance and sense of commitment to Perform arduous talk are vital component to fulfil responsibility today.

Clarity of thought, mentorship from experts and literature etc. The future depends on what you do today" (Gandhiji). inspires us to proceed with responsibility rather than procrastinate it. Similarly, the case of national integration of case India demonstrates the benefits of performing on time and the consequences are in front of us. At the same time, non-fulfilment of duties of Preventing communal Polarisation led to partition of India.

Bridging all the threads associated with it, it can be concluded that each new day offers a vast potential, each new moment demands Performance. It depends on us whether to understand it's importance and utilise in shaping individual or and common good of to seek current fleeting pleasure. As Benjamin Franklin said "Do not put off till tomorrow what can be done today". It would not only address current challenges but ensure Prosperous and happier tomorrow. It's never too late to begin making positive changes by ensuring that the responsibility of tomorrow are met with action of today.