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**UPSC ACADEMY**

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# From the Director's Desk

*Dear Aspirants,*

It is my pleasure to share with you the April 2026 edition of our Monthly Current Affairs Magazine, PrepPulse. As the preparation cycle progresses, it becomes increasingly important for aspirants to see current affairs not just as daily news, but as a reflection of the changing priorities of governance, economy, and global relations.

March witnessed several important developments of direct relevance for UPSC preparation. The emerging Gulf crisis and rising geopolitical tensions brought renewed attention to India's energy security and the vulnerabilities of global supply chains. The energy crisis, driven by fluctuating crude oil prices, highlighted challenges related to inflation, import dependence, and the need for strategic reserves.

On the social front, discussions around maternity leave and women-centric labour reforms reflected the ongoing focus on inclusive growth and gender equity in the workforce. Simultaneously, debates related to Scheduled Caste (SC) status and sub-categorisation underscored the complexities of social justice, affirmative action, and constitutional safeguards.

At the governance level, judicial interventions and policy discussions continued to emphasize transparency, welfare delivery, and institutional accountability. Collectively, these developments highlight India's balancing act between economic resilience, social equity, and strategic interests in an evolving global order.

This edition is curated to help you understand these developments with depth and clarity. As a UPSC aspirant, your goal is not only to stay updated but to think beyond the news to connect facts, observe patterns, and understand why events unfold the way they do and what they mean for India and the world.

Read this magazine with curiosity, patience, and an analytical mindset. Each page is an opportunity not only to gain information but to develop the analytical thinking that distinguishes a serious aspirant from an average reader.

Stay consistent. Stay informed. And most importantly, keep moving forward.

*Warm regards,*

*Manish Kumar*

*Director*

*Maharaja Agrasain UPSC Academy*

**DEEP DIVE**

# The Global Energy Security

## Introduction

The global energy sector is currently navigating an unprecedented challenge known as the **"Energy Trilemma,"** which demands the **simultaneous balancing of energy security, environmental sustainability, and economic affordability.** This complex paradigm is deeply interwoven into global development, meaning that efforts to enhance one pillar frequently require trade-offs in the others.

- **Energy security** focuses on ensuring a stable, reliable energy supply capable of withstanding geopolitical conflicts, natural disasters, and market fluctuations.
- **Environmental sustainability** necessitates a transition away from fossil fuels toward low-carbon and renewable sources to mitigate climate change and ecological degradation.
- Meanwhile, **economic affordability** ensures that energy remains financially accessible, preventing energy poverty and supporting industrial competitiveness.

## History of Price Hike and Shocks (Energy Crisis)

The modern era of energy crises began in 1971 when crude petroleum prices suddenly jumped from \$1.50 to nearly \$7 per barrel. This was followed by a second major energy crisis in 1979, triggered by the Islamic revolution in Iran, where OPEC increased prices from \$8 to \$35 per barrel due to supply drops and rising demand from India and China. The 1990 Iraq-Kuwait war sparked a third crisis, causing oil prices to soar to \$65 per barrel due to supply disruptions. Conversely, in 1995–1996, petroleum prices collapsed to a historic low of \$10 per barrel

because of the UN's "Oil for food" program, decreased Western demand related to global warming concerns, and the South East Asian economic crisis. In 2001, the California electricity crisis and the IT revolution spurred new petroleum demand. Later, in 2008, crude prices skyrocketed to an unprecedented \$160 per barrel driven by speculative demand from China and India before plummeting back to \$60. Finally, following the COVID-19 pandemic, global energy markets tightened drastically in 2021 due to an extraordinarily rapid economic rebound that exhausted available supplies.

## The 2026 Global Energy Shock

The fragility of the global energy system and the acute importance of energy security were violently exposed during the **2026 Iran War, a conflict that triggered the largest oil supply shock in history.** The crisis began on February 28, 2026, when coordinated U.S. Israeli airstrikes, codenamed "Operation Epic Fury," targeted Iranian military installations and leadership, resulting in the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. In retaliation, Iran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime chokepoint just 21 miles wide.

The closure of the Strait blocked the transit of approximately 20 million barrels of oil per day roughly 20% of global consumption as well as 20% of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade, primarily originating from Qatar. **This blockade trapped not only active energy exports but also over 4 million barrels per day of spare oil production capacity** held by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iraq, and Kuwait, effectively eliminating the global market's primary "relief valve" for price shocks. Consequently, Brent crude oil prices surged dramatically, breaching \$100 to \$120 per barrel, while natural gas prices in Europe nearly doubled to over €60/MWh.

The economic ramifications of this disruption have been systemic and global. **Asian economies, heavily dependent on Middle Eastern energy, bore the brunt of the crisis.** Japan, which imports 95% of its crude from the Middle East, faced a severe widening of its trade deficit and a weakening yen. Europe, already strained by the loss of Russian gas years prior, plunged into a second energy crisis due to the sudden suspension of Qatari LNG, leading to heightened risks of stagflation and a potential technical recession in heavily industrialized nations like Germany and Italy.

Furthermore, the blockade disrupted supply chains far beyond oil and gas. Exports of crucial commodities such as sulfur, helium, urea, and ammonia were halted, threatening semiconductor manufacturing and triggering a spike in global fertilizer costs that raised the specter of a severe global food crisis.

## Impacts on India

**The 2026 Strait of Hormuz crisis has severely impacted India across economic, agricultural, and social dimensions.** As a nation importing 85–90% of its crude oil, **India is highly vulnerable to Middle Eastern supply shocks.** The blockade caused the Indian rupee to plummet to a record low of ₹92 per US dollar, exacerbating import costs and pushing retail inflation to 3.21%.

Beyond energy, **the crisis has threatened India's agricultural output and global food supply chains.** India sources over 40% of its urea and phosphate from the Gulf. The disruption of Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG) forced India to curtail production at three major domestic urea plants.

Socially, the war triggered a massive "reverse migration" of over 220,000 Indian professionals and workers from the Gulf. While this exodus threatened crucial remittance inflows historically totaling up to \$125 billion annually it simultaneously injected "returnee" capital into

India, driving a 14% growth in Tier-2 and Tier-3 real estate markets.

To mitigate these intersecting crises, **India secured a 30-day U.S. emergency waiver to purchase Russian oil** and accelerated the diversification of its energy imports, pivoting to alternative suppliers like the United States and Norway for resources such as LPG.

## Short-Term Mitigation: Demand-Side Measures and Fuel Switching

In response to the unprecedented supply disruption, immediate mitigation strategies became paramount. To stabilize markets, **the International Energy Agency (IEA) coordinated the largest emergency stock draw in its history, releasing 400 million barrels of oil** from member countries' strategic reserves. However, supply-side interventions alone were insufficient to offset the scale of the Hormuz blockade.

To shelter consumers and alleviate economic strain, the IEA outlined a robust menu of **demand-side measures.** Since road transport accounts for roughly 45% of global oil demand, targeted behavioural and policy shifts were prioritized. Key recommendations included expanding remote work to displace commuting, reducing highway speed limits by at least 10 km/h, alternating private car access in large cities based on number plates, and incentivizing a massive shift toward public transportation and car-sharing.

Additional emergency measures involved restricting non-essential business air travel to ease the severely constrained jet fuel market, and shifting petrochemical facilities away from liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to alternative feedstocks to preserve LPG for essential residential cooking.

Simultaneously, the crisis forced a wave of fuel switching, highlighting the tension between sustainability and energy security. Facing

exorbitant oil and gas prices, several nations pivoted to cost-competitive, albeit highly polluting, alternatives. China, leveraging its vast domestic reserves, increased its reliance on coal, while Taiwan and Italy considered reactivating dormant coal-fired power plants to ensure grid stability. While these pragmatic responses helped maintain immediate energy security, they represented a temporary setback for global climate progress.

## **Medium-Term Strategies: Energy Independence, Efficiency, and Nuclear Power**

To insulate themselves from future geopolitical shocks, nations are increasingly prioritizing structural energy independence. Energy efficiency is universally recognized as the fastest, most cost-effective "first fuel" for saving energy and mitigating climate change. By reducing overall energy intensity, economies inherently lower their reliance on imported fuels. Successful implementations include Germany and Ukraine's focus on energy-efficient urban districts (like the bigEE initiative) and Chile's deployment of highly efficient cogeneration plants in public hospitals.

Alongside efficiency, nuclear energy has emerged as a cornerstone for achieving long-term energy independence. Nuclear power operates independently of fluctuating fossil fuel markets because uranium is relatively abundant and historically stable in price. By providing consistent, low-carbon baseload electricity, nuclear plants can perfectly complement the intermittent nature of renewable sources like wind and solar. Replacing coal and gas plants with nuclear reactors significantly reduces a nation's carbon footprint while eliminating exposure to hostile geopolitical chokepoints.

However, the expansion of nuclear energy is not without hurdles. The technology requires massive upfront capital investments and long construction lead times, creating financial

barriers for developing nations. Public opposition stemming from safety concerns and radioactive waste management also persists. Nonetheless, the development of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) presents a promising solution. SMRs offer enhanced safety features, scalability, and flexibility, making them ideal for deployment in remote or off-grid locations, thus driving domestic energy production.

## **Long-Term Transformation: The Net Zero 2050 Roadmap**

While managing the immediate fallout of geopolitical conflicts, the ultimate resolution to the Energy Trilemma lies in a complete transformation of the global energy sector. The IEA's Roadmap to Net Zero by 2050 charts a narrow but achievable pathway to limit the long-term increase in average global temperatures to 1.5°C. This pathway requires a monumental shift away from fossil fuels, which currently supply nearly four-fifths of global energy, down to just over one-fifth by 2050. In this scenario, no new oil and gas fields or coal mines are required beyond those already approved in 2021.

The Net Zero roadmap relies on an unparalleled clean technology push. By 2030, the global economy must scale up solar and wind capacity exponentially, adding 630 gigawatts (GW) of solar photovoltaics and 390 GW of wind annually four times the record levels set in 2020. Furthermore, electrification must become a universal tool for decarbonization, with electric vehicles (EVs) soaring from 5% of global car sales in 2020 to over 60% by 2030.

Achieving this transition necessitates a historic surge in clean energy investment, projected to reach \$5 trillion annually by 2030. While this requires immense capital mobilization, it is expected to add 0.4 percentage points a year to global GDP growth and create 14 million new clean energy jobs by 2030. However, the transition will also yield new security concerns. The market for critical minerals (copper, cobalt,

manganese, rare earth metals) will grow almost sevenfold by 2030, creating new geopolitical vulnerabilities if supply cannot meet burgeoning demand. Moreover, as electricity assumes dominance in the energy mix, grid flexibility, energy storage (advanced batteries), and cybersecurity will become the new frontiers of national security.

## **The Role of the Hydrogen Economy**

A critical component of bridging the gap between intermittent renewables and the deep decarbonization of heavy industry is the development of a robust hydrogen economy. Hydrogen offers the long-term potential to provide an energy system that produces near-zero emissions while utilizing domestically available resources.

Currently, 95% of hydrogen in the U.S. is produced via steam methane reforming, a fossil fuel process that emits substantial carbon dioxide. To align with Net Zero goals, production must shift toward green hydrogen generated by electrolyzers powered by renewable energy, or advanced methods such as biological generation, photoelectrochemical (solar) water-splitting, and high-temperature nuclear thermochemical processes.

Building a hydrogen economy requires overcoming severe technical and infrastructural barriers. Delivery and storage remain the highest hurdles. Hydrogen has a very low volumetric energy density, meaning it requires high-pressure compression (up to 10,000 psi), energy-intensive cryogenic liquefaction, or advanced solid-state storage materials like metal hydrides and carbon nanotubes to be viable for transportation. Furthermore, the industry faces a classic "chicken-and-egg" dilemma: infrastructure developers will not build multi-billion-dollar pipeline and distribution networks without guaranteed consumer demand, and automakers will not mass-produce hydrogen

fuel cell vehicles without a ubiquitous refueling infrastructure.

To solve this, public-private partnerships must establish regional hydrogen demonstrations and "power parks" to validate technologies, reduce manufacturing costs for fuel cells, and establish unified international codes and standards. Hydrogen conversion devices, such as Polymer Electrolyte Membrane (PEM) and Solid Oxide fuel cells, must undergo fundamental materials research to eliminate the need for precious metal catalysts and improve long-term durability.

## **Conclusion**

The global energy landscape is currently trapped in a volatile paradigm where geopolitical fragmentation directly threatens global stability. As demonstrated by the devastating 2026 Strait of Hormuz crisis, the reliance on concentrated fossil fuel chokepoints leaves the global economy highly vulnerable to asymmetric warfare and supply shocks.

To successfully navigate the Energy Trilemma, the global community must recognize that energy security and environmental sustainability are no longer mutually exclusive; they are fundamentally aligned. Transitioning to a Net Zero economy through the aggressive expansion of wind, solar, nuclear, and hydrogen technologies not only mitigates catastrophic climate change but inherently decentralizes and secures energy supplies. By coupling massive technological innovation with targeted demand-side management, international financial cooperation, and inclusive energy justice policies, the world can build a resilient energy infrastructure that is secure, sustainable, and affordable for all.

# The Religious Boundaries of Scheduled Caste Status

## Introduction: The Intersection of Faith, Caste, and Constitutional Rights

The legal boundaries defining who qualifies for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) status in India represent one of the most profound constitutional and sociological puzzles in the country's legal landscape. At the very core of this complex issue lies the intersection of personal religious identity, historical disadvantage, and the State's affirmative action framework. A landmark judgment delivered by the Supreme Court of India in March 2026 has brought these legal boundaries back into sharp focus.

The apex court unequivocally reaffirmed the strict, religion-based prerequisites required to maintain SC status, while simultaneously highlighting the distinctly different, sociology-based criteria that govern ST status. This analysis delves deeply into the constitutional foundations of these classifications, the specifics of the recent judicial pronouncements, the stark legal contrast between SC and ST categorisations, and the broader socio-political implications of these rigid boundaries.

## The Historical and Constitutional Framework of SC Status

The foundational legal architecture governing the identification of Scheduled Castes is firmly anchored in Article 341 and Article 366(24) of the Indian Constitution. Article 341 grants the President of India the authority to officially notify specific castes, races, or tribes as Scheduled Castes, while Article 366(24) legally defines Scheduled Castes as exclusively those groups notified under the presidential order.

These two articles work in tandem to create a self-reinforcing framework, the operational instrument of which is the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. Crucially, Paragraph 3 of the 1950 Order establishes an explicit, uncompromising religious bar. It mandates that no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism can be legally deemed a member of a Scheduled Caste.

When initially drafted, the 1950 Order restricted SC status exclusively to Hindus. The underlying legislative and historical premise was that the oppressive caste system, and specifically the debilitating practice of untouchability, are intrinsically rooted in the Hindu social structure and its traditional hierarchy.

Over the decades, acknowledging that similar social disadvantages and caste-based discrimination persisted within closely related faiths, the government amended the Order. It was expanded to include Sikhs in 1956 and Buddhists in 1990. However, individuals from Dalit communities who convert to Christianity or Islam remain entirely excluded from SC recognition, regardless of their caste of origin or their socio-economic status. The dominant legal reasoning supporting this exclusion posits that Christianity and Islam are doctrinally egalitarian faiths that do not formally recognise or sanction caste distinctions.

## The March 2026 Judgment

The rigidity of these religious boundaries was forcefully upheld and clarified by the Supreme Court on March 24, 2026, in a pivotal case involving Pastor Chinthada Anand Paul versus The State.

## Background of the Dispute

**Chinthada Anand** belonged to the Madiga community, a recognised Scheduled Caste group in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Over a decade prior to the legal dispute, Anand had voluntarily converted to Christianity and was actively serving as a pastor, regularly conducting Sunday prayer meetings in his village of Pittalavanipalem. During one such prayer gathering in 2021, Anand alleged that he and his family were brutally assaulted, threatened with death, and subjected to severe caste-based abuse by individuals including Akkala Ramireddy. In response, Anand filed a criminal complaint invoking the rigorous provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, alongside standard sections of the Indian Penal Code.

**The Legal Battle and High Court Ruling** The accused petitioned the Andhra Pradesh High Court to quash the First Information Report (FIR), presenting a singular, potent legal argument: because Anand had converted to Christianity years ago and functioned publicly as a pastor, he had forfeited his SC status and was therefore legally barred from invoking the SC/ST Act. In April 2025 (also cited as May 2025 in some reports), Justice N Harinath of the High Court ruled in favour of the accused, quashing the criminal proceedings. The High Court observed that the caste system is fundamentally "alien to Christianity" and that the SC/ST Act is a "protective legislation" meant exclusively for legitimate members of the SC/ST communities. The court noted that merely possessing an old SC certificate becomes legally irrelevant once religious conversion and the active practice of a new faith are firmly established.

**The Supreme Court's Pronouncements** Anand appealed to the Supreme Court, but a bench comprising Justices P.K. Mishra and Manmohan (also reported alongside Justice N.V. Anjaria) dismissed his plea, firmly upholding the High Court's decision. The apex court delivered several critical legal interpretations:

- **An Absolute Bar with No Exceptions:** The Court declared that the religious bar under the 1950 Order is "absolute" and admits absolutely no exceptions. It ruled that professing a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism while simultaneously claiming SC membership are legal positions that are "mutually exclusive and contrary to the Constitutional scheme".
- **Immediate Termination of Status:** The bench clarified that the loss of SC status upon conversion is not a gradual socio-legal process but an instant consequence. A Hindu Dalit's conversion to Christianity or Islam leads to the "automatic and immediate termination of all eligibility for statutory benefits, protections, reservations, preferences and entitlements" meant for Scheduled Castes. The Court stated that the individual's caste status "stood eclipsed in the eyes of law" the very moment conversion occurred, leading to an "immediate and complete loss" of SC identity.
- **Legal Definition of "Professing":** A highly consequential aspect of the judgment was the Court's strict definition of what it means to "profess" a religion under the 1950 Order. The Court determined that professing goes far beyond mere private belief or personal conviction; it requires a public, outward declaration or manifestation of faith. In Anand's case, his active role as a pastor—publicly leading prayers and organising religious gatherings—was deemed conclusive, admitted proof that he remained a Christian on the date of the occurrence. The court noted he had neither reconverted to his original faith nor been accepted back into the Madiga community.
- **Inapplicability of Protective Legislation:** Because the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act directly adopts the constitutional definitions of Scheduled

Castes, the religious bar automatically extends to the legal remedies and protections under the Act. Consequently, once a person's social membership to the SC community ends through conversion, the legal protections tied to that membership instantly end as well.

## The Divergent and Sociological Framework for Scheduled Tribes

While the Supreme Court rigidly enforced the religious boundaries for Scheduled Castes, it took great care to contrast this framework with the laws governing Scheduled Tribes (STs). The Court explicitly clarified that religious conversion is not the sole criterion for determining whether a person has lost their membership in an ST community.

Unlike the SC Order, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, contains absolutely no religion-based exclusion. The legal and sociological definition of a 'tribe' differs fundamentally from that of a 'caste'. Referring to the 2004 precedent *State of Kerala versus Chandramohan*, the Court reiterated that a tribe is defined legally as a social group where members speak a common dialect, possess a single government, and act together for a common purpose.

Therefore, an individual's ST identity does not depend on their personal religion, but on their continued sociological membership within the tribal community. The Court established that an individual only loses their ST status if their religious conversion or subsequent conduct results in a "complete severance from the tribal way of life and loss of community recognition". The foundational basis for ST status is eroded only when a person completely abandons customary practices, social organisation, and community life, and is no longer accepted by the tribe.

Conversely, if these essential attributes "demonstrably subsist or are genuinely re-established" and accepted by the community, a claim to ST status cannot be mechanically rejected simply because the individual embraced a new religion. This makes the SC and ST frameworks legally distinct and fundamentally different in their treatment of religious conversion.

## Constitutional Conflicts and Socio-Political Implications

The stark contrast in how the state treats SC and ST converts, alongside the rigid exclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims, has fueled a profound and ongoing constitutional debate regarding equality and justice.

### The Ground Reality vs. Constitutional Design

The current legal framework operates on the doctrinal assumption that conversion to egalitarian religions like Christianity and Islam automatically erases the stigma and disadvantage of caste. However, petitioners and social activists argue that this ignores the lived ground reality. Sociological evidence strongly suggests that caste-based discrimination, historical disadvantages, and severe social exclusion often persist vigorously even after an individual converts to a new faith.

**Fundamental Rights at Stake** Critics argue that denying SC status based solely on religious affiliation violates core fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. Specifically, it raises severe questions under **Article 14 (Equality before Law)**, as it overtly discriminates between Dalits facing similar social prejudices solely based on their faith; **Article 15 (Non-discrimination)**, which explicitly prohibits the state from discriminating against citizens on religious grounds; and **Article 25 (Freedom of Religion)**, as the threat of instantly losing vital socio-economic benefits, reservations in education and jobs, and legal protections acts as

a highly coercive deterrent against voluntary religious conversion.

### **Policy Dilution and "Fraud on the Constitution"**

Conversely, there is tremendous political and social opposition to expanding the SC list to include non-Hindu Dalits. Existing SC communities and policymakers express deep concern that including Dalit Christians and Muslims would lead to the severe dilution of benefits, heavily straining already limited reservation quotas and state resources.

Furthermore, courts have occasionally noted that claiming affirmative action benefits—which are specifically designed to address the historical experience of untouchability within the Hindu fold—while simultaneously professing a faith that formally rejects the caste system, amounts to a "fraud on the Constitution".

## **The Way Forward**

The March 2026 Supreme Court judgment definitively clarifies and enforces the current letter of the law, establishing that religious conversion carries severe, immediate legal consequences for SC identity. However, it does not resolve the broader, simmering socio-political debate surrounding this issue.

Recognising the immense complexity of this subject, the Government of India established a commission headed by former Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan in 2022. The commission, whose tenure has been extended multiple times, is currently tasked with investigating the historical, social, and economic realities of Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam to determine if they should finally be included in the SC list.

Moving forward, resolving this deep-seated friction will require a multifaceted, evidence-based approach. Crucially, there is an urgent need for comprehensive, empirical studies to accurately document the current socio-

economic status and lived experiences of Dalit converts, addressing the severe data deficiency that currently plagues policy decisions. Based on this empirical evidence, policymakers and the legislature may need to consider a formal review of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, adapting it to contemporary social realities.

If fully integrating non-Hindu Dalits into the existing SC list proves too politically or socially contentious, the state might explore alternative mechanisms, such as targeted welfare measures or distinct sub-quotas, to ensure that affirmative action is delivered equitably. Ultimately, the overarching goal of the state and the judiciary must remain the complete eradication of historical disadvantage and the fostering of a genuinely equal and inclusive society.

# Maternity and Reproductive Rights in India

## Introduction

In a landmark ruling that significantly advances gender equality and reproductive rights, the Supreme Court of India in *Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. Union of India* (2026) fundamentally redefined the scope of maternity benefits for adoptive mothers. **The Court struck down Section 60(4) of the Code on Social Security, 2020, which arbitrarily restricted the 12-week maternity benefit to women who adopted a child below the age of three months.** Recognizing that the statutory adoption processes in India, governed by the Juvenile Justice Act and CARA Regulations, usually significantly exceed three months, the Court declared this age cap unconstitutional, discriminatory, and practically unworkable.

The judgment emphatically established that maternity protection is a basic human right rooted in Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. The Court observed that motherhood transcends biological childbirth; it fundamentally encompasses the time required to nurture an emotional bond and meaningfully integrate a child into a new family environment. Consequently, the Supreme Court extended maternity benefits to all adoptive mothers, regardless of the adopted child's age. Furthermore, the Court critically highlighted how the absence of universally mandated paternity leave reinforces archaic gender roles, urging the government to recognize shared parenting through statutory paternity leave as a social security benefit.



## The Evolution of Maternity and Reproductive Rights in India: A Constitutional and Statutory Analysis

The landscape of maternity and reproductive rights in India has witnessed a profound and progressive transformation over the decades. Historically viewed as a discretionary statutory employment benefit, maternity protection has now evolved into an inalienable constitutional right firmly rooted in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. This shift embodies a deep commitment to securing women's reproductive autonomy, ensuring substantive equality in the workplace, and safeguarding maternal and child health.

The trajectory of these rights is characterized by ambitious legislative milestones, most notably the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017, alongside a series of transformative judicial pronouncements that have dismantled discriminatory administrative practices and broadened the legal understanding of family and motherhood. This analytical write-up explores the structured evolution of maternity rights in India, critically examining statutory advancements, the constitutionalization of reproductive autonomy, inherent economic and structural challenges, and the broader comparative global frameworks that influence Indian jurisprudence.

## Statutory Advancements: The 2017 Amendment

The foundational legal framework for maternity protection in India is anchored by the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, which was designed to protect female employment during childbirth by ensuring paid absence and job security. A

watershed moment in this statutory evolution was the enactment of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, which significantly expanded these protections, catapulting India into the ranks of countries with the most progressive maternity leave durations globally. The landmark amendment augmented paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks for the first two children, while maintaining the 12-week entitlement for women with two or more surviving children.

Importantly, the 2017 amendment acknowledged non-traditional pathways to motherhood. It extended a 12-week maternity leave to "commissioning mothers"—biological mothers who use surrogacy—and to women legally adopting a child below the age of three months. The legislation also introduced modern workplace mandates, such as an enabling "work from home" provision post-maternity leave, depending on the mutual agreement between the employer and the employee.

Furthermore, it mandated the establishment of crèche facilities for enterprises employing 50 or more workers, permitting mothers four daily visits to nurse and care for their infants. These provisions were designed to facilitate the seamless continuance of women in the workforce, fundamentally recognizing that childbirth is a natural incident of life that should never detract from a woman's purpose of employment.

## **The Constitutionalization of Maternity Rights**

While statutory amendments laid a robust groundwork, the Indian judiciary has played a revolutionary role in elevating maternity leave from a legislative grace to a constitutional imperative. This jurisprudential shift heavily draws from international conventions ratified by India, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

(CEDAW), and the International Labour Organization's Maternity Protection Convention.

In the landmark 2025 judgment of *K. Umadevi v. State of Tamil Nadu*, the Supreme Court orchestrated a constitutional revolution by striking down state rules that denied maternity leave to a woman for her third child, born from a second marriage. The Court unequivocally ruled that maternity leave is a direct facet of a woman's reproductive rights and right to life under Article 21, establishing that administrative convenience cannot override constitutional imperatives. The judgment elevated human dignity to a meta-constitutional principle, dictating that state policies cannot reduce women to mere statistics.

Furthermore, the *Umadevi* decision successfully harmonized competing state interests. While recognizing population control as a legitimate state objective, the Court held that the objective of managing a small family norm and the goal of granting maternity benefits are not mutually exclusive. Policies promoting a two-child norm cannot be mechanically applied to deprive a mother of her fundamental rights, especially when such rules treat different factual circumstances—like custody arrangements or remarriage—identically, thereby violating the right to equality under Article 14.

## **Redefining Motherhood and Evolving Family Structures**

The evolution of maternity rights in India has also driven a critical re-evaluation of traditional, monolithic concepts of family and motherhood. The Supreme Court has actively bridged the gap between rigid law and dynamic societal realities through the purposive interpretation of welfare legislations. In *Deepika Singh v. Central Administrative Tribunal* (2022), the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a woman who was denied maternity leave for her first biological child because her spouse had two children from a

previous marriage, for whom she had previously availed child care leave.

The Court emphatically observed that atypical family structures such as blended families, single-parent households, or queer relationships are equally deserving of protection under social welfare legislation. The black letter of the law must not be weaponized to disadvantage families that depart from traditional norms.

This expansive view of motherhood was further solidified in the 2026 judgment of *Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. Union of India*. The Supreme Court struck down Section 60(4) of the Social Security Code, 2020 (which mirrored the 2017 amendment), because it arbitrarily restricted the 12-week maternity benefit to adoptive mothers only if the adopted child was below three months of age.

The Court profoundly recognized that motherhood is not merely a biological process confined to the womb, but encompasses the conscious nurturing of an emotional bond and the complex integration of a child into a new family. Noting the lengthy statutory adoption processes in India, which often surpass three months, the Court ruled that an age cap was discriminatory, unworkable, and violative of Articles 14 and 21, thereby extending maternity benefits to all adoptive mothers irrespective of the child's age.

## **Structural Flaws and Economic Repercussions**

Despite these monumental progressive strides, India's maternity benefit framework is hindered by significant structural and economic flaws. A glaring anomaly is that India is almost unique globally in placing the entire financial burden of maternity leave squarely on the employer. This policy design has inadvertently triggered severe repercussions for female employment. Studies estimate that this mandate has fostered hiring practices that actively discriminate against

women of childbearing age, potentially leading to between 11 to 18 lakh job losses for women in the short to medium term.

Attempts by the government to mitigate this burden have been heavily criticized for lacking scale and ambition. Proposals to reimburse employers for only 7 weeks of the 26-week mandate are undermined by restrictive conditions—such as limiting eligibility to female employees earning less than ₹15,000 who have been members of the Employees' Provident Fund Organization for at least a year. Furthermore, the existing legal apparatus largely excludes the unorganized and informal sectors. Since the vast majority of India's female workforce engages in informal labor, millions are left without basic reproductive rights protection, contrasting sharply with nations like the Philippines, which extend paid maternity benefits to informal workers regardless of marital status or citizenship.

## **Comparative Perspectives and the Mandate for Paternity Leave**

A comparative global analysis underscores the urgent need for systemic reform in India. Developed nations consistently rely on state-funded or socially insured models to protect women's employment. In Sweden, Canada, and the United Kingdom, extended maternity and parental leaves are substantially funded by the government, effectively eliminating the economic disincentive for employers to hire women.

## **The absence of universally mandated statutory paternity leave.**

While certain Central Civil Services rules provide 15 days of paternity leave to government servants, private sector participation remains strictly voluntary. In the *Hamsaanandini Nanduri* judgment, the Supreme Court critically observed that the absence of paternity leave reinforces

archaic gender roles that exclusively attribute caregiving to mothers.

By undervaluing a father's presence during a child's nascent development, the legal system fails to foster shared parenting and places undue career pressures entirely on women. The Court urged the creation of a legally recognized paternity leave as a social security benefit to dismantle structural inequalities.

## **Conclusion**

The evolution of maternity and reproductive rights in India reflects a remarkable journey from basic labor welfare to the realization of substantive, inalienable constitutional rights. Propelled by transformative judicial interpretations, maternity leave is now fundamentally intertwined with a woman's right to life, dignity, equality, and reproductive autonomy. However, to truly realize the promise of these constitutional guarantees, India's statutory framework requires a serious socio-economic recalibration.

India must urgently pivot away from a purely employer-funded model towards a state-subsidized or social insurance system to prevent workplace discrimination and secure women's labor force participation. Moreover, expanding universal coverage to the informal sector, implementing robust crèche infrastructures, and establishing statutory shared parental leave are essential legislative imperatives. Only by harmonizing these legal entitlements with practical economic support can India ensure an equitable, inclusive, and empowering environment for all working mothers.

# NEWS GIST

# ECONOMY

## Energy Security and Geopolitics

### Global Energy Vulnerability: The IEA Warning

The head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) has warned of a potential oil supply shock that could be more severe than the historic crises of the 1970s. This looming crisis is driven by geopolitical tensions in key oil-producing regions, post-pandemic demand-supply mismatches, and OPEC+ production strategies that involve calibrated output cuts to tighten global supply. Furthermore, energy transition policies have led to an underinvestment in fossil fuels without sufficient renewable energy substitution to fill the gap.

A major oil shock threatens global economic stability by fuelling inflation and potentially triggering stagflation. As a major oil importer, India faces the specific risks of rising import bills, increased pressure on its current account deficit, and severe inflation in fuel and essential goods.

### India's Strategic Pivot: Tapping Alternative Crude Supplies

India currently imports approximately 85% of its crude oil requirements, traditionally relying heavily on West Asian nations like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. However, ongoing conflicts in West Asia and threats near the Strait of Hormuz have created severe risks to regional supply chains and shipping.

To ensure continuous fuel availability and price stability, India is actively diversifying its crude sources. This strategy involves forging new partnerships with producers in the US, Russia,

Latin America, and Africa. Diversification reduces India's vulnerability to regional conflicts, helps manage domestic inflation, and enhances the nation's strategic autonomy and bargaining power. However, sourcing from alternative regions can entail higher transportation and insurance costs, alongside logistical challenges in adjusting refinery configurations to process different types of crude oil.

### Bolstering Domestic Resilience: Boosting LPG Production

Addressing vulnerabilities at home, the Government of India has urged domestic refiners such as Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindustan Petroleum to increase the production of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). This push responds to rising domestic demand and fluctuating global energy prices, aiming to reduce dependence on volatile international markets.

Expanding the domestic LPG supply is also crucial for sustaining social welfare schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which significantly improves health outcomes by mitigating indoor air pollution in rural households. While enhancing domestic production stabilises consumer prices and reduces government subsidy burdens, existing refinery infrastructure may struggle to scale up without high capital investments. To achieve this, refineries may need to adopt advanced technological processes, such as hydrocracking and residue upgrading, to improve their LPG yields.

## The Way Forward

To navigate the dual challenges of immediate energy security and long-term climate commitments, India must adopt a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach.

- **Strategic Reserves:** India must strengthen and expand its Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to serve as a buffer against sudden supply disruptions.
- **Domestic Exploration:** There is a pressing need to boost indigenous oil and gas exploration to limit import dependency.
- **Energy Transition:** In the long term, India must gradually shift away from fossil fuels by expanding clean energy technologies like solar, wind, and green hydrogen. Similarly, electric cooking solutions and biogas should be promoted as greener alternatives to traditional LPG.
- **Energy Diplomacy:** Strengthening international cooperation through bodies like the IEA and securing long-term supply agreements will be vital.

The current geopolitical landscape underscores the fragile nature of global energy systems. A balanced strategy that secures short-term crude and LPG supplies while aggressively accelerating the transition to renewable alternatives will be the defining challenge for India's sustainable development and energy resilience in this decade.



# Polymer Supply Disruption and Plastic Price Surge

## Context

Ongoing geopolitical conflicts in West Asia have disrupted global polymer supplies, which threatens to push plastic prices up by as much as 60%.

## Macroeconomic & Industrial Impacts:

- **Cost-Push Inflation:** Because India relies significantly on polymer imports, disrupted supplies will increase input costs for the packaging, automotive, construction, and FMCG sectors. This will likely inflate the prices of daily-use consumer goods and reduce industrial profit margins.
- **Trade Balance Stress:** Higher raw material costs will inflate India's import bills for petrochemical products.

## Strategic Opportunities:

- **Domestic Boost:** Indian domestic petrochemical firms may financially benefit from the higher global market prices.
- **Sustainability Push:** Supply vulnerability strongly incentivizes innovation in circular economy practices, recycling, and the development of biodegradable alternatives.

## Way Forward

To build supply chain resilience, India must focus on:

- **Diversification & Capacity Expansion:** Sourcing polymers from multiple regions and boosting domestic petrochemical manufacturing under the "Make in India" initiative.

- **Strategic Reserves:** Establishing buffer stocks for critical raw materials to mitigate future dependency risks.

## Conclusion

While the supply shock poses short-term economic challenges, it offers a vital opportunity for India to reduce import dependency and build a resilient, sustainable petrochemical sector.

# Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA): Propelling India's Manufacturing Hub Aspirations

## Context

The Union Cabinet recently approved the **Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA)** with a financial outlay of ₹33,660 crore. The scheme aims to develop 100 mega plug-and-play industrial parks across India by 2032. Inspired by China's highly successful industrial cluster model, this initiative is a strategic step toward making India the world's third-largest manufacturer.

## Key Features of the Scheme

- **Plug-and-Play Infrastructure:** Designed to drastically improve the ease of doing business, these parks will offer pre-approved land equipped with core infrastructure (internal roads, ICT, underground utilities) and value-added facilities like testing labs and warehousing.
- **Scale and Funding:** Parks spanning 100 to 1,000 acres will receive financial backing of up to ₹1 crore per acre. Additionally, up to 25% of the project

cost will be provided to develop external infrastructure.

- **Sustainable and Connected:** Aligning with the PM GatiShakti principles, the parks will ensure multimodal connectivity and seamless last-mile access. They will emphasize green energy and feature integrated underground utility corridors for a no-dig environment.
- **Implementation:** Spearheaded by the National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC), the project will utilize a "challenge mode" to select reform-oriented proposals in partnership with states.

## Strategic Significance

- **Scaling Global Output:** India currently holds a 3% share in global manufacturing output, significantly lagging behind China's 31.6%. BHAVYA targets elevating this share to 4% by 2030 by clustering sectors like textiles, chemicals, and medical devices.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** By enhancing domestic manufacturing capacity, BHAVYA builds systemic resilience against global supply chain shocks—such as the recent West Asian geopolitical conflicts that disrupted polymer imports and inflated domestic plastics prices.
- **Economic Multiplier:** Ready-to-use infrastructure will attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), support MSMEs, and create millions of direct and indirect jobs, fostering inclusive regional industrialization.

## Challenges and Way Forward

Implementing mega-projects comes with inherent challenges, including complex land acquisition, the risk of socio-economic displacement, and potential ecological impacts. There is also a risk of regional imbalance if

investments disproportionately favor already developed states.

To mitigate these, policymakers must prioritize transparent land acquisition with fair rehabilitation and promote green industrial practices. Coupled with robust workforce skill development and strong Centre-State coordination, BHAVYA can serve as the cornerstone of an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, ensuring long-term global competitiveness.

## India's Calibrated Shift in Chinese Foreign Investment Policy

### Why in News

The Union Cabinet has relaxed specific provisions of the 2020 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rules, which previously restricted investments from countries sharing a land border with India. This move signals a calibrated reopening to Chinese capital driven by both economic and strategic considerations.

### Background

Following border tensions with China in 2020, India amended its FDI policy to mandate the government approval route for investments originating from neighboring nations. The primary objective at the time was to prevent the opportunistic takeover of vulnerable Indian companies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Significance and Advantages

This policy tweak holds immense significance for India's economic revival, aiming to attract fresh capital into key sectors such as technology and manufacturing. It will help India integrate more seamlessly into global value chains and provide a much-needed boost to Indian startups, a sector

where Chinese venture capital was historically significant. The overarching pros include increased investment flows that support job creation and infrastructure growth, crucial technology transfers offering access to advanced manufacturing expertise, and enhanced global competitiveness through the cost efficiency and scale of Chinese firms.

### Challenges and Concerns

Despite the economic benefits, the shift presents several challenges. National security concerns remain a top priority due to potential exposure in sensitive sectors. Additionally, there are severe data privacy issues, particularly within the digital and telecommunication sectors. India also faces the risk of economic dependence on Chinese capital and high political sensitivity fueled by ongoing border disputes.

### Way Forward

India is likely to adopt a strategy of selective liberalisation, restricting approvals to non-sensitive sectors while implementing stronger screening mechanisms for security risks. This easing of FDI rules reflects a pragmatic approach, balancing the need for foreign investment to fuel economic growth with the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* push for domestic capacity building and the safeguarding of national strategic autonomy.

## RBI's ₹50,000 Crore Liquidity Injection via G-Secs

### Context

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently executed its second tranche of **Government Securities (G-Secs) purchases worth ₹50,000 crore** to infuse liquidity into the banking system amid evolving economic conditions.

## Mechanism

Utilizing **Open Market Operations (OMO)**, the RBI buys G-Secs, which are government bonds originally used to finance fiscal deficits. When the RBI purchases these securities, it injects money directly into the banking system, thereby increasing overall liquidity.

## Significance & Benefits

This proactive intervention serves as a crucial counter-cyclical tool during economic slowdowns. It ensures banks have adequate funds to boost credit growth, controls bond yields for interest rate stability, and encourages investments through lower borrowing costs.

## Challenges

Injecting excess money carries inherent risks, primarily the potential to fuel inflation and weaken the rupee. Additionally, if overall credit demand remains weak, the extra liquidity may have a limited impact on actual economic growth, while potentially creating a moral hazard where banks over-rely on RBI support.

## Way Forward

The RBI must maintain a calibrated approach to balance inflation and growth concerns, aligning its actions carefully with the government's fiscal policy and borrowing. Sustained economic growth will ultimately depend on macroeconomic stability and effective credit transmission.



# Foreign Portfolio Investor (FPI) Outflows: Causes and Macroeconomic Impacts

## Context

Recently, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have been heavily selling Indian equities, triggering a noticeable decline in the stock markets and the depreciation of the Indian rupee against the US dollar. Because FPIs are highly sensitive to global economic variables like inflation and interest rates, these outflows highlight India's reliance on foreign capital for market stability.

## Key Drivers of FPI Outflows

The ongoing capital flight is driven by a combination of global and domestic factors:

- **Global Headwinds:** Rising US interest rates and a strong US dollar are making emerging markets less attractive, prompting investors to shift their money to safer, higher-yielding US assets. Additionally, geopolitical uncertainties, such as the conflicts in West Asia, have heightened global risk aversion.
- **Domestic Factors:** Indian stocks are currently viewed as having high valuations. Following a strong rally in the Indian markets, foreign investors are engaging in profit booking to cash out their gains.

## Impact Analysis

- **Challenges (Cons):** FPI outflows exert significant currency pressure, leading to a weaker rupee, which in turn increases

the cost of essential imports like crude oil and raises inflation risks. It also creates external sector stress by impacting the current account deficit and forex reserves, exposing the risks of overdependence on foreign capital.

- **Opportunities (Pros):** On the flip side, a depreciated rupee makes Indian exports more competitive. Furthermore, the resulting market correction helps adjust overvalued stocks, creating an opportunity for domestic investors to purchase equities at lower prices.

## Way Forward and Conclusion

Current FPI outflows reflect global financial shifts rather than domestic economic weakness. To mitigate these short-term challenges, the RBI and the government must ensure stable macroeconomic policies and robust forex reserve management. Strategically, India should reduce its reliance on FPIs by diversifying capital sources through domestic investors and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Ultimately, India's strong long-term fundamentals driven by solid growth and demographics will ensure stability and inevitably attract foreign investors back.

# SEBI Strengthens Conflict of Interest Norms

## Context

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) recently approved recommendations from a high-level panel to review and tighten conflict-of-interest norms among its members and officials, aiming to enhance institutional integrity.

## Key Recommendations

- **Enhanced Disclosures & Recusal:** Mandatory disclosure of all financial interests, including indirect holdings, and stricter recusal norms for officials facing potential conflicts.
- **Post-Tenure Restrictions:** Introduction of cooling-off periods that restrict senior officials from immediately joining private sector entities after their tenure.
- **Oversight:** Strengthening internal ethics committees to independently monitor compliance and ensure accountability.

## Significance

This development aligns India's financial governance with global best practices seen in advanced markets like the US and UK. Crucially, it mitigates the risk of "regulatory capture"—where private interests influence public policy—thereby enhancing SEBI's credibility and bolstering trust among retail and institutional investors.

## Challenges

Implementation faces hurdles, particularly in tracking real-time disclosures and detecting indirect conflicts routed through family or proxies. Furthermore, there is a risk that overly stringent rules may discourage experienced professionals from joining SEBI, necessitating a delicate balance between rigorous integrity and effective talent acquisition.

## Way Forward

To ensure seamless enforcement, SEBI should leverage technology-driven solutions, such as AI-based systems, to monitor disclosures and flag anomalies. Establishing an autonomous oversight authority, clearly defining "conflict of interest" to remove ambiguity, and publishing periodic compliance reports will further cement

transparency. Ultimately, these reforms are vital for safeguarding investor interests and reinforcing India's stature as a robust global financial market.

# Bihar Enforces Mandatory Permits for Minor Mineral Transport

## Why in News?

The Bihar government has mandated carrying permits or passes for the transportation of minor minerals, such as sand, stone, and gravel. This measure aims to curb illegal mining activities and enhance the regulation of the state's mineral resources.

## Background

Under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, state governments are empowered to regulate minor minerals, which include sand, gravel, brick earth, and stones. Historically, illegal mining in Bihar has led to severe environmental degradation and substantial revenue losses.

## Significance and Advantages

- **Better Regulation and Revenue:** The permit system tracks mineral transport, thereby preventing tax evasion, ensuring proper royalty collection, and reducing black-market activities.
- **Environmental Protection:** It helps control the over-exploitation of riverbeds and promotes the sustainable use of natural resources.
- **Improved Law and Order:** The move aims to dismantle mafia control over the local mining sector, promoting

transparency and accountability in governance.

## Key Challenges

- **Implementation Hurdles:** Monitoring mineral transport across rural and remote areas presents significant logistical challenges.
- **Economic Impact:** Increased paperwork, compliance costs, and potential supply delays could inflate construction expenses.
- **Corruption Risks:** Bureaucratic bottlenecks may lead to the misuse of power by local administrative authorities.

## Way Forward

To ensure the reform's success, a robust digital tracking system incorporating e-permits and GPS monitoring of transport vehicles is essential. Strict enforcement with heavy penalties for violations, coupled with community participation through local bodies, can improve oversight. Furthermore, introducing transparency measures to reduce human discretion will mitigate corruption risks.

## Conclusion

Bihar's mandatory permit reform is a vital step toward sustainable resource management and improved governance. By leveraging technology, strictly enforcing rules, and scientifically assessing extraction limits, the state can effectively balance infrastructural development with environmental conservation and revenue generation.

# POLITY

## The Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, 2026

### Introduction

The recent passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, has reignited critical debates on gender identity, inclusivity, and the trajectory of legal reforms in India. Passed in the Lok Sabha amidst a dramatic opposition walkout, the legislation highlights a clash between legislative intent and concerns over adequate stakeholder consultation.

### Global and Historical Context

Debates surrounding gender have historically been shaped by feminist theories distinguishing biological sex from the socially constructed roles of gender, countering the idea that "biology is destiny". In recent years, an expanded understanding of non-binary and genderqueer identities has challenged these traditional binaries. However, this shift has faced a global conservative backlash, exemplified by the reintroduction of a two-gender policy by the US government in 2025 and judicial rulings in the UK excluding transgender women from single-sex spaces.

### Key Provisions of the 2026 Bill

In India, the 2026 Bill proposes sweeping changes that narrow the legal definition of a transgender person. It removes previously included categories such as "trans-man," "trans-woman," and "genderqueer," explicitly

excluding self-perceived sexual identities. The Bill retains socio-cultural identities like *kinner* or *hijra* and incorporates new categories, including eunuchs and individuals forced into a transgender identity via mutilation or castration.

Crucially, the legislation modifies the process of gender recognition. Moving away from the 2019 Act's allowance for self-declaration, the 2026 Bill mandates that a District Magistrate will issue an identity certificate only after examining recommendations from a designated medical board headed by a Chief or Deputy Chief Medical Officer. The Bill also introduces stringent punishments, including life imprisonment, for kidnapping or forcing an individual to assume a transgender identity or engage in forced begging.

### Controversies and Lived Realities

The opposition's walkout was largely driven by concerns that the Bill includes regressive provisions, particularly the shift away from pure self-identification, which many see as undermining the autonomy guaranteed by the landmark 2014 NALSA judgment.

Furthermore, while India has seen progressive judicial milestones such as the decriminalization of Section 377 and the recognition of privacy and bodily autonomy stark gaps remain in enforcement. Transgender individuals continue to face systemic hurdles, including the lack of horizontal reservations in education and employment, and delays in crucial healthcare benefits like the Ayushman Bharat TG Plus card.

### The Way Forward

Achieving true equality requires more than robust legal frameworks; it demands the

eradication of social stigma. Meaningful progress will depend on trans-sensitive training for healthcare and administrative professionals, inclusive policy-making, and a steadfast commitment to a dignity-based framework for all citizens.

## Supreme Court on Women in the Armed Forces

### Context

The Supreme Court (SC) of India has recently highlighted the persistent, long-term bias against women officers in the armed forces, bringing the struggle between traditional institutional norms and constitutional equality back into national focus. The Court has delivered a landmark judgment addressing the systemic discrimination faced by women Short Service Commission Officers (SSCWOs).

### Key Directives and Judicial Observations

Historically, women were primarily inducted into the armed forces through the Short Service Commission, which limited their career progression, access to command roles, and pension benefits compared to male officers.

- The SC observed a deeply entrenched "unequal opportunity structure" where women were systematically denied key appointments and career-enhancing training courses.
- Furthermore, the Court noted significant flaws in the evaluation system, stating that women's Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) were often graded casually or given lower scores, while higher grades were informally reserved

for male officers eligible for Permanent Commission (PC).

To rectify this structural inequality, the SC has upheld the entitlement to PC for eligible women officers, ruling that their inclusion in the consideration zone is a constitutional obligation. The Court explicitly rejected the argument that limited vacancies can justify the denial of equality. Additionally, women officers who were denied PC and released from service will now be deemed to have completed 20 years of service, qualifying them for full pensionary benefits. These directives mandate uniform application across all three branches of the armed forces.

### Significance and the Way Forward

This ruling reinforces that gender equality is not optional but a strict constitutional mandate under Articles 14, 15, and 16, emphasizing the need for substantive equality rather than just formal equality. However, significant challenges remain, including deep-rooted patriarchy, infrastructure constraints in combat zones, and inconsistent policy application. Eradicating this bias requires a multi-dimensional approach that includes strict enforcement of SC directives, gender-neutral policy reforms, targeted infrastructure development, and a fundamental cultural transformation within the military.

## NCERT Textbook Controversy: Balancing Institutional Dignity and Academic Freedom

### Context

The Supreme Court (SC) recently took suo motu cognisance and imposed a blanket ban on the Class 8 NCERT Social Science textbook, *Exploring Society- India and Beyond (Part II)*. The

intervention was triggered by a chapter explicitly discussing "corruption in the judiciary," which the SC labeled as "reckless" and a potential threat to children's trust in the justice system.

## Key Developments

A bench led by CJI Surya Kant observed that such "opinion-driven" narratives could delegitimize the constitutional system among young students, remarking that "the judiciary is bleeding". The SC subsequently issued show-cause notices for contempt of court to responsible education officials and ordered the dissociation of three NCERT curriculum members, including Prof. Michel Danino, from finalizing future textbooks.

Following an unconditional apology from NCERT, the Centre constituted a three-member expert committee—comprising former Attorney General K.K. Venugopal and former SC judges Indu Malhotra and Aniruddha Bose—to accurately redraft the chapter.

## Constitutional and Pedagogical Dimensions

- **Article 129 & Institutional Dignity:** The SC exercised its inherent power as a Court of Record (Article 129) to prevent content that "scandalises" the institution or lowers its authority, framing it as a matter of criminal contempt.
- **Free Speech vs. Judicial Overreach:** Critics argue the textbook ban constitutes prior restraint on speech, potentially violating Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech) and the Doctrine of Proportionality, which demands that rights restrictions be minimal.
- **Transparency vs. Legitimacy Dilemma:** The SC noted that 13-year-olds might lack the maturity to differentiate between individual anomalies and systemic functioning. Conversely,

educators caution against the "infantilization of students," warning that the threat of legal liability creates a "chilling effect" on academic freedom and critical thinking.

## Way Forward

This episode highlights the need to balance academic freedom with pedagogical responsibility. Future textbook drafting must incorporate multi-layered scrutiny, including a "legal audit" by constitutional practitioners for sensitive topics. Educational materials should promote constitutional literacy by presenting a balanced narrative—discussing institutional challenges constructively alongside systemic remedies and achievements, thereby strengthening public trust without compromising democratic transparency.

# SC Mandate on State DGP Appointments

## Context

The Supreme Court recently reiterated that any delay in appointing State Directors General of Police (DGPs) must receive its approval, addressing concerns over states bypassing transparency by appointing "acting" DGPs.

## Background

The directive traces back to the landmark *Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)* case, where the Court mandated DGP selections from a UPSC-prepared panel with a minimum two-year tenure to ensure leadership stability and prevent arbitrary, politically motivated appointments.

## Significance & Analysis

This judicial insistence aims to depoliticise top police appointments, ensuring transparent, merit-based governance and strengthening the rule of law. However, the mandate sparks a complex debate on federalism versus judicial activism. While it reduces political interference and ensures continuity, critics argue it represents judicial overreach into executive functions, potentially causing procedural delays and limiting state flexibility in urgent, context-specific situations.

## Way Forward

Achieving effective law enforcement requires strict compliance with the *Prakash Singh* guidelines across all states. A balanced approach is needed streamlining coordination between the UPSC and states for timely panels, and establishing independent police boards for transfers and appointments. Harmonising judicial oversight with federal principles is essential to foster professional, independent police leadership and build public trust.

# Constitutional Crisis and the Removal of the Lok Sabha Speaker

## Why in News?

Recently, a rare parliamentary event unfolded when the Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, alleging partisan conduct and the stifling of opposition voices. Although the motion was ultimately defeated by a voice vote, it has brought the constitutional safeguards regarding the Chair's neutrality and the procedural nuances of removing a Speaker into sharp focus.

## Constitutional Framework

The office of the Speaker is governed by strict constitutional provisions to protect it from arbitrary removal by fluctuating majorities:

- **Article 93:** Mandates the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha.
- **Article 94(c):** States that a Speaker may be removed from office by a resolution of the Lok Sabha passed by a "**majority of all the then members of the House,**" which is known as an Effective Majority (Total strength minus vacancies).
- **Article 96:** Explicitly bars the Speaker from presiding over the House while a resolution for their removal is under consideration.

## Procedural Nuances in the Lok Sabha

The removal process is strictly governed by Rules 200–203 of the Lok Sabha Rules of Procedure:

- **14-Day Notice:** A mandatory written notice of at least 14 days must be given to the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha before the resolution can be moved.
- **Admissibility (Leave of the House):** The motion is not automatically debated. It requires at least 50 Members of Parliament (MPs) to stand up in support to be admitted for discussion.
- **Rights of the Speaker:** While barred from presiding, the Speaker retains the right to participate and speak in the removal proceedings. Furthermore, the Speaker is entitled to vote in the first instance on the resolution, but loses the privilege of a "casting vote" in the event of a tie.

## Historical Precedents

In India's parliamentary history, no Lok Sabha Speaker has ever been successfully removed through such a motion. Prior to Om Birla, formal challenges were brought against three Speakers:

- **G.V. Mavalankar (1954):** The first Speaker faced a motion over alleged bias, which was overwhelmingly defeated after Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru defended the dignity of the Chair.
- **Sardar Hukam Singh (1966):** The motion failed to secure the mandatory 50-member support.
- **Balram Jakhur (1987):** The resolution was negated by the House.

## Institutional Analysis and Way Forward

The recent motion exposes deeper institutional vulnerabilities. The foremost issue is the vacancy of the Deputy Speaker's office, which has remained unfilled since 2019 (through the 17th Lok Sabha and into the 18th). During a Speaker's removal debate, the Deputy Speaker traditionally steps in, and this ongoing vacuum raises serious questions about constitutional appropriateness.

While a removal motion acts as a democratic check, frequent politicization risks eroding parliamentary norms. Moving forward, India's deliberative democracy requires strengthening the conventions of the Chair's absolute neutrality, filling vacant constitutional offices promptly, and fostering bipartisan collaboration to prevent parliamentary disruptions.

# Right to Die with Dignity: Evolution and the Harish Rana Judgment

## Why in the News?

In a historic first, the Supreme Court of India in March 2026 permitted the withdrawal of Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) for Harish Rana, a man living in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) for 13 years. This landmark ruling allowed passive euthanasia by applying the "best interest of the patient" principle and integrating it with palliative care.

## Evolution of Euthanasia Jurisprudence in India

The legal trajectory of passive euthanasia has evolved significantly through judicial pronouncements:

- **Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996):** The Supreme Court held that the 'Right to Life' under Article 21 does not include the 'Right to Die', but recognized that the right to live with human dignity encompasses a dignified procedure of death when natural death is imminent.
- **Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011):** The Court permitted passive euthanasia (withdrawing life-sustaining treatment) for patients in PVS, subject to strict High Court approval, while declaring active euthanasia illegal.
- **Common Cause v. Union of India (2018):** A Constitution Bench recognized the "right to die with dignity" as a fundamental right under Article 21. It

legalized "Advance Medical Directives" (living wills), enabling individuals to legally refuse life-prolonging treatment when terminally ill.

- **2023 Guidelines Modification:** The Supreme Court simplified the complex 2018 guidelines by removing the requirement of a Judicial Magistrate's countersignature for living wills, substituting it with a notary or Gazetted Officer, and streamlining the Medical Board processes to make passive euthanasia more practical.

## Key Takeaways from the Harish Rana Judgment (2026)

- **CANH as Medical Treatment:** The Court clarified that CANH is a technologically mediated medical intervention, not merely basic sustenance, and is subject to the same legal principles as other life-sustaining treatments.
- **Best Interest Principle:** Emphasised a holistic assessment of the patient's welfare, noting that preserving life is not absolute when treatment becomes futile, invasive, and merely prolongs suffering devoid of awareness.
- **Palliative Care:** The Court ruled that the right to die with dignity is inseparable from quality palliative and End-of-Life (EOL) care, ensuring the withdrawal process is humane, preserving the patient's dignity to the highest degree.

## Ethical Dilemmas and Way Forward

Passive euthanasia poses ethical dilemmas, balancing the "sanctity of life" against "patient autonomy" and the "quality of life". While it

reduces prolonged suffering, concerns exist regarding potential misuse, coercion, and implementation challenges in weaker healthcare systems. Moving forward, India needs a comprehensive statutory framework to replace judicial guidelines, enhanced public awareness about advance directives, and strengthened palliative care infrastructure to ensure compassionate, patient-centric healthcare.

# Kerala to Keralam: Constitutional and Historical Dimensions

## Why in News

The Union Cabinet recently approved the proposal to officially rename the state of 'Kerala' to 'Keralam', following unanimous resolutions passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 2023 and 2024.

## Constitutional Process

Under **Article 3** of the Indian Constitution, Parliament has the exclusive power to alter the name of any state. The procedure mandates that the President first refers the renaming Bill to the respective state legislature for its views before it can be introduced in Parliament. Once introduced, the Bill must be passed by a simple majority in both Houses. The final approval, followed by Presidential assent, results in an amendment to the First Schedule of the Constitution, which lists all official state names.

## Historical & Linguistic Context

"Keralam" aligns perfectly with the native Malayalam pronunciation. Etymologically, scholars believe the name derives from "Cheralam" (land of the Chera dynasty). Historically, the region was cited as "Keralaputra" in Emperor Ashoka's Rock Edict II dating back to 257 BCE. Modern Kerala was formed on November 1, 1956, based on the linguistic reorganization recommended by the Fazl Ali Commission.

## Significance

This renaming exemplifies cooperative federalism by respecting regional aspirations. It acts as a step toward decolonization, cultural preservation, and reinforcing the authentic linguistic identity of the Malayalam-speaking populace.

# Census 2027: Introduction of Official Mascots

## Why in News

The government has launched official mascots for Census 2027 to enhance public awareness and make the enumeration process more engaging and people-friendly.

## Background

Conducted every decade under the Census Act, 1948, the 2027 Census holds significant importance following the delayed 2021 Census. The upcoming exercise is expected to

incorporate digital data collection and updated demographic indicators.

## Significance & Benefits

Mascots offer an innovative and relatable approach to outreach, promoting inclusivity among remote and illiterate populations. By making the process less intimidating, they build trust and encourage youth engagement. Ultimately, higher participation ensures accurate population data, which is critical for policy planning, welfare schemes, resource allocation, and delimitation.

## Challenges

The impact of mascots might remain superficial if deep-rooted privacy concerns and public mistrust regarding data usage are not addressed. Additionally, these awareness campaigns involve extra expenditure, and their success depends entirely on effective, widespread dissemination.

## Way Forward

While introducing mascots reflects a modern, citizen-centric approach to governance, it must be supported by transparent data security measures and thorough capacity-building for enumerators. Leveraging technology for a digital census alongside robust, multi-platform communication campaigns will ensure reliable and accurate census outcomes.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## India-Israel Relations and West Asian Geopolitics

In February 2026, the Indian Prime Minister's historic visit to Israel marked a watershed moment in bilateral ties, officially elevating the relationship from a traditional "buyer-seller" dynamic to a **"Special Strategic Partnership"**. Guided by a successful "De-hyphenated West Asia Policy," India has successfully decoupled its ties with Israel from its historical stance on Palestine, allowing for deep, independent cooperation while maintaining strategic autonomy.

### Key Dimensions of the Partnership

- **Defence and Mission Sudarshan Chakra:** Defence cooperation is transitioning towards the joint development and co-production of advanced platforms under the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative. A critical component is India's **"Mission Sudarshan Chakra,"** an integrated aerospace, cyber, and multi-layered defence shield aimed for completion by 2035. Israel is expected to share technology for its Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) systems, including the Iron Dome and Iron Beam, to significantly enhance India's capabilities. The successful use of Israeli drones and air defence systems by Indian forces during "Operation

Sindoor" in 2025 further validated this strategic synergy.

- **Frontier Technologies and Economy:** Both nations launched an Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) led by their National Security Advisors, focusing on semiconductors, quantum computing, and Artificial Intelligence. In the realm of "Fintech Diplomacy," the linkage of India's UPI with Israel's Masav system enables seamless cross-border payments for traders and tourists. Furthermore, a new labour mobility agreement allows up to 50,000 Indian workers to migrate to Israel over the next five years, expanding beyond construction into the high-tech and manufacturing sectors.
- **Agriculture and Space:** The partnership continues to thrive in agriculture through the "Villages of Excellence" model, training Indian farmers in Israeli drip irrigation, and through expanding collaborations between ISRO and the Israel Space Agency.

### Geopolitical Alignments and Challenges

India and Israel are deeply engaged in multilateral frameworks like the **I2U2** (India, Israel, UAE, USA), which uniquely targets cross-sectoral economic and technological partnerships, such as integrated food parks and renewable energy projects in India. Additionally, Israel recently proposed the **"Hexagon Alliance,"** a new framework aiming to align India, Israel, and Mediterranean partners (like Greece and

Cyprus) across economic, diplomatic, and security tracks.

However, these strategic advancements are set against the backdrop of a severe Middle East crisis. The geopolitical landscape fundamentally shifted in early 2026 following US and Israeli strikes on Iran ("Operation Epic Fury" and "Operation Roaring Lion"), the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, and Iran's subsequent retaliation and closure of the Strait of Hormuz. This volatile conflict poses massive challenges for India, including severe energy inflation, disruptions to vital maritime supply chains, and grave safety threats to the 8-9 million Indian diaspora living in the Gulf. Furthermore, India must delicately balance its strategic alliance with Israel against its energy and connectivity interests in Iran, particularly the Chabahar Port.

## Conclusion

The 2026 developments signify that India-Israel relations have entered a futuristic "Special Strategic Axis" rooted in innovation and mutual security. Moving forward, finalizing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and pragmatically managing the complex, volatile geopolitics of the Middle East will be crucial for India to leverage this partnership towards its ultimate goal of becoming a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047.

# The USA-Israel-Iran War of 2026: Geopolitical & Economic Ramifications

## Context and Background

The ongoing geopolitical conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran, which

commenced on February 28, 2026, with joint U.S.-Israeli strikes dubbed "Operation Epic Fury," has rapidly evolved into a multi-front war. Initially aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear capabilities, missile sites, and proxy networks, the prolonged conflict now fundamentally threatens Middle Eastern stability, global energy markets, and international security frameworks.

## Key Geopolitical Developments

- **Leadership Vacuum and Internal Crisis:** The initial strikes resulted in the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, prompting the immediate succession of his son, Mojtaba Khamenei. This unprecedented leadership shift has exacerbated political and ethnic polarization within Iran, leading to heightened internal repression, internet blackouts, and a surge in executions to suppress civil dissent.
- **Asymmetric and Proxy Warfare:** Facing conventional military degradation, Iran has heavily leveraged asymmetric warfare through its "Axis of Resistance," including Hezbollah, Iraqi Shi'a militias, and the Houthis. This has forced Israel and the U.S. to divert resources to diffuse fronts, including Lebanon and the Gulf States.
- **Strategic Overextension:** The conflict has forced the U.S. to redirect military and diplomatic assets away from the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe. This strategic shift significantly benefits Russia—by relieving pressure on its operations in Ukraine and boosting its oil revenues—and China, which gains an opportunity to expand its regional influence and potentially act on Taiwan.

## Global Economic and Humanitarian Impact

- **Strait of Hormuz and Energy Shocks:** The war has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, choking off 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply. Qatar's LNG exports have completely ceased, and the halt of nitrogen-based fertilizer shipments threatens global agricultural outputs and food security. Planned releases of strategic petroleum reserves, such as a 400-million-barrel swap over two months orchestrated by the International Energy Agency (IEA), are insufficient to offset the massive 15-17% plunge in global supply.
- **Humanitarian Catastrophe:** According to UN experts, U.S. and Israeli airstrikes have killed nearly 2,000 civilians and displaced over 3 million people internally. Civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, has been severely damaged. Furthermore, the escalation has intensified the risk of technological and cyber warfare targeting vital civilian and financial infrastructure globally.

## Way Forward

To mitigate the catastrophic global fallout, a multi-pronged strategy is imperative:

1. **Multilateral Diplomacy and Ceasefire:** The international community must prioritize a ceasefire framework mediated by neutral intermediaries and institutions like the UN and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Diplomatic negotiations must also inherently focus on resolving Iran's human rights crisis and restoring civic space.
2. **Avoidance of Ground Intervention:** The U.S. should prioritize deterrence and avoid a large-scale ground war, which would trigger a massive refugee crisis,

drain economic resources, and result in unmanageable strategic overextension.

3. **Securing Trade Corridors:** Direct military escorts in the Strait of Hormuz remain highly vulnerable to Iranian asymmetric naval assets and mines. Instead, establishing a robust, distributed regional defense security framework with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) partners is essential to bolster defensive readiness and stabilize global energy markets.

# India Secures 30-Day U.S. Exemption for Russian Oil Purchases

## Context

The U.S. Department of the Treasury has issued a **30-day General License** allowing Indian refiners to purchase and offload Russian crude oil that was stranded at sea due to sanctions fears. This reflects a pragmatic shift in Washington's policy amid the **2026 U.S.-Iran conflict**.

## Key Drivers

- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** The ongoing war in West Asia has severely disrupted the Strait of Hormuz, a choke point for 20% of global oil, creating a massive supply crunch.
- **Tariff Reversal:** Reversing an earlier threat of a 25% punitive tariff on India, the U.S. prioritized global price stability to prevent Brent crude from surging further past \$100/barrel.

## Significance for India

- **Energy Security & Economy:** As India imports nearly 85% of its oil, this waiver provides a crucial economic cushion. It ensures refineries remain operational, prevents domestic fuel shortages, and helps manage the current account deficit.
- **Strategic Leverage:** It validates India's "Multi-alignment" strategy, successfully balancing its strategic partnership with the U.S. alongside historical energy ties with Russia.

## Key Challenges

The primary concern is the short duration of the waiver (ending April 4, 2026), which creates a "cliff edge" for planners. Furthermore, India faces geopolitical optics issues due to a "sanctions gap" with the EU and UK.

## Way Forward

This temporary relief highlights the necessity of long-term resilience. India must accelerate its transition toward Green Hydrogen and nuclear energy. Additionally, securing alternative logistics frameworks like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Northern Sea Route is vital to bypass vulnerable routes like Hormuz, ensuring a truly *Atmanirbhar* (self-reliant) energy future.

# Iran's Maritime Tactics in the Strait of Hormuz

## Why in News

Recent escalations have seen Iran targeting commercial vessels and energy infrastructure in the Persian Gulf, particularly around the Strait of

Hormuz, which has severely disrupted shipping and triggered a surge in global oil prices.

## Background & Strategic Intent

Iran's actions primarily serve as a retaliation against U.S. and Israeli military strikes. By disrupting the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz—a critical global chokepoint handling nearly 20% of global oil trade—Iran leverages economic pressure to counter international sanctions and assert its strategic military dominance in the Gulf region.

## Key Impacts & Challenges

- **Global Economic Instability:** These maritime disruptions have driven global oil prices above \$100 per barrel, fueling worldwide inflation and crippling global supply chains.
- **Geopolitical Escalation:** Continued attacks increase the risk of a wider regional war and direct confrontation with global military powers.
- **Threat to India:** As a heavily import-dependent nation, India faces acute energy security risks and economic strain due to restricted oil flows.

## Way Forward

- **Diplomacy & Maritime Security:** A sustainable resolution requires negotiated de-escalation over military intervention, alongside the strengthening of international maritime security frameworks.
- **Strategic Diversification:** Vulnerable nations must accelerate their transition towards renewable energy and utilize strategic oil reserves to stabilize volatile markets.
- **Alternative Trade Routes:** Developing new pipelines and non-Hormuz shipping

corridors is critical to insulating global energy supply chains from localized geopolitical conflicts.

# Geopolitics and India's Medical Tourism

## Context

Ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia have caused a notable decline in patients from countries like Iraq, Yemen, and Oman seeking affordable healthcare in India.

## Significance of Medical Tourism

This sector is a major revenue source for India, relying heavily on West Asian patients due to proximity and cultural compatibility. Furthermore, **medical diplomacy serves as a crucial soft power tool**, enhancing India's global influence while supporting the broader healthcare ecosystem, including hospitality and allied services.

## Challenges Posed by the Conflict

- **Economic and Operational Losses:** Travel restrictions, visa issues, and currency instability have severely disrupted patient mobility, resulting in direct revenue losses.
- **Infrastructure and Ripple Effects:** The decline has led to the underutilization of high-end private hospitals and negatively impacted associated services, including hotels, travel agencies, and translators.

## Opportunities for Resilience

- **Market Diversification:** The crisis encourages India to expand its outreach to alternative markets such as Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.
- **Digital Innovation:** It provides a strong boost to telemedicine, as cross-border remote consultations can partially offset the decline in physical travel.
- **Domestic Focus:** Hospitals may shift their focus towards improving domestic healthcare accessibility.

## Way Forward

To build long-term resilience against geopolitical shocks, India must strategically target new regions like the CIS countries and leverage digital innovation. Policy support through **government initiatives like "Heal in India"** will be vital in strengthening the sector's foundation. Ultimately, while short-term vulnerabilities exist, strategic adaptation and normalization of regional stability will sustain India's stature as a premier global healthcare hub.

# Stranded in the Strait: Protecting India's Global Seafarers

## Why in News

Rising geopolitical tensions in the Strait of Hormuz have resulted in attacks on commercial vessels, leading to an increased abandonment of seafarers, particularly Indian nationals working on foreign-flagged ships.

## Significance & Impact

- **Strategic & Economic:** India is a major supplier of maritime labour, with over 2.5 lakh personnel on international vessels. Additionally, nearly 20% of global oil trade passes through this critical route, directly impacting India's energy security.
- **Humanitarian Crisis:** Abandonment leaves workers stranded without food, wages, or legal protection. Accountability is further complicated because many vessels operate under "flags of convenience".

## Major Challenges

Indian seafarers are increasingly exposed to geopolitical risks beyond national control, leading to severe human rights violations, psychological stress, and lost income for dependent families. A major underlying issue is the weak enforcement mechanisms of international maritime laws.

## Opportunities for Reform

Despite the challenges, the crisis has successfully drawn global policy attention to seafarers' rights, paving the way for international cooperation and stricter regulatory scrutiny of shipowners and insurance norms.

## Way Forward

- **Strengthening Institutions:** Better enforcement of labour standards is required through global bodies like the International Maritime Organization and International Labour Organization.
- **Strategic Agreements:** India must sign stronger bilateral agreements with flag states to protect its citizens.
- **Monitoring & Security:** Implementing mandatory financial security

mechanisms, improved vessel tracking, and encouraging skill diversification toward more secure shipping companies is crucial.

## Conclusion

While strategic concerns dominate the geopolitical discourse, the humanitarian dimension of the Strait of Hormuz crisis demands immediate attention. Ensuring legal protection and accountability is essential to safeguard the seafarers who sustain global trade.

# Raisina Dialogue 2026: Shaping Global Geopolitics and Geo- economics

## Context

The 11th edition of the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship multilateral conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, was held in New Delhi from March 5 to 7, 2026. Jointly organized by the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** and the **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**, the dialogue convened global leaders, policymakers, and experts to address pressing international challenges.

## Theme and Core Pillars

The 2026 theme, "**Samskāra – Assertion, Accommodation, Advancement,**" reflected a world where nations are asserting their identities, embracing diversity, and defining their paths of progress. The dialogue was structured around six thematic pillars, which included discussions on contested frontiers, repairing the global commons, the pursuit of Agenda 2030, climate and conflict, technology, and trade resilience in an era of tariffs.

## Key Highlights and Takeaways

- **Advocacy for Reformed Multilateralism:** Finland's President Dr. Alexander Stubb, the Chief Guest, highlighted the shifting balance of global power toward the Global South. He strongly advocated for **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reforms** and reiterated support for India's permanent membership.
- **Launch of the Raisina Science Diplomacy Initiative (SDI):** A landmark outcome of the 2026 edition was the launch of the SDI. This framework aims to integrate science and technology into foreign policy, with a dedicated focus on AI governance, semiconductor supply chains, and sharing India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) with developing nations.
- **Rise of the Global South and Multipolarity:** The forum acknowledged the consolidation of a multipolar global order driven by South-South partnerships and flexible plurilateral groupings. India's engagement through BRICS, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and the India-France-UAE trilateral positioned the nation as a crucial bridge and voice for the Global South.
- **Maritime Security Focus:** Deliberations heavily emphasized the need to secure global supply chains, maritime routes, and undersea communication cables amidst escalating tensions in the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Indo-Pacific regions.

## Significance for India

The Raisina Dialogue 2026 successfully reinforced India's role as a formidable convening power in global diplomacy. It provided a vital platform for India to steer international narratives on emerging technologies, global governance, and strategic security in a rapidly transforming world.

# ENVIRONMENT

## Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM): Progress, Impacts, and the Quest for Sustainability

### Context

The Ministry of Jal Shakti recently released the JJM 2.0 Operational Guidelines, which focus on strengthening governance, improving service delivery, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Concurrently, a Parliamentary Committee has flagged concerns that JJM's objectives may remain unfulfilled due to an over-reliance on depleting groundwater, with many newly installed taps running dry within a year.

### Financial Overview

In the Union Budget 2026-27, JJM has been allocated Rs 67,670 crore, a massive increase compared to the heavily reduced revised estimates of 2025-26. Notably, the scheme witnessed severe fund underutilisation in 2025-26, with zero central funds released to states, thereby shifting the financial liability to state governments for ongoing projects.

### Transformative Impacts

Despite implementation hurdles, JJM has driven profound socio-economic and health transformations across rural India:

- **Health and Well-being:** Access to clean piped water has drastically reduced waterborne diseases. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) cases declined by 99%.

Nationally, the provision of safe water under JJM has the potential to prevent 1.36 lakh infant deaths and 4 lakh diarrheal deaths annually.

- **Social Empowerment:** JJM acts as a social equalizer, breaking historical barriers for marginalized communities and providing dignified access to the differently-abled. Furthermore, the mission saves an estimated 5.5 crore hours daily (75% for women), liberating them from the drudgery of fetching water and facilitating their active leadership in village *Paani Samitis* (Water Committees).

### Key Challenges

- **Source Sustainability:** About 75% of Indian districts are already water-stressed. Rising temperatures and climate variability severely threaten traditional water sources, which risks making costly JJM infrastructure redundant over the next 25-30 years.
- **Cost of Last-Mile Connectivity:** Extending coverage to the final 20% of households situated in difficult, hilly, or arid terrains will significantly escalate the mission's financial burden.

### Way Forward

To ensure lasting rural water security, the governance ecosystem must shift its focus from infrastructure creation to sustainable service delivery:

- **Mandatory Source Audits:** Conducting strict hydrogeological audits for every JJM scheme to certify a 30-year water supply.

- **Digital Transparency:** Utilizing the central *Sujalam Bharat* framework and *Sujal Gaon* IDs to monitor real-time source water levels and prevent supply failures.
- **Scheme Convergence:** Integrating JJM with VG RAM G to promote decentralized rainwater harvesting, check dams, and local aquifer recharge.

# India's Rice Economy and the Groundwater Crisis

## Context

In 2025, India overtook China to become the world's largest rice producer, commanding approximately 40% of the global rice trade with exports exceeding 20 million metric tons. However, this milestone masks a severe ecological threat: the rapid depletion of India's groundwater resources and the unsustainable export of "virtual water".

## Key Concerns

- **Severe Groundwater Depletion:** Cultivating rice is highly water-intensive, requiring 3,000 to 5,000 litres of water to produce a single kilogram of grain. In traditional "breadbasket" states like Punjab and Haryana, massive groundwater extraction has caused water tables to plummet from 30 feet a decade ago to depths of 80–200 feet. Current extraction rates are severely over-exploited, standing at 156% of the natural recharge rate in Punjab and 137% in Haryana.
- **Virtual Water Export:** When India exports rice, it effectively trades its domestic freshwater resources. Globally, India is a leading virtual water

exporter, transferring an estimated 5,185 million cubic meters of virtual water annually through rice trade.

- **Policy Inertia & Environmental Degradation:** Existing policies, such as the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and free electricity subsidies, inadvertently incentivize farmers to cultivate thirsty paddy over sustainable crops. Furthermore, conventional rice farming practices, particularly post-harvest straw burning, contribute significantly to global warming, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and acidification.

## Government Initiatives

To counter these challenges, the government is promoting the **Crop Diversification Programme (CDP)** to shift land from paddy to alternative crops like pulses, oilseeds, and nutri-cereals. At the state level, Haryana's flagship ***Mera Pani Meri Virasat*** scheme offers farmers a financial incentive—increased to ₹8,000 per acre in 2025—to switch from paddy to less water-demanding crops like maize and millets.

## Way Forward

To ensure long-term sustainability, India must re-evaluate its agricultural model. Key interventions should include:

1. **Promoting Sustainable Farming:** Encouraging organic farming and crop residue fermentation instead of combustion to build soil health and cut GHG emissions.
2. **Technological Shift:** Incentivizing water-efficient technologies like Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) and rationalizing MSP policies to align with ecological goals.
3. **Global Alignment:** Adopting global standards, such as those of the **Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP)**, to reduce the environmental footprint of

rice while ensuring stable farmer livelihoods and global food security.

## **Project Cheetah: Population Milestone and Future Prospects**

### **Context**

India's cheetah population has successfully reached **53** following the birth of a new litter at Kuno National Park. This marks a significant early success for Project Cheetah, an ambitious initiative launched in 2022 to translocate African cheetahs to India and revive a species that was declared extinct in 1952 due to overhunting and habitat loss.

### **Significance**

The reintroduction of this apex predator is crucial for restoring the ecological balance of grassland and savanna ecosystems, which are often neglected in traditional conservation efforts. It establishes India's global conservation leadership as the first country to reintroduce an extinct large carnivore, while simultaneously promoting sustainable development and **eco-tourism** for local communities.

### **Challenges**

Despite the population growth, the project faces several critical hurdles. High mortality rates driven by infections, stress, and difficulties in climatic adaptation pose threats to long-term survival. Furthermore, Kuno's habitat limitations and the lack of connected landscapes restrict spatial expansion, heightening the risk of human-wildlife conflict and livestock predation in nearby settlements.

### **Way Forward**

To secure the project's future, India must expand its habitat network by developing additional reserves, such as Gandhi Sagar and Mukundra Hills, and creating wildlife corridors for genetic exchange. Strengthening **scientific monitoring** through GPS tracking and AI, establishing specialised veterinary centres, and ensuring robust community participation are essential steps.

### **Conclusion**

While reaching 53 cheetahs is an encouraging sign, it is only the beginning. Long-term success demands a holistic approach balancing ecological goals with socio-economic realities and sustained policy commitment to cement the cheetah's place in India's natural heritage.

## **India's Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) 2031-2035**

### **Context**

The Union Cabinet recently approved India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for the 2031-2035 period. This move reinforces the country's commitment to climate multilateralism and enhanced climate ambition under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.

### **Key Commitments (by 2035)**

Building on the foundational 2015 NDCs and the 2021-2022 updates, the new framework outlines three headline quantitative targets:

- **Emissions Intensity:** Target a 47% reduction in the emissions intensity of GDP by 2035 compared to 2005 levels. This enhances the previous goal of a 45% reduction by 2030.
- **Non-Fossil Power Capacity:** Achieve 60% of cumulative installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2035, up from the 50% target set for 2030.
- **Carbon Sink:** Create an enhanced carbon sink of 3.5-4 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent through increased forest and tree cover from 2005 levels. Additionally, the NDC identifies qualitative targets, including developing resilient infrastructure, mobilizing low-cost international and domestic climate finance, and aligning economic pathways with the “Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)” principle.

## Current Progress & Feasibility

India is heavily accelerating its climate goals. As of December 2025, India's non-fossil installed capacity stood at 51.93% (266.78 GW) of the total power capacity. Assuming current capacity addition trends, projections suggest India could achieve its 60% non-fossil capacity target as early as 2028. Furthermore, India has already reduced its emissions intensity by 36% (as of 2020). However, a persistent challenge is that actual electricity *generation* from non-fossil sources remains low, accounting for only 22.36% of the total in 2024-2025.

## Significance

India's strategy highlights a pragmatic balancing of developmental priorities with climate goals. Despite accounting for only 3.5% of historical global emissions, India continues to pull more than its weight. By sticking to an emissions intensity target rather than an absolute emissions reduction (like China), India safeguards its economic growth while projecting

concrete Global South leadership in climate action, especially as many developed nations backtrack on their commitments.

# State of India's Environment 2026 Report: A Comprehensive Analysis

## Context and Significance

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and *Down To Earth* magazine recently released the 'State of India's Environment (SOE) 2026' report at the Anil Agarwal Dialogue 2026. Published annually since 1982, this report serves as a crucial evidence-based assessment of ecological crises, structural inequities, and policy gaps, acting as a vital reference for policymakers, researchers, and civil society.

## Key Findings

- **Breach of Planetary Boundaries and Tipping Points:** The report highlights a grave global ecological strain, noting that seven out of the nine 'planetary boundaries'—a framework proposed by Johan Rockström in 2009 defining safe limits for Earth's stability—have now been breached. The previously breached six boundaries include climate change, biosphere integrity, land system change, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows, and novel entities (such as plastics and synthetic chemicals). The newly breached seventh boundary is ocean acidification; surface ocean acidity has surged by 30-40% since the industrial era, severely threatening marine ecosystems like corals and plankton.

Furthermore, global forest cover has dropped to 59% (below the 75% safe minimum), and species extinction rates exceed 100 per million, far above the safe threshold of 10. Crucially, average global temperatures over the past three years signal a breach of the 1.5°C safety guardrail, pushing ecosystems like the Amazon rainforest towards irreversible tipping points.

- **Escalation of Extreme Weather Events** Signalling a severe ecological backlash, India experienced extreme weather events on 99% of days in 2025, the highest frequency in the past four years (up from 88% in 2024 and 89% in 2023). These extremes, encompassing heatwaves, cold waves, and intense floods, claimed 4,419 lives and devastated over 17.41 million hectares of crop area. Himachal Pradesh was the most severely affected state (recording 267 extreme weather days), followed by Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Structural Inequity in Air Quality Monitoring** The report exposes a glaring gap in environmental governance: 85% of India's population (over 1.2 billion people) breathes air outside any measurable monitoring range. Only 15% of the population lives within a 10 km radius of a continuous air quality monitor. Monitoring infrastructure remains highly urban-centric, concentrated in state capitals and metropolitan areas, while smaller towns, industrial belts, and peri-urban zones lack real-time data entirely.
- **Rising Human-Tiger Conflict** Ecological changes, habitat loss, and the spread of invasive species like *Lantana camara* have altered tiger behaviour. With approximately 60 million people living within tiger landscapes across 20 states, human proximity to tiger territories has drastically increased. Consequently, at least 43 people were killed near tiger

reserves between January and June 2025.

## Way Forward

- **Shift to Pre-Disaster Resilience:** India must urgently transition from a reactive, post-disaster relief approach to proactive pre-disaster resilience planning by integrating climate science into everyday developmental and infrastructural decisions.
- **Embrace Nature-Based Solutions:** Improving climate resilience requires nature-based interventions, such as restoring wetlands, reconnecting rivers to floodplains, and scaling up groundwater recharge and rainwater harvesting.
- **Equitable Environmental Governance:** Expanding the air quality monitoring grid beyond major cities to cover rural and industrial belts is essential to eliminate structural inequalities in environmental protection.

# World Air Quality Report 2025

## Context

Released by the Swiss technology company IQAir, this report provides a comprehensive assessment of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution across 143 countries.

## Global Highlights

- **Worsening Air Quality:** Only 14% of global cities met the World Health Organization's (WHO) annual PM2.5 safe guideline of 5 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2025, a decline from the previous year.

- **Worst Affected Nations:** Pakistan is the world's most polluted country, followed by Bangladesh and Tajikistan.
- **Asian Crisis:** Asia is the most affected region, hosting all 25 of the world's most polluted cities. Additionally, climate change-induced wildfires heavily contributed to global PM2.5 spikes.

## India's Status

- **National Rank:** India is the 6th most polluted country globally, with an average annual PM2.5 concentration of 48.9  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .
- **Most Polluted Cities:** Loni (Uttar Pradesh) is the most polluted city in the world, with PM2.5 levels exceeding the WHO limit by over 22 times. India is home to 5 of the top 10 most polluted cities globally.
- **Capital City: New Delhi** continues to be the world's most polluted capital.

## Key Concerns for India

While India's average PM2.5 saw a slight decrease, the crisis remains severe. There is a massive gap between the WHO's recommended limit (5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) and India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (40  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ). Furthermore, India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) directs 64% of its funding primarily toward road dust, highlighting a need to refocus on larger contributors like industrial pollution, vehicular emissions, and biomass burning.

# INTERNAL SECURITY

## Dismantling Left-Wing Extremism: The Sunset of the Red Corridor

### Context

In March 2026, the Union Government declared Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) "almost vanquished," setting a definitive target to completely eliminate Naxalism in India by March 31, 2026. Once a formidable internal security threat, the geographic spread of the "Red Corridor" has drastically contracted from 126 districts to just 18.

### Key Achievements

Incidents of LWE-orchestrated violence plummeted by 81% between 2010 and 2024, corresponding with an 85% drop in civilian and security force casualties. Coordinated intelligence operations, such as 2025's *Operation Black Forest*, have successfully neutralized key Maoist operatives, precipitating leadership crises and eroding grassroots support for the insurgency.

### The Multi-Pronged Strategy

This success is largely attributed to the 2015 National Policy and Action Plan, which integrates kinetic security measures with inclusive socio-economic development:

- **Security & Governance:** The SAMADHAN doctrine forms the bedrock of India's security response, emphasizing smart intelligence, aggressive operations, and the use of modern technology like drones for

forest surveillance. Furthermore, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has actively choked Maoist financial resources, while the establishment of 612 fortified police stations has helped state forces reclaim vulnerable zones.

- **Developmental Push:** Recognizing that "Development Defeats Dissent," the government focused on bridging infrastructure gaps via the *Road Connectivity Project for LWE affected areas (RCPLWE)* and expansive telecom tower installations. Social empowerment was amplified by the *Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan* (launched October 2024), which targets full saturation of basic amenities in over 15,000 LWE-affected villages.

### Way Forward

While the insurgency is territorially and operationally weakened, moving past a purely "security-dominant" approach remains vital. Ensuring last-mile governance, offering robust surrender-cum-rehabilitation packages to economically reintegrate former cadres, and securing equitable development for marginalized tribal communities are the critical next steps to permanently consolidate these internal security gains.

## AI and Technology in India's Internal Security Framework

### Context

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is fundamentally transforming India's security

architecture, shifting from traditional, reactive law enforcement to predictive, AI-driven policing. Simultaneously, the rising tide of digital crime has ignited a critical debate over encryption and state surveillance.

## Key AI Initiatives in Policing

To combat borderless digital threats, the MHA, spearheaded by the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)**, has launched several preventive platforms:

- **Financial Fraud Prevention:** In collaboration with IIT Bombay and the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH), the I4C is deploying the **Mulehunter.ai** model. This system analyzes behavioral patterns to assign a "suspect score" to "mule accounts," enabling banks to flag and block laundered funds in real-time.
- **Project Surakshini:** Shifting digital governance from an "active takedown" approach to a "preventive moderation" model, this initiative targets harmful online content. Utilizing a Proactive Monitoring Tool (PMT) developed by CDAC Mumbai, the system uses automated hash-matching to proactively detect and block the uploading of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Material (CSEAM) and Non-Consensual Intimate Imagery (NCII).
- **Infrastructure Upgrades:** The 1930 national cybercrime helpline is integrating multilingual AI for automated complaint registration and routing. Furthermore, the upcoming IVFRT 3.0 system will leverage AI and blockchain for intelligent traveler profiling and immigration security.

## The Encryption Dilemma

As the state bolsters its AI capabilities, encryption remains a complex challenge. While encryption is vital for securing national power

grids, patient records, and financial data, it serves as a secure shield for terrorist networks and cybercriminals. Although monitoring encrypted platforms has helped agencies like Europol dismantle major crime syndicates, creating state-mandated "backdoors" into encrypted networks sparks intense civil liberty debates globally.

## Ethical and Constitutional Challenges

- **Right to Privacy:** Both continuous AI surveillance and encryption vulnerabilities risk transforming governance into a surveillance state, directly conflicting with the fundamental Right to Privacy established in the **K.S. Puttaswamy judgment**.
- **Algorithmic Bias:** Predictive policing models trained on historical data may inherently discriminate against minority or lower socio-economic communities, unjustly targeting them as potential threats.
- **Misuse of Tools:** The deployment of powerful surveillance tools (such as Pegasus spyware) highlights the severe risk of security technology being weaponized to monitor journalists and activists rather than criminals.

## The Way Forward

The integration of AI marks a vital paradigm shift in securing India's booming digital public infrastructure. However, to prevent technological overreach, these mechanisms must be governed by an independent oversight committee, transparent algorithmic audits, and strict alignment with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023. Balancing proactive national security with constitutional civil liberties remains the ultimate administrative challenge.

# CERT-In Space Cybersecurity Framework: A New Era for Satellite Security

## Context

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), under MeitY, in collaboration with the SatCom Industry Association of India (SIA-India), recently released the "Cyber Security Framework and Guidelines for Space including Satellite Communication". Unveiled at the DefSat Conference & Expo 2026, the guidelines arrive amidst escalating cyber threats, highlighted by over 1.5 million cyberattack attempts recorded during Operation Sindoor.

## Key Features and Compliance Obligations

- **Incident Reporting & Monitoring:** SatCom operators must report any cybersecurity incidents within 6 hours of detection and retain incident logs for a minimum of 180 days. Continuous anomaly detection must be managed through dedicated Network and Security Operations Centers (NOCs/SOCs).
- **Supply Chain & Certification:** Hardware and software must be procured exclusively from trusted sources with full traceability maintained via Bills of Materials (BOM). Additionally, cryptographic modules and mission systems must undergo certification adhering to standards like ISO/IEC 27001.
- **Auditing & Governance:** Entities are required to conduct annual external cybersecurity audits via CERT-In

empanelled auditors and bi-annual internal audits. They must also designate specific officers for cybersecurity oversight and maintain robust crisis management plans.

- **Security Architecture:** The framework mandates the adoption of "**security-by-design**" and "**defense-in-depth**" principles, ensuring security is integrated from the initial development stage across space, ground, and user segments to prevent single points of failure.

## Significance

Satellite communication is a critical enabler of India's defence, disaster response, and navigation. This holistic, public-private partnership framework acts as a *de facto* benchmark, ensuring cybersecurity evolves from a technical afterthought into a core pillar of mission assurance and national technological sovereignty.

# ART & CULTURE

## The Anahita Temple: Heritage at the Crossroads of Conflict

### Why in the News?

Amidst escalating military tensions between Iran and the United States, global concerns have emerged regarding potential threats to culturally significant sites, most notably Iran's ancient Anahita Temple. The possibility of damage to such heritage structures during military actions has drawn significant international attention to the vulnerability of historical monuments in war zones.

### About the Anahita Temple

- **Historical Context:** Located at Kangavar, the temple dates back to the Parthian and Sassanian periods.
- **Deity:** It is dedicated to Anahita, the ancient Persian goddess associated with water and fertility.
- **Architecture:** It stands as one of the largest stone structures in Iran, prominently reflecting Greco-Persian architectural influences.
- **Cultural Value:** The temple is considered a vital symbol of Iran's pre-Islamic cultural heritage.

### Significance

The site represents a deep civilizational heritage, showcasing ancient Persian art, architecture, and religion. As a symbol of national and historical identity, its damage would deeply

impact the historical consciousness of the region, as it is an integral part of humanity's shared cultural legacy. Furthermore, targeting the site carries major legal implications, threatening to violate international conventions meant to protect heritage during wartime.

### Implications of the Current Threat

- **Concerns (Cons):** The primary risk is the irreversible destruction of ancient history, leading to an immense cultural and emotional loss for present and future generations. Additionally, any damage would likely violate international laws, such as the Hague Convention, and further intensify geopolitical and cultural tensions.
- **Silver Lining (Pros):** Indirectly, this threat has raised global awareness regarding the urgent need to protect heritage in conflict zones. It encourages greater international monitoring, cooperation, and promotes modern digital preservation and restoration efforts.

### Way Forward

To protect such invaluable sites, there must be strict adherence to international humanitarian laws. The international community must strengthen the role of global bodies like UNESCO and develop "no-strike" cultural protection lists

specifically for conflict zones. Moreover, investing in digital archiving technologies and prioritizing diplomatic conflict resolution are vital to prevent further destruction.

## Conclusion

The threat to the Anahita Temple serves as a stark reminder that modern conflicts endanger not only human lives but also centuries of human history. Protecting these irreplicable symbols of civilization remains a shared global responsibility, because once lost, they can never be recreated.

# 99 Years of the Mahad Satyagraha

## Why in News?

Thousands recently gathered in Mahad to commemorate the 99th anniversary of the Mahad Satyagraha. This event has sparked renewed discussions on social justice, caste discrimination, and equality as India approaches the movement's centenary in 2027.

## Historical Background

Led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1927 at the Chavdar Tank, the Mahad Satyagraha aimed to secure the right of Dalits to access public water sources. It marked one of the earliest organized movements against untouchability, symbolizing a monumental shift from passive suffering to the active assertion of human rights and dignity.

## Significance

- **Constitutional Influence:** The movement's core ideals heavily influenced India's constitutional framework, laying the groundwork for

the Right to Equality (Article 14) and the Abolition of Untouchability (Article 17).

- **Social Equality:** By challenging caste-based exclusion in public spaces, it reinforced equal citizenship and established the foundation of the Dalit rights movement.

## Current Challenges

Despite constitutional guarantees, social inequality persists, with caste discrimination existing in both subtle and overt forms. There is also unequal implementation of social justice measures, and commemorative celebrations often remain symbolic without translating into real grassroots change.

## Way Forward

True tribute to this historical struggle requires the strict enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and the implementation of inclusive development policies focused on marginalized communities. Furthermore, incorporating the history of such movements into the education system will strengthen public awareness and actively promote the Ambedkarite values of equality, dignity, and constitutional morality.

# K. N. Panikkar: The Legacy of a Secular Historian

## Context

Renowned academic, historian, and public intellectual K. N. Panikkar recently passed away at the age of 89. His passing marks the profound loss of one of India's most influential voices in modern historiography and public intellectual discourse.

## Significance and Key Contributions

- **Pioneer of Modern Historiography:** Panikkar made significant contributions to the study of social change, nationalism, and colonialism in India. He authored highly influential works focusing on colonial ideology, culture, and resistance movements.
- **People-Centric Approach:** Moving away from elite-focused historical accounts, he actively promoted a people-centric history that prioritized the voices of the marginalized.
- **Advocate for Secular Values:** Known for his unwavering commitment to secularism, Panikkar actively opposed communal interpretations of history and emphasized the need for inclusive narratives.
- **Institution Builder & Educationist:** He played a pivotal role in strengthening historical research institutions and academic rigor in India, serving in key bodies like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the Kerala Council for Historical Research. He also actively participated in shaping debates around education policy and curriculum.

## Way Forward

To honor and sustain his intellectual legacy, it is crucial to preserve his work through archives, publications, and ongoing academic discussions. The education system must prioritize evidence-based, critical historiography and promote inclusive narratives that accurately reflect India's diversity. Additionally, strengthening academic freedom and institutional autonomy is paramount.

## Conclusion

K. N. Panikar was not merely a historian, but a transformative thought leader. His lifelong commitment to an inclusive, secular, and critical approach to history remains a guiding light for future scholars and citizens alike.

# SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

## India's Nationwide HPV Vaccination and Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy

### Context

On February 28, 2026, the Government of India launched a nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign to combat cervical cancer, which is one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths among Indian women.

### Key Features of the Vaccination Programme

- **Target Beneficiaries:** The drive targets approximately 1.2 crore (12 million) adolescent girls aged 14 years across all 36 States and Union Territories.
- **Vaccine Administration:** A single-dose of the Gardasil-4 (Quadrivalent) vaccine is being administered free of cost at government health facilities, including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.
- **Consent and Safety:** The vaccination is strictly voluntary and mandates parental consent, respecting family autonomy. Furthermore, vaccination sites are linked to 24x7 Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) Management Centers to ensure patient safety.
- **Digital Monitoring:** The government is leveraging the U-WIN platform to track real-time vaccination events and the eVIN system to monitor vaccine stocks and cold-chain logistics.

### A Multi-Pronged Elimination Strategy

This initiative marks a vital shift in public health policy from treatment to prevention. It complements India's ongoing population-based screening program, where women aged 30 to 65 undergo Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA). Notably, over 86 million women have already been screened under this effort. Together, these strategies strongly align with the WHO Global Strategy to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem by 2030.

### Challenges

Despite its significance, the programme faces hurdles such as limited awareness, societal stigma, and vaccine hesitancy driven by cultural resistance and misinformation. Additionally, sustaining such a massive nationwide initiative requires significant long-term funding and overcoming logistical bottlenecks, particularly in ensuring last-mile cold chain delivery in rural and remote areas.

### Way Forward

To ensure the programme's success, India must deploy mass awareness campaigns to debunk myths and promote vaccine acceptance. Utilizing school-based vaccination drives will be essential for efficient and widespread coverage. Ultimately, strengthening health infrastructure, fostering public-private partnerships, and seamlessly integrating vaccination with ongoing screening programmes will be crucial for achieving equitable access and transforming women's health outcomes across the country.

# Public Health Crisis: Meghalaya Emerges as India's HIV Hotspot

## Why in News?

Meghalaya has recorded the highest human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) caseload in India, with an adult prevalence rate of 0.42% double the national average. Currently, over 10,293 patients are receiving Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) in the state.

## Key Drivers of the Crisis

The alarming surge is largely attributed to a 'twin crisis' of injecting drug use (IDU), worsened by the state's proximity to the 'Golden Triangle', and an increase in unsafe heterosexual transmission. Additionally, severe social stigma and a lack of awareness discourage vulnerable populations, including youths, from seeking early testing and treatment.

## Key Challenges: The Legal Paradox

Efforts to curb the spread face a unique hurdle. The HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 rightfully protects patient dignity through strict confidentiality and informed consent provisions; however, health officials note that these laws act as a double-edged sword, complicating early detection because mandatory mass testing cannot be legally enforced. Furthermore, difficult geographic terrain and siloed departmental operations hinder effective healthcare delivery.

## Interventions and Way Forward

To tackle this epidemic, the Meghalaya government has sanctioned a **₹25-crore 'mission-mode' programme** over the next five

years to expand testing infrastructure and manpower. Current strategies emphasize harm-reduction initiatives, such as providing opioid substitution therapy (OST) to IDUs.

Ultimately, containing the crisis demands a decentralized, community-led response that balances the legal rights of patient confidentiality with mass screening and the destigmatization of the disease to achieve global 95-95-95 HIV control targets.

# Antibiotic-Induced Liver Injury (DILI): Mechanisms and Concerns

## Why in News?

Recent clinical observations and pharmacovigilance reports have highlighted an increase in cases of drug-induced liver injury (DILI) linked to certain antibiotics, renewing attention on the need for safer prescription practices.

## Understanding DILI and Its Mechanisms

The liver plays a central role in drug metabolism. Antibiotics can induce liver damage through several primary pathways:

- **Toxic Metabolites & Immune Reactions:** Some antibiotics produce toxic byproducts during breakdown, while others trigger idiosyncratic immune-mediated reactions where the body attacks its own liver cells.
- **Cellular Dysfunction:** Research into macrolides demonstrates that structural toxicity can occur via the inhibition of the mitochondrial electron transport

chain or the inhibition of bile acid transporters.

- **Gut-Liver Axis Disruption:** Antibiotics often alter the gut microbiota (dysbiosis), depleting protective commensal bacteria and damaging the intestinal barrier. This increased intestinal permeability allows bacterial antigens (such as lipopolysaccharides) to enter the portal circulation, triggering an inflammatory immune response in the liver.

## High-Risk Antibiotics & Vulnerability

Amoxicillin-clavulanate is globally the most commonly implicated drug in DILI. Other significant contributors include anti-tuberculosis medications (like isoniazid, pyrazinamide, and rifampicin), as well as tetracyclines and macrolides. Patient susceptibility is heavily influenced by age, genetics, pre-existing liver disease, and the dose or duration of the treatment.

## Key Challenges

- **Diagnostic Difficulties:** Identifying DILI is challenging as symptoms (such as jaundice, fatigue, and nausea) mimic other liver diseases and often appear late, sometimes weeks after the antibiotic course has finished.
- **Irrational Use:** Widespread misuse and self-medication of antibiotics not only increase the risk of liver toxicity but also drive the emergence of multidrug-resistant bacteria.

## Way Forward

- **Antimicrobial Stewardship:** Promoting rational prescription practices, short treatment courses, and early de-escalation of antibiotics.
- **Enhanced Pharmacovigilance:** Strengthening data collection for

adverse drug reactions and conducting routine liver function tests for high-risk patients.

- **Microbiome Interventions:** Exploring treatments like probiotics, prebiotics, and targeted flora restoration to mitigate toxicity and protect the gut-liver axis.

# NavIC's Atomic Clock Setback: Challenges & Opportunities

## Why in the News?

India's regional navigation system, NavIC, has recently faced setbacks due to the malfunction of onboard atomic clocks in some of its satellites. Because these clocks are critical for calculating precise positioning, their failure has raised concerns regarding the reliability of India's indigenous GPS alternative.

## About NavIC

Developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), NavIC (formerly IRNSS) uses a constellation of satellites to provide accurate navigation and timing services over India and surrounding regions. It is designed for diverse applications, including military operations, disaster management, and commercial transportation.

## Significance

- **Strategic Autonomy:** It reduces India's dependence on foreign navigation systems like GPS, thereby enhancing national security.
- **Critical Infrastructure:** Accurate timing from NavIC is essential for the seamless functioning of telecommunications, power grids, and banking sectors.

- **Civilian Applications:** It supports crucial civilian services, including fisheries, transport, and emergency management.

## Key Challenges

- **Hardware Reliability:** Failures in atomic clocks directly impact service continuity and precision.
- **Import Vulnerabilities:** Earlier reliance on foreign technology for these clocks created strategic vulnerabilities.
- **Ecosystem & Coverage:** NavIC currently has only regional reach, and there is a lack of widespread integration of NavIC-compatible chips in everyday devices like smartphones.
- **Cost:** Maintaining, upgrading, and replacing satellites is highly expensive.

## Way Forward & Conclusion

To overcome these hurdles, India must accelerate the indigenous development of atomic clocks and design future satellites with better redundancy and durability. Expanding the system's coverage and heavily promoting NavIC integration in commercial devices is also vital. Ultimately, while these setbacks pose short-term challenges, sustained investment and innovation can transform NavIC into a highly robust pillar of India's strategic infrastructure.

# Major Boost to Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train Project

## Why in News?

India's flagship **Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail** project has recently gained significant momentum with the arrival of a **Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) from China**. This machinery will

be deployed to construct critical underground tunnels across challenging terrains.

## What is a Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM)?

A TBM is specialized engineering equipment designed to excavate tunnels safely and with high precision. It is crucial for the bullet train project's complex urban and underwater stretches, such as creek crossings, as it significantly **minimizes surface disruption** and boosts construction efficiency.

## Significance of the Development

- **Infrastructure and Economic Growth:** The TBM's arrival marks tangible progress in India's first high-speed rail corridor, which is expected to drastically reduce travel time, enhance connectivity, and stimulate regional economic development.
- **Technological Upgrade:** Adopting such advanced tunnelling technology enhances India's engineering capabilities and presents a **Make in India** opportunity for tech-transfer and skill development.

## Associated Challenges

- **Financial and Administrative Hurdles:** The project requires immense capital investment and faces ongoing delays due to legal resistance over land acquisition.
- **Technical and Environmental Risks:** Navigating complex underwater terrains poses severe technical challenges, while large-scale construction threatens local ecosystems.
- **Foreign Dependence:** Heavy reliance on imported machinery like Chinese TBMs highlights gaps in domestic manufacturing.

## Way Forward

To ensure the transformative project's success, India must prioritise **strengthening its indigenous capacity** to manufacture high-tech machinery like TBMs. Furthermore, the government must streamline land acquisition through transparent stakeholder engagement, enforce strict **environmental safeguards**, and enhance overall project management to avoid costly delays.

# Centre Rolls Out AI Skilling Initiative

## Context

The Government of India has launched a nationwide AI skilling initiative in collaboration with Google and YouTube. This programme is designed to equip students, educators, and professionals with vital artificial intelligence and digital skills to meet the demands of a rapidly changing job market.

## Significance

The initiative is instrumental in building a **future-ready workforce** tailored for emerging AI-driven industries and bridging the current mismatch between workforce capabilities and industry needs. By utilising online platforms like YouTube, the programme ensures **scalable and inclusive learning** across regions, actively supporting India's ambition to become a global hub for technological innovation.

## Challenges

Despite its potential, the programme faces several hurdles:

- **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to devices and the internet may exclude marginalised and rural communities.
- **Language & Quality Barriers:** There is a limited availability of AI content in regional languages, and ensuring a standardised, industry-relevant curriculum is difficult.
- **Implementation Gaps:** Challenges remain in adequately training educators and ensuring these new skills translate into concrete employment opportunities.

## Way Forward

To ensure success, it is critical to **expand digital infrastructure** for last-mile connectivity and **localise content** into regional languages. The programme should foster **Public-Private Partnerships** and align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Furthermore, capacity building for teachers and a strong focus on practical skills—such as internships and project-based learning—are essential.

## Conclusion

This initiative marks a crucial step toward preparing India for the digital age. By prioritising inclusive access, high-quality training, and robust industry linkages, this coordinated approach can successfully position India as a global leader in the AI economy.



# Assam's Dedicated Satellite for Flood Management

## Why in the News?

The Government of Assam has recently floated a tender to develop and deploy a dedicated satellite for flood monitoring and management. This marks a significant step toward using technology to mitigate the recurrent disasters caused by the Brahmaputra river system.

## Technological Framework

The initiative will rely on Earth Observation (EO) satellites utilizing remote sensing technology. A crucial requirement for flood monitoring is the use of Radar (SAR) sensors, which can penetrate dense cloud cover and operate at night—essential during the monsoon. While India currently utilizes satellites like Cartosat and the RISAT series, a dedicated state-specific satellite will offer more frequent, high-resolution, and localized data for mapping inundated zones and monitoring changing river courses.

## Significance

- **Enhanced Disaster Preparedness:** It enables real-time tracking of flood dynamics and early warning systems,

reducing casualties and optimizing relief operations.

- **Economic & Agricultural Relief:** Rapid and accurate assessment of crop and infrastructure damage will streamline compensation and support crop insurance planning.
- **Decentralized Governance:** It promotes the localized application of space technology, empowering the state with independent data rather than relying entirely on external sources.

## Key Challenges

The project faces high costs associated with satellite development, launch, and maintenance. Additionally, translating raw satellite data into actionable policy (the data-to-action gap) requires high-level technical expertise. Furthermore, the highly dynamic, shifting channels of the Brahmaputra make predictive modeling complex.

## Way Forward

To ensure viability, Assam should collaborate closely with ISRO to leverage existing infrastructure and optimize costs. An integrated approach combining satellite data with AI-based models and ground sensors is vital. By focusing on capacity building and ensuring last-mile connectivity for warnings, this initiative sets a progressive precedent for integrating space technology into grassroots climate adaptation and disaster resilience strategies.

# **PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

# PUBLIC DISCOURSE

## India's Push for Algorithmic Sovereignty

### What is Algorithmic Sovereignty?

For centuries, sovereignty was defined by control over physical territory, but in the 21st century, power is increasingly embedded in algorithms. Algorithmic sovereignty refers to a nation's or institution's capacity to independently govern the design, deployment, and oversight of algorithmic systems in alignment with its own legal, ethical, and cultural values, free from foreign economic or social compulsions.

While digital sovereignty primarily focuses on data localization and infrastructure control, algorithmic sovereignty shifts the focus to how that data is processed. It encompasses the power to audit, regulate, and adapt artificial intelligence (AI) systems to ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness within a society. As AI integrates deeper into government laws, healthcare, and national security, it is becoming the "brain" behind critical national infrastructure, making the push for digital independence a strategic necessity.

### Why Does Algorithmic Sovereignty Matter for India?

The conversation around algorithmic sovereignty is gaining urgency due to the explosive growth of AI and its integration into Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

- **Countering 'Digital Colonialism':** Currently, global technology

corporations control the platforms and algorithms that mediate information flows. If India relies exclusively on foreign AI architectures (like those from the US or China), foreign entities will effectively control Indian digital data and knowledge, leading to "Digital Colonialism". Outsourcing AI for law and defense threatens India's "Strategic Autonomy"—the freedom to make independent national choices.

- **Mitigating Structural and Cultural Bias:** AI models are largely trained on Western datasets, treating American or European viewpoints as the "default truth". For example, when an advanced foreign AI was asked a legal question regarding US naval activity in Asian waters, it instantly supported the Western viewpoint, completely ignoring India's long-standing legal stance under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Our AI must understand Indian languages, regional cultures, and local laws rather than blindly replicating Western perspectives.
- **Safeguarding Democracy:** Algorithms curate social media feeds and search engines, shaping public opinion. Political consultants increasingly use algorithmic accuracy, psychographic targeting, and emotional engineering to segment voters and create "affective feedback loops". If these systems remain opaque and externally controlled, they can deepen polarization, amplify misinformation, and threaten the deliberative nature of India's democracy.
- **Promoting Social Justice:** Algorithms are not neutral; they inherit biases from their training data. In domains like credit scoring, healthcare, or

welfare delivery, biased algorithms can reinforce existing inequalities. Algorithmic sovereignty ensures these systems align with constitutional values of equality and fairness.

## The Debate: Foreign AI Stack vs. Indigenous Development

A central debate in strategic circles is whether India should rapidly adopt existing foreign AI or build its own.

- **Argument for Foreign AI:** Some experts argue that given the massive technological lead of the US, India should prioritize the rapid deployment of global AI technologies in sectors like healthcare, agriculture, and education to close the deployment gap immediately.
- **Argument for Sovereign AI:** Conversely, exclusive reliance on foreign foundational models poses severe long-term risks. India's AI sovereignty is not established by just deploying flagship models, but through sustained national control over end-to-end infrastructure.

### Operationalizing India's Sovereign AI Stack

To achieve digital independence, India is working to assemble a sovereign AI stack consisting of five interconnected layers:

1. **Energy Infrastructure:** Massive AI clusters require continuous baseload power. Recognizing this, the proposed SHANTI Bill aims to expand India's

nuclear power base to provide a 24x7 baseload supply for data centers.

2. **Semiconductor Chips:** The India Semiconductor Mission seeks to address India's historical lag in fabrication by funding large-scale projects in assembly, testing, and packaging, alongside software-hardware co-design.
3. **Data Centers:** The proposed National Data Centre Policy treats data centers as strategic infrastructure, offering long-term incentives to anchor investments domestically.
4. **Indigenous Models:** Through the IndiaAI Mission (operated by MeitY), the government is building massive datasets and a national AI compute platform. India is focusing on cost-effective, open-source models optimized for Indic languages and domestic use cases (e.g., AI4Bharat) rather than just mimicking expensive global foundational models.
5. **Applications:** India's globally recognized DPI (Aadhaar, UPI) provides a uniquely scalable environment to embed domestic AI applications into mission-critical workflows like welfare delivery and financial fraud detection.

### Regulatory Framework and Existing Gaps

While India is making technological strides, its regulatory scaffolding is still evolving.

- Currently, the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the pending Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA), 2023 form the basis of the digital regulatory framework.
- However, these regulations do not adequately address algorithmic accountability, automated decision-making, or model explainability.
- To fill these gaps, multiple regulators are stepping in: NITI Aayog is designing responsible AI principles, the RBI's FREE-

AI committee is creating frameworks for ethical AI in finance, SEBI is looking at AI/ML governance for investor protection, and the ICMR has published ethical guidelines for AI in healthcare.

## Way Forward

Algorithmic sovereignty in India is no longer a theoretical construct it is a strategic imperative. To transition from intent to capability, India must:

- **Invest heavily in Domestic Compute and Datasets:** Build secure data infrastructure and datasets that reflect India's socio-cultural realities, ensuring foreign entities do not dominate the data architecture.
- **Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Achieving autonomy requires cross-functional collaboration among technologists, lawyers, policymakers, and ethicists to balance global technological integration with local accountability.
- **Ensure Algorithmic Accountability and Data Justice:** India must mandate algorithmic transparency, requiring AI developers to conduct bias audits and adhere to an "emotional transparency" framework to protect citizens from psychographic manipulation.
- **Promote Participatory Consultancy:** Campaigning and public communication should shift toward deliberative co-creation, involving citizens in shaping the logic of political and public algorithms, thus strengthening democratic resilience.

## Conclusion

Algorithm sovereignty is not about rejecting globalization; it is about ensuring that the invisible architectures governing modern society align with national priorities and democratic

values. In the coming decades, sovereignty will not only be defended at national borders but also within lines of code. By assembling a resilient AI stack and robust regulatory frameworks, India can transition from being a passive consumer of algorithmic power to an active shaper of its digital destiny.

# Tuberculosis Elimination in India: Diagnostic Innovations and Global Strategies

## Context and Relevance

Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be one of the world's most lethal infectious diseases, persisting as a severe public health challenge despite being preventable and curable. Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has expanded its TB diagnostic toolkit, introducing new recommendations aimed at improving access to faster, more efficient testing methodologies. For civil services aspirants, understanding the evolving diagnostic landscape, alongside the global frameworks and India's institutional responses, is critical for comprehensively evaluating the public health strategies required to end the TB epidemic.

## The Global and Indian TB Burden

Caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, TB primarily affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also manifest in other organs. The global burden remains staggering; the 2022 Global TB Report highlighted that an estimated 4.1 million people with TB went undiagnosed or unreported globally in 2021.

India bears the highest TB burden worldwide, accounting for nearly 27% of the global incidence. In 2022, out of an estimated 10.6

million global cases, 2.82 million occurred in India, corresponding to an incidence rate of 199 cases per 100,000 population. Furthermore, India recorded an estimated 331,000 TB-related deaths the same year.

To combat this, the WHO's End TB Strategy has set global targets for 2030, which include a 90% reduction in TB deaths and an 80% reduction in TB incidence compared to the 2015 baseline. In a bold policy move, the Government of India has committed to eliminating TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets.

## The Evolving Diagnostic Landscape

Early and accurate diagnosis is the cornerstone of TB elimination, as a single untreated patient can perpetuate community transmission. The diagnostic architecture is currently undergoing a paradigm shift:

- **Traditional Methods:** Historically, health systems relied on Sputum Smear Microscopy. While low-cost and widely used, it frequently misses less active, early-stage TB and cannot determine drug resistance. Culture tests, though highly accurate, take weeks to yield results, causing critical delays in initiating treatment.
- **Molecular Diagnostics:** Advanced molecular diagnostics, such as CBNAAT (GeneXpert) and the indigenous TrueNat, have revolutionized detection by accurately identifying both TB and drug-resistant strains within hours.
- **Diagnostic Network Optimization (DNO):** To address the high costs and infrastructural limitations of molecular tests, health systems are utilizing DNO. DNO is a geospatial analytics approach that visualizes existing diagnostic networks and models "ideal" scenarios, enabling the cost-effective deployment of diagnostic resources.

## Recent WHO Diagnostic Interventions

To close persistent global diagnostic gaps, the WHO is prioritizing decentralization and efficiency. The newly endorsed diagnostic strategies include:

1. **Near Point-of-Care Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests (NPOC-NAATs):** A new class of molecular tests designed for peripheral healthcare levels, such as primary care clinics. They offer lower unit costs and faster results than traditional centralized laboratory platforms.
2. **Tongue Swabs:** An easy-to-collect alternative sample type endorsed for adults and adolescents who are unable to produce sputum, thereby simplifying the collection process.
3. **Sputum Pooling:** A cost-saving diagnostic strategy where multiple sputum samples are tested together using low-complexity automated NAATs. This approach improves laboratory throughput and conserves valuable reagents in resource-constrained environments.

*Note: While the WHO advocates for universal access to these rapid diagnostics, countries with lower incidence rates, such as the United States (guided by the CDC), continue to utilize a targeted, risk-based screening approach.*

## India's Institutional Response:

**National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)** Guided by the National Strategic Plan (2017-2025), India's Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) was renamed the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) in 2020 to align with its aggressive 2025 target. The

programme operates on four strategic pillars: "Detect – Treat – Prevent – Build" (DTPB).

## Key interventions under the NTEP include:

- **Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan (PMTBMBA):** Launched in September 2022, this initiative seeks to transform TB elimination into a 'Jan Andolan' (people's movement). It leverages community involvement and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through *Ni-kshay Mitras*—individuals and organizations that adopt TB patients to provide nutritional and social support. By July 2024, over 1.6 lakh *Ni-kshay Mitras* had registered to support 11.4 lakh patients.
- **Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana (NPY):** Addressing undernutrition, a critical risk factor, the government provides financial assistance of ₹500 per month via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to support the nutritional needs of all TB patients during their treatment.
- **Active Case Finding and Private Sector Engagement:** The NTEP conducts systematic house-to-house searches among high-risk populations, including tribal communities, prisoners, and people living with HIV. Furthermore, strategic engagement with the private sector has yielded a seven-fold increase in private sector case notifications over eight years, successfully bringing a large portion of the "missing millions" into the formal care network.
- **Sub-National Disease-Free Certification:** India introduced a novel framework to monitor TB trends at the district and state levels. This utilizes an inverse sampling methodology to track community-level disease burden and private sector drug sales, measuring progress against the 2015 baseline.

## Challenges and Bottlenecks

- **Drug-Resistant TB:** The emergence of Multi-Drug-Resistant (MDR-TB) and Extensively Drug-Resistant (XDR-TB) tuberculosis complicates clinical management. India reports drug resistance in 2.5% of new cases and 13% of previously treated cases.
- **Infrastructure Deficits:** A pronounced rural-urban divide restricts access to advanced molecular diagnostics, which are expensive and require specific laboratory infrastructure.
- **Socio-Economic Determinants:** Poverty, undernutrition, and the catastrophic financial costs associated with the disease hinder treatment adherence. Achieving the SDG target of zero TB-affected households facing catastrophic costs remains a significant hurdle.
- **Social Stigma:** Lack of awareness and deep-rooted societal stigma cause individuals to delay testing, thereby sustaining the chain of transmission.

## Way Forward

To achieve the vision of a TB-free India, a multi-dimensional approach is required. First, there must be a rapid scale-up of universal access to molecular diagnostics, integrating decentralized tools like TrueNat and the newly recommended NPOC-NAATs. Second, data-driven methodologies like Diagnostic Network Optimization (DNO) must be systematically deployed to maximize resource efficiency. Third, addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities through the sustained implementation of schemes like the *Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana* is imperative. Ultimately, the convergence of technological innovation, robust domestic funding, and decentralized community participation will determine the success of India's ambitious TB elimination mandate.

# **PREP ZONE**

## **PRACTICE QUESTIONS**

# MAINS CURRENT AFFAIRS QUESTION

## From Deep Dive:

1. Examine the evolution of maternity benefits in India.  
How far has the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (as amended in 2017) succeeded in ensuring gender justice in the workforce?
2. Discuss the ethical, legal, and social challenges surrounding abortion rights in India under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.  
How have recent amendments and rulings addressed these concerns?
3. Evaluate the role of public health infrastructure in ensuring reproductive rights in India.  
What reforms are necessary to improve accessibility and quality of care?
4. **“Energy security is no longer limited to supply stability but extends to sustainability and geopolitics.”**  
Discuss in the context of recent global developments.
5. Analyze the geopolitical implications of energy corridors and pipelines in regions like West Asia and Central Asia.  
How do they influence global power dynamics?
6. **“The LPG crisis reflects the intersection of energy security and social welfare.”**  
Discuss with reference to recent price volatility and its impact on vulnerable households in India.
7. **“The restriction of Scheduled Caste status to specific religions raises questions of equality and secularism.”**  
Critically examine in light of constitutional provisions and recent debates.
8. Examine the constitutional validity of linking caste-based discrimination with religion.  
How does it align with Articles 14, 15, and 25 of the Indian Constitution?
9. **“Caste-based discrimination transcends religious boundaries.”**  
Analyze this statement with reference to demands for extending Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians.

## From news gist:

1. **Legal recognition alone is insufficient to ensure substantive equality for transgender persons.”**  
Critically examine in the context of recent amendments to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.
2. Examine the tension between self-identification and state certification in determining gender identity.  
Evaluate its implications for dignity and autonomy
3. **Gender equality in the armed forces is a constitutional mandate, not a matter of policy discretion.”**  
Discuss in light of recent Supreme Court judgments on women’s inclusion in the armed forces.
4. **“Institutional resistance often hinders the realization of gender equality.”**  
Analyze this statement with reference to women’s entry and advancement in the armed forces.

5. **"The mandate of institutions like the NCERT to 'rationalize' school curriculum often finds itself at a crossroads with the principles of academic freedom and historical objectivity.** Critically analyze the impact of such controversies on the institutional dignity of educational bodies and suggest a framework to ensure that curriculum updates remain pedagogically sound and ideologically neutral." (250 Words | 15 Marks)
6. **"The practice of appointing 'Acting' Directors General of Police (DGPs) is a subversion of the rule of law and an affront to the administrative autonomy of the police force. In light of the recent Supreme Court directives (2026), critically examine how the tightening of DGP appointment norms strengthens the Prakash Singh framework."** Suggest measures to bridge the gap between judicial mandates and state-level compliance. (250 Words | 15 Marks)
7. **"The Speaker of the Lok Sabha is intended to be the 'conscience-keeper' of the House, yet the structural link between the Chair and the ruling party often precipitates constitutional deadlocks.** In light of recent developments, critically evaluate the procedural safeguards for the removal of the Speaker and discuss the necessity of adopting the 'once a Speaker, always a Speaker' convention to ensure the impartiality of the office." (250 Words | 15 Marks)
8. The judicial recognition of the 'Right to Die with Dignity' represents a transformative shift from a literal interpretation of Article 21 to a more compassionate, person-centric constitutionalism. In light of the *Common Cause (2018)* and the recent *Harish Rana (2026)* judgments, critically analyze the legal and ethical challenges in implementing 'Living Wills' in India." (250 Words | 15 Marks)
9. **"The demand for renaming 'Kerala' to 'Keralam' is not merely a linguistic correction but an assertion of cultural identity rooted in the 'Aikya Kerala' movement.** Discuss the constitutional procedure for changing the name of a state and analyze the significance of such toponymic shifts in a federal polity like India." (250 Words | 15 Marks)
10. **"Public participation is essential for the success of large-scale governance exercises like the Census."**  
Discuss in the context of innovative measures such as the introduction of mascots for Census of India 2027.
11. **"Digital governance must evolve to address emerging risks to child development."**  
Evaluate this statement with reference to social media regulation policies.
12. Discuss the role of technology, darknet, and digital payments in facilitating modern drug networks.  
Suggest measures to counter these threats.
13. How can the success of Chandigarh as a fully literate UT be replicated in other regions of India?  
Highlight key policy lessons.
14. Discuss the role of strategic petroleum reserves, diversification of energy sources, and international partnerships in strengthening India's energy security
15. Analyze how geopolitical tensions and energy price fluctuations influence the polymer industry and plastic pricing.
16. **"Balanced regional development remains a challenge in India's industrialization."** Evaluate how BHAVYA *"India's evolving stance on Chinese FDI reflects a balance between economic pragmatism and national security."* Critically examine. can contribute to reducing regional disparities.

17. Explain the mechanism through which the Reserve Bank of India injects liquidity using government securities. How does it impact interest rates and credit flow?
18. *“External financial shocks can test the resilience of domestic economic fundamentals.”* Evaluate with reference to FPI outflows.
19. ***“Retail lending has become a key driver of banking growth in India, but it also carries emerging risks.”***  
Critically analyze in the context of rising NPAs and write-offs.
20. ***“Environmental sustainability and economic development often come into conflict in mineral extraction.”***  
Critically analyze in the context of minor mineral regulation.
21. Analyze the geopolitical causes behind the USA–Israel–Iran conflict of 2026. How does it reflect shifting power dynamics in West Asia?
22. Discuss the geopolitical and economic factors behind India continuing oil imports from Russia despite Western sanctions. How does the temporary U.S. exemption impact India’s policy choices?
23. Evaluate the effectiveness and limitations of Iran’s maritime strategy in the Strait of Hormuz in the context of modern naval warfare and global geopolitical responses
24. *Affordable healthcare and skilled manpower give India a comparative advantage in medical tourism, but geopolitical uncertainties can disrupt this growth.”*  
Critically analyze.
25. Discuss the challenges faced by Indian seafarers in geopolitically sensitive regions such as the Strait of Hormuz. How can India enhance their safety and security?
26. Analyze the major themes discussed in Raisina Dialogue 2026, such as multipolarity, supply chain resilience, and technological governance.
27. Discuss the significance of the HPV vaccination programme in preventing cervical cancer in India. What challenges may arise in its implementation?
28. ***“Public health challenges in Northeast India require region-specific strategies.”***  
Critically examine in the context of HIV prevalence.
29. Analyze the challenges of regulating antibiotic use in India in light of rising antimicrobial resistance and adverse drug reactions.
30. Evaluate the role of Indian Space Research Organisation in addressing technical failures and strengthening India’s space-based infrastructure. Suggest reforms to enhance system reliability.
31. *High-speed rail projects are a symbol of modern infrastructure and economic progress.”*  
Examine in the context of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Corridor.
32. Analyze the challenges in implementing AI skilling programmes in India, particularly in terms of digital divide, infrastructure, and quality of training.
33. Explain the causes of recurrent flooding in Assam. How can technological interventions mitigate these challenges?
34. *Cultural heritage in conflict zones is highly vulnerable to destruction and neglect.”*  
Examine with reference to the Anahita Temple.
35. Discuss the relevance of the Mahad Satyagraha in contemporary India with respect to issues of social inclusion, caste discrimination, and human rights.
36. Discuss the contribution of K. N. Panikkar to Indian historiography. How did his work promote secular and pluralistic interpretations of history?

37. Discuss the achievements of the Jal Jeevan Mission in improving rural water supply. What challenges remain in ensuring universal coverage?
38. *Ensuring food security should not come at the cost of ecological sustainability.*  
Critically analyze with reference to rice production in India.
39. Suggest measures to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of Project Cheetah, including monitoring, community participation, and scientific management.
40. Discuss the objectives and achievements of Project Cheetah. What ecological and conservation challenges does it face?
41. *"Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) reflect a country's commitment to global climate action."*  
Examine in the context of India's updated targets for 2031–2035.
42. *Air pollution remains one of the most serious environmental health risks globally.*  
Examine in the context of findings from the World Air Quality Report 2025.
43. Discuss the factors responsible for the weakening of Left-Wing Extremism in India. How have security and development strategies contributed to this decline?
44. *"Technological advancement without robust regulatory frameworks can lead to misuse."*  
Critically analyze in the context of AI deployment in internal security.
45. *"As space becomes increasingly commercialized, cybersecurity risks are expanding."*  
Critically analyze in the context of India's growing space ecosystem.

# PRELIMS QUESTIONS

## From Deep Dive:

### 1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 initially restricted Scheduled Caste (SC) status only to Hindus.
2. Later amendments extended SC status to Sikhs and Buddhists.
3. Persons belonging to Christianity or Islam are currently included under the SC category nationwide.
4. The power to notify Scheduled Castes lies with the President, subject to parliamentary law.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

### 2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 was issued under Article 341 of the Constitution.
2. Parliament has the power to include or exclude groups from the SC list.
3. States can independently notify changes to the SC list without central approval.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

### 3. Consider the following statements:

1. Article 341 of the Constitution deals with the identification of Scheduled Castes.
2. Once notified, the SC list cannot be altered under any circumstances.
3. Religious restrictions on SC status have been a subject of legal and policy debate.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

### 4. Consider the following statements:

1. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides for paid maternity leave for women in certain establishments.
2. The Act mandates 26 weeks of paid leave for all working women in India, regardless of sector.
3. The Act also includes provisions for crèche facilities in establishments with a specified number of employees.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

### 5. Consider the following statements:

1. Reproductive rights in India are linked to the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21.
2. The Supreme Court has recognized a woman's right to make reproductive choices as part of privacy rights.
3. Reproductive rights are explicitly enumerated as Fundamental Rights in the Constitution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**6. Consider the following statements regarding abortion laws in India:**

1. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 allows abortion under specific conditions.
2. The 2021 amendment extended the upper gestation limit for certain categories of women.
3. Abortion on request without any conditions is fully legal in India.

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

**7. Consider the following statements regarding global energy institutions:**

1. International Energy Agency was established to ensure energy security among its member countries.
2. OPEC influences global oil prices through production decisions.

3. All major energy-consuming countries are members of the IEA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**8. Consider the following statements:**

1. The ongoing Iran–Israel conflict has led to disruptions in global oil and gas supply.
2. Strategic petroleum reserves alone can fully offset long-term global supply shocks.
3. Energy price spikes can contribute to inflation and economic instability worldwide.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**9. Consider the following statements:**

1. Closure of major maritime chokepoints can disrupt global trade beyond energy, including fertilizers and food supply chains.
2. Energy demand is highly elastic in the short term, allowing quick adjustment to supply shocks.
3. Geopolitical conflicts can create a "risk premium" in global oil prices.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**FROM NEWS GIST**

**10. Which of the following regions are considered critical maritime choke points for India's energy security?**

- 1. Strait of Hormuz
- 2. Bab el-Mandeb Strait
- 3. Strait of Malacca

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**11. With reference to India's crude oil import diversification, consider the following statements:**

- 1. India imports more than 80% of its crude oil requirement.
- 2. OPEC countries historically dominate India's oil imports.
- 3. India has recently increased crude imports from Russia despite geopolitical tensions.

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

**12. With reference to Open Market Operations (OMO) conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, consider the following statements:**

- 1. Purchase of government securities injects liquidity into the banking system.
- 2. Sale of government securities increases liquidity in the system.
- 3. OMOs are a tool of monetary policy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**13. "Durable liquidity" in RBI operations refers to:**

- A. Short-term overnight liquidity adjustments
- B. Long-term liquidity infusion into the banking system
- C. Liquidity provided only to NBFCs
- D. Emergency liquidity during crises only

**14. With reference to India's FDI policy reforms in 2020, consider the following statements:**

- 1. India made prior government approval mandatory for investments from countries sharing a land border with India.
- 2. The policy was introduced to prevent opportunistic takeovers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3. The policy applies only to Chinese investments.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**15. A sustained depreciation of the rupee can have which of the following effects?**

1. Increase in import bill
2. Imported inflation
3. Boost to exports

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

**16. With reference to loan write-offs by banks in India, consider the following statements:**

1. Loan write-off means the borrower is no longer liable to repay the loan.
2. Write-offs improve the balance sheet of banks by removing non-performing assets.
3. Written-off loans can still be recovered by banks.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**17. Consider the following statements:**

1. State governments have the power to regulate minor minerals.
2. The central government regulates only minor minerals.
3. Royalty from minor minerals is collected by state governments.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**18. Consider the following statements regarding industrial corridors in India:**

1. They aim to integrate manufacturing with infrastructure development.
2. Examples include Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC).
3. They are solely financed by state governments.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**19. With reference to polymers, consider the following statements:**

1. Polymers are long-chain molecules made of repeating monomer units.
2. Most commercial plastics are derived from petrochemicals.
3. Polymer prices are independent of crude oil prices.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**20. With reference to the International Energy Agency (IEA), consider the following statements:**

1. It was established in response to the 1973 oil crisis.
2. India is a full member of the IEA.
3. It provides policy advice on energy security and sustainability.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**21. A severe oil shock would most likely lead to:**

- 1. Cost-push inflation
- 2. Widening current account deficit
- 3. Depreciation of domestic currency

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

**22. With reference to the Census in India, consider the following statements:**

- 1. The Census is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948.
- 2. It is conducted by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.
- 3. It is a concurrent subject under the Constitution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**23. With reference to passive euthanasia in India, consider the following statements:**

- 1. Passive euthanasia involves withdrawal or withholding of life-support.
- 2. Active euthanasia is legal in India.
- 3. Living wills are legally recognized in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**24. Consider the following statements:**

- 1. The Speaker continues in office even after dissolution of the Lok Sabha until a new Speaker is elected.
- 2. The Speaker is expected to function impartially.
- 3. The Speaker must resign from his/her political party after election.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**25. Which of the following powers/functions are exercised by the Speaker of Lok Sabha?**

- 1. Certification of Money Bills
- 2. Decision on disqualification under the Tenth Schedule
- 3. Presiding over joint sittings of Parliament

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**26. With reference to the appointment of the Director General of Police (DGP) in states, consider the following statements:**

- 1. The DGP is appointed by the State Government.

2. The appointment must be made from a panel of officers prepared by the Union Public Service Commission.
3. The DGP must have a minimum tenure of two years as per Supreme Court guidelines.

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

**27. Which of the following international frameworks supports maternity protection?**

- A. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- B. ILO conventions on maternity protection
- C. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

**28. Consider the following statements regarding adoption in India:**

1. Adoption is governed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.
2. Single working women can legally adopt children in India.
3. Adoption laws in India are uniform across all religions.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

**29. Consider the following statements:**

1. The Right to Education is a Fundamental Right under Article 21A.
2. Curriculum development in India is exclusively under the Union Government.
3. States have flexibility in implementing curriculum frameworks.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**30. The Supreme Court judgment granting Permanent Commission to women in the Army is:**

- A. Indra Sawhney case
- B. Secretary, Ministry of Defence v. Babita Puniya
- C. Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan
- D. Navtej Singh Johar case

**31. With reference to Scheduled Caste (SC) status, consider the following statements:**

1. SC status is currently limited to Hindus only.
2. Sikhs and Buddhists were later included within the SC category.
3. SC status is determined by the President through a public notification.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**32. With reference to India–Israel relations, consider the following statements:**

1. India recognized Israel in 1950.
2. Full diplomatic relations between India and Israel were established in 1992.
3. India has always maintained strong public diplomatic ties with Israel since independence.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**33. With reference to the issue of abandonment of seafarers, consider the following statements:**

1. It refers to shipowners failing to pay wages or repatriate crew
2. It is regulated under international maritime conventions
3. It affects only cargo ships and not oil tankers

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**34. Consider the following countries often associated with India's inbound medical tourism from West Asia:**

1. Iraq
2. Yemen
3. Oman

Which of the above are major contributors to medical tourists in India?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

35. Consider the following statements regarding the renaming of states in India:

1. It requires a constitutional amendment under Article 368
2. Parliament has the power to alter the name of a state
3. The President must refer the proposal to the concerned State Legislature

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

36. Consider the following statements regarding the Census in India:

1. It is conducted by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner
2. It comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs
3. It is a concurrent subject under the Constitution

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**37. Consider the following statements regarding the removal of the Speaker:**

1. It requires a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the House
2. A 14-day notice is required before moving the resolution
3. The Speaker can preside over the sitting when the resolution for their removal is under consideration

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

**38. Consider the following statements regarding passive euthanasia in India:**

1. It involves withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining treatment
2. It is legally permitted under certain conditions
3. Active euthanasia is also legal in India

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**39. Consider the following safeguards related to passive euthanasia in India:**

1. Approval by medical boards
2. Consent through advance directive or family
3. Mandatory judicial approval in all cases

Which of the above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**40. Consider the following statements regarding DGP appointments:**

1. The DGP is selected from a panel of officers prepared by the UPSC
2. The DGP must have a minimum tenure of two years
3. The State Government has absolute discretion in appointing the DGP

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**41. Consider the following statements regarding maternity benefits in India:**

1. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 provides for paid maternity leave
2. The Act was amended to extend leave to 26 weeks
3. It applies only to government employees

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**42. Which of the following Directive Principles of State Policy is most closely related to maternity relief?**

- A. Article 38
- B. Article 39
- C. Article 42
- D. Article 44

**43. With reference to education governance in India, consider the following:**

1. Education is placed in the Concurrent List
2. NCERT operates under the direct control of State Governments
3. SCERTs function at the state level to contextualize curriculum

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only

- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**44. Which landmark judgment addressed gender discrimination in granting Permanent Commission to women officers in the Army?**

- A. Vishaka case
- B. Indra Sawhney case
- C. Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs Babita Puniya
- D. Navtej Singh Johar case

**45. Consider the following statements regarding women in the Indian Armed Forces:**

1. Women were initially inducted through Short Service Commission (SSC)
2. Permanent Commission for women was recognized following judicial intervention
3. Women are currently allowed in all combat roles across all services

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**46. With reference to transgender rights in India, consider the following statements:**

1. The right to self-identify gender has been recognized by the judiciary
2. Legal recognition of gender identity requires medical certification in all cases
3. The Constitution explicitly mentions "transgender" as a category

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**47. Consider the following features of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:**

1. Prohibition of discrimination in education and employment
2. Establishment of National Council for Transgender Persons
3. Reservation in public employment as a statutory right

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**48. Consider the following statements regarding SC status:**

1. It was originally restricted to Hindus only
2. It was later extended to Sikhs and Buddhists through Presidential Orders
3. It is automatically available to all socially backward communities irrespective of religion

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**49. The power to specify Scheduled Castes lies with:**

- A. Parliament alone
- B. State Governments
- C. The President, subject to parliamentary law
- D. Supreme Court

**50. With reference to rice cultivation in India, consider the following statements:**

1. It is a Kharif crop requiring high temperature and rainfall
2. It can also be grown as a Rabi crop in some regions with irrigation
3. It requires well-drained sandy soils only

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

51. Consider the following statements regarding the Jal Jeevan Mission:

1. It is implemented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti
2. It focuses only on surface water sources
3. It emphasizes community participation in water management

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**52. Consider the following statements regarding regulation of digital platforms:**

1. Social media regulation in India falls under the IT Act, 2000
2. States have no role in regulating online content
3. Intermediaries are required to exercise due diligence

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**53. Which of the following international conventions are related to drug control?**

1. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961
2. Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971
3. UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, 1988

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

**54. With reference to Union Territories in India, consider the following statements:**

1. They are administered by the President through an Administrator/Lieutenant Governor
2. All Union Territories have legislatures
3. Education is a subject in the Concurrent List

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**55. Which of the following indicators is most relevant for declaring a region “fully literate”?**

- A. Gross Enrolment Ratio
- B. Ability to read, write, and understand basic text
- C. Number of universities
- D. Digital penetration rate

**56. Consider the following statements regarding K. N. Panikkar:**

1. He was associated with the study of colonialism and nationalism

2. He emphasized a Marxist approach to historiography
3. He primarily worked on ancient Vedic texts

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**57. Consider the following statements regarding the Mahad Satyagraha:**

1. It took place in present-day Maharashtra
2. It involved the burning of Manusmriti
3. It was part of the Civil Disobedience Movement

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**58. The primary objective of the Mahad Satyagraha was to:**

- A. Demand independence from British rule
- B. Secure temple entry rights
- C. Assert the right of untouchables to access public water sources
- D. Promote Swadeshi goods

**59. The damage or threat to cultural heritage sites during conflicts is governed internationally by which convention?**

- A. Geneva Convention
- B. Hague Convention of 1954
- C. Vienna Convention
- D. Ramsar Convention

**60. Consider the following statements regarding HPV vaccination in India:**

1. It is most effective when administered before exposure to the virus
2. It provides protection against all types of cancers
3. It is part of preventive healthcare strategy

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**61. With reference to the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection, consider the following statements:**

1. It is primarily transmitted through sexual contact
2. All HPV infections lead to cancer
3. Certain high-risk strains are linked to cervical cancer

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**62. Consider the following statements:**

1. Injecting drug use is a significant factor in HIV spread in parts of Northeast India.
2. Migration and transport corridors can influence HIV transmission patterns.
3. HIV prevalence is higher in urban areas only and negligible in rural regions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**63. Consider the following statements:**

1. HIV/AIDS can be completely eliminated from the body through long-term Antiretroviral Therapy (ART).
2. Targeted interventions in India focus on high-risk groups such as injecting drug users, sex workers, and migrants.
3. In northeastern India, cross-border movement and drug trafficking routes contribute to higher HIV vulnerability.
4. National AIDS Control Organisation is responsible for policy formulation as well as implementation of HIV/AIDS programmes in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**64. Consider the following statements regarding drug-induced liver injury (DILI) caused by antibiotics:**

1. Certain antibiotics are metabolized in the liver, producing toxic intermediates that can damage liver cells.
2. All antibiotics have an equal potential to cause liver injury regardless of dosage and duration.
3. Idiosyncratic reactions, which are unpredictable and not dose-dependent, can contribute to liver damage.
4. The risk of liver injury may increase in individuals with pre-existing liver disease or alcohol use.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 3 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 2 only

- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**65. Consider the following statements regarding NavIC:**

1. NavIC is developed by ISRO to provide accurate position information over India and surrounding regions.
2. Atomic clocks onboard navigation satellites are essential for precise time measurement used in positioning.
3. Failure of atomic clocks can degrade the accuracy of navigation signals.
4. NavIC depends entirely on foreign satellite systems for time synchronization.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**66. Consider the following statements regarding Semaglutide:**

1. It is used in the treatment of Type 2 Diabetes and for weight management.
2. It mimics GLP-1 hormone to regulate blood sugar and appetite.
3. Generic versions always have identical safety and efficacy profiles as branded drugs without any regulatory evaluation.
4. Increased access to generics may raise concerns about quality control, dosing, and misuse.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 3 only

- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**67. Consider the following statements:**

1. The AI skilling initiative involves partnerships with private tech companies like Google.
2. It focuses only on urban populations with access to high-end infrastructure.
3. Digital platforms such as YouTube are used to scale outreach.
4. The initiative supports India's goal of becoming a global AI talent hub.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 3 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**68. Consider the following statements regarding India's Bullet Train project:**

1. The project is based on high-speed rail technology similar to Japan's Shinkansen system.
2. A Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) is used for constructing underground tunnels in challenging terrains.
3. The project is being implemented by National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited.
4. All major components of the project, including TBMs, are entirely manufactured within India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 4 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**69. Consider the following statements:**

1. Assam has proposed the use of a dedicated satellite to improve flood monitoring and disaster management.
2. Satellite-based remote sensing can help in real-time tracking of rainfall, river levels, and inundation areas.
3. Such satellites operate independently of ground-based systems and do not require integration with other data sources.
4. Flood monitoring using satellites can support early warning systems and disaster preparedness.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

**70. Consider the following statements:**

1. Copper is often referred to as a "barometer of economic health."
2. Supply disruptions in mining regions can influence global copper prices.
3. West Asia is the world's largest producer of copper.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

**71. With reference to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), consider the following statements:**

1. NDCs are legally binding emission reduction targets under the Paris Agreement.
2. Countries must update their NDCs every five years.
3. NDCs reflect each country's highest possible ambition.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

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

**72. India's NDC targets are submitted under which of the following?**

- (a) Kyoto Protocol
- (b) Montreal Protocol
- (c) Paris Agreement
- (d) Glasgow Pact

**73. "Ecological Overshoot" refers to:**

- (a) Excess rainfall beyond average levels
- (b) Use of natural resources faster than regeneration capacity
- (c) Increase in forest cover beyond limits
- (d) Excess biodiversity in a region

**74. With reference to groundwater trends highlighted in the *State of India's Environment 2026 Report*, consider the following statements:**

1. Groundwater depletion is uniform across all Indian states.
2. Over-extraction is a major concern in several regions.
3. Agriculture is a key driver of groundwater usage.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

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

**75. The term "Red Corridor" refers to:**

- (a) Areas with high industrial pollution
- (b) Regions affected by Left-Wing Extremism
- (c) Border areas with high military presence
- (d) Regions under emergency provisions

**76. The "SAMADHAN Doctrine" is associated with:**

- (a) Climate change mitigation
- (b) Cyber security strategy
- (c) LWE counter-insurgency strategy
- (d) Border dispute resolution

**77. With reference to government measures to tackle LWE, consider the following:**

1. Security-related expenditure schemes
2. Aspirational Districts Programme
3. Exclusive reliance on military action

Which of the statements is/are correct?

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

**78. The CERT-In Space Cybersecurity Framework emphasizes which of the following principles?**

1. Zero Trust Architecture
2. Supply chain security
3. Encryption and data protection

Select the correct answer:

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

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

**79. With reference to satellite communication systems, consider the following components:**

1. Space segment
2. Ground segment
3. User segment

The CERT-In Space Cybersecurity Framework is relevant to:

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

**80. With reference to “Predictive Policing”, consider the following statements:**

1. It relies on historical crime data and algorithms.
2. It can help in optimal deployment of police resources.
3. It guarantees prevention of all crimes.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

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

**ANSWER CODE:**

1A,2A,3A,4A,5A,6A,7A,8A,9A,10D,11D,12A,13B,14A,15C,16A,17A,18A,19A,20A,21C,22A,23A,24A,25D,26D,27C,28A,29A,30B,31A,32A,33A,34C,35A,36A,37A,38A,39A,40A,41A,42C,43A,44C,45A,46A,47A,48A,49C,50A,51A,52A,53C,54A,55B,56A,57A,58C,59B,60A,61A,62A,63B,64A,65A,66A,67A,68A,69A,70A,71A,72C,73B,74A,75B,76C,77A,78C,79D,80A

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