NOVEMBER 2025

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CURRENT CONNECT

NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES DAY

RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

e-JAGRITI
Justice **A**nd **G**rievance **R**edressal for Consumers us...
Information **T**echnology & **I**nnovation
www.e-jagriti.gov.in

JHARKHAND
Ranchi
Saranda forest

WITH LOADED FEATURES

- PRE-SHOTS
- PHILOSOPHY OF THE MONTH
- THEMATIC ESSAYS
- CONTEMPORARY ETHICS CASE STUDIES

Contents

INDIAN POLITY

Coalition Politics & Bihar Mandate: What the Election Reveals About India's Federal Democracy

Why in News?

The recent Bihar election has once again turned national attention toward the fragility, flexibility, and inevitability of coalition politics in large Indian states. With no single party securing a dominant majority, government formation has depended on alliances, post-poll negotiations, and shifting political commitments.

Bihar's experience adds a new chapter to India's long history of coalition federalism, alliance realignments, and power-sharing arrangements.

1. Why Coalition Governments Are Common in States Like Bihar

(a) Fragmented Social & Political Landscape

Bihar's political space is shaped by:
- caste-based mobilisation,
- regional identities,
- community-specific leadership,
- uneven socio-economic development.

No party easily becomes the "default choice," making coalitions structurally likely.

(b) Rise of Strong Regional Parties

Regional parties command:
- loyal vote banks,
- charismatic local leadership,
- strong organisational networks.

Their strength prevents single-party dominance.

(c) Declining Capacity of National Parties to Sweep

Even when national parties expand, they require regional partners for ground mobilisation and community bridging.

2. COALITION FORMATION AFTER THE BIHAR ELECTION: WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

(a) The Mandate Did Not Produce a Clear Majority

Multiple parties won substantial but insufficient seats.
This opened the space for:
- alliance negotiations,
- independents becoming crucial,
- ideological flexibility becoming a factor.

(b) Post-Poll Alignments Were Decisive

As in many Indian states, post-poll coalitions—not pre-poll partnerships—determined the final government shape.
This reflects a constitutional design that allows:
- any party or alliance commanding majority support
- to form government,
- regardless of whether the coalition existed before polling.

(c) The Governor's Role Came Into Focus Again

As per Articles 163 and 164, the Governor must:
- identify who can command majority,
- invite the appropriate leader to form government,
- ensure floor test within a reasonable timeframe.

Bihar's situation revived debates on:
- neutrality of Raj Bhavan,
- discretion vs. constitutional convention,
- time-bound floor tests.

3. WHAT THE BIHAR ELECTION TELLS US ABOUT COALITION CULTURE

(1) Coalition Governments Are Not an Aberration

They are a normal, constitutional outcome of voter diversity.
Bihar demonstrates:
- coalition governance is not necessarily unstable,
- alliances evolve with political expectations,
- flexibility is built into India's parliamentary system.

(2) Electoral Volatility Is Now Institutionalised

Voters in Bihar frequently differentiate between:
- Lok Sabha voting (national focus), and
- Vidhan Sabha voting (local governance).

Thus, alternating coalitions and shifting alliances reflect voter maturity—not confusion.

(3) Coalition Politics Encourages Bargaining & Accountability

Power-sharing means:
- no single party dominates decision-making,
- smaller partners influence portfolios,
- checks and balances operate internally.

This can improve responsiveness if managed well.

(4) But It Also Introduces Governance Challenges

Bihar's situation again illustrates:
- delay in policy execution due to coordination issues,
- ideological contradictions,
- personalised negotiations between party leaders,
- dependence on central support for resources.

Coalition stability becomes a governance variable.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING COALITION FORMATION

(a) Test of Majority Must Happen on the Floor of the House

Repeatedly affirmed by Supreme Court in:
- SR Bommai (1994)
- Rameshwar Prasad Bihar Dissolution Case (2006)
- Nabam Rebia (2016)

The Governor cannot assume numbers; only the legislature can decide legitimacy.

(b) Governor Should Remain Neutral

While discretion exists, constitutional morality demands:
- non-partisanship,
- avoiding undue delay,
- ensuring stable formation through floor test.

Page 3

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(c) Anti-Defection Law Shapes Coalition Stability

Under Tenth Schedule:

- MLAs cannot switch sides individually,
- but groups can break away if two-thirds split,
- Speaker plays a key role in recognition.

Bihar's scenario shows why anti-defection remains a debated tool.

5. WIDER IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN DEMOCRACY

1. Coalition States Are Laboratories of Federalism

They demonstrate:

- consensus-building,
- multi-layered leadership,
- shared governance responsibility.

2. Coalition Politics Encourages Social Inclusion

Representation widens to include:

- caste groups,
- regional voices,
- minorities,
- weaker sections.

3. National Politics Experiences a Spillover Effect

State-level coalition experiences often:

- reshape national alliances,
- influence Rajya Sabha arithmetic,
- determine federal cooperation.

Bihar's results contribute to this ongoing rebalancing.

6. THE ROAD AHEAD: MAKING COALITIONS WORK

For stable governance, Bihar and other coalition-driven states need:

(1) Clear Common Minimum Programmes (CMPs)

Reduces conflict and policy drift.

(2) Institutionalised Inter-Party Coordination Committees

Prevents last-minute breakdowns.

(3) Time-bound grievance resolution mechanisms

Avoids personalised power struggles.

(4) Strengthening Local Governance

Municipal and Panchayati structures help insulate governance from coalition volatility.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Articles 163, 164, 174
- Floor test jurisprudence
- Tenth Schedule
- Sarkaria & Punchhi Commission recommendations
- Role of Governor in hung assembly

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Coalition governments, as seen once again in Bihar, represent both the strength and strain of India's federal parliamentary democracy."

Evaluate this statement with reference to constitutional practices and governance outcomes.

From Raj Bhavan to Lok Bhavan: The Politics and Constitutional Significance of Renaming Governor Houses

Why in News?

Several states have initiated proposals to rename the Governor's official residence—traditionally known as Raj Bhavan—to titles such as Lok Bhavan or Jan Bhavan.

This development, highlighted through legislative debates, government notifications, and media reports (The Hindu, Indian Express), has reignited the discussion around the symbolism, constitutional role, and public perception of the Governor's institution.

1. WHY IS THE RENAMING SIGNIFICANT?

(a) Historical Legacy of the Term "Raj Bhavan"

The word "Raj" originates in the colonial tradition of the Governor-General's House, reflecting authority, hierarchy, and imperial governance.

After independence, while many colonial names were reformed, Raj Bhavan continued unchanged across states.

(b) Rebranding the Office as "People-Centric"

Names like Lok Bhavan / Jan Bhavan imply a shift:

- from symbolic authority → to democratic stewardship,
- from aloofness → to accessibility,
- from colonial legacy → to constitutional modernity.

States argue that institutions must align with the spirit of popular sovereignty.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT: WHAT IS THE GOVERNOR'S HOUSE?

(a) Governor as the Constitutional Head of State

Under Articles 153–162, the Governor:

- functions as the nominal executive head of the state,
- acts on aid and advice of the Council of Ministers,
- safeguards constitutional norms.

(b) Raj Bhavan as a Constitutional Symbol

The building is not merely a residence; it hosts:

- oath-taking ceremonies,
- meetings related to legislative decisions,
- communications with the Centre,
- interactions with civil society.

Thus, any renaming impacts the public meaning of constitutional authority.

3. WHY ARE STATES RENAMING IT NOW?

(1) De-colonisation Drive

Across India, institutions are being renamed to shed British-era legacies—roads, cities, awards, and official buildings.

Renaming Raj Bhavan aligns with that broader symbolic decolonisation movement.

(2) Rising Demand for Transparency & Accessibility

A people-oriented name suggests the Governor's house is:

- open to citizens,

- engaged in outreach,
- responsive to public concerns.

States highlight that symbolic gestures can reshape institutional culture.

(3) Federal & Political Messaging

Renaming also sends a message that the state seeks:

- greater autonomy in defining constitutional offices,
- a people-first governance ethos.

In a dynamic federal environment, names carry political meaning.

4. DEBATES AND CONCERNS

(a) Does Renaming Affect Constitutional Status?

No. The Constitution does not prescribe a name for the Governor's residence.

Changing the name does not:

- alter the powers of the Governor,
- affect Centre–State relations,
- require constitutional amendment.

(b) Critics Argue Symbolism Cannot Replace Reform

Some commentators note that:

- the Governor's discretionary powers remain contentious,
- renaming does not address issues like delays in assent to bills,
- disputes between elected governments and Raj Bhavans persist.

They argue that institutional reforms matter more than titles.

(c) Administrative Standardisation Concerns

Different states using different names could create:

- logistical confusion,
- lack of uniformity in inter-state communication.

Most states, however, view diversity as a reflection of federalism.

5. THE LARGER IDEA: DEMOCRATISING CONSTITUTIONAL SYMBOLS

India's Constitution embodies "We, the People".

Renaming Raj Bhavans as Lok/Jana Bhavans symbolically re-anchors:

- constitutional authority within public sovereignty,
- Governor's office within democratic legitimacy,
- state institutions within citizen visibility.

This aligns with the global trend of citizen-centric constitutional spaces.

6. THE ROAD AHEAD

If viewed constructively, renaming can be part of a broader effort to:

- increase Governor–citizen engagement,
- improve access to ceremonial spaces,
- make Raj Bhavans centres for public policy dialogue,
- reinforce the Governor's role as constitutional sentinel, not political actor.

Names alone cannot transform institutions, but they can signal a shift in expectations.

A "Lok Bhavan" vision works best when matched with transparent functioning, timely constitutional action, and genuine public outreach.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Articles 153, 154, 163, 200 (Governor's role & powers)
- Governor's discretionary powers
- Sarkaria Commission & Punchhi Commission on Governor's office
- Constitutional morality & federalism

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Renaming Raj Bhavan as Lok Bhavan is symbolic, yet deeply political."

Discuss how such symbolic changes influence constitutional culture, Centre–State relations, and public trust in the Governor's office.

e-Jagriti Unifies Consumer Justice: India's Digital Grievance Redressal Leap

Why in News?

The Department of Consumer Affairs announced that e-Jagriti has already registered over 2.75 lakh users (including 1,388 NRIs) since its launch on 1 January 2025.

The platform has facilitated 130,550 case-filings and seen the disposal of 127,058 complaints — a strong indicator of efficiency and reach.

e-Jagriti is being presented as a transformative tool for consumer justice — reducing paperwork, enabling virtual hearings, and giving both domestic and overseas Indians access to redressal easily.

1. What is e-Jagriti?

- It is a unified, AI-enabled, digital grievance-redressal portal launched by the Department of Consumer Affairs.
- It integrates legacy systems — such as OCMS, e-Daakhil, NCDRC CMS, and CONFONET — into a seamless interface.
- It is designed to provide:
  - OTP-based registration (no physical paperwork required),
  - Online and offline fee payment (integrated with Bharat Kosh / PayGov),
  - Digital case filing, document uploads, virtual hearings, and real-time tracking,
  - Role-based dashboards for consumers, advocates and adjudicating bodies to monitor and manage cases smoothly.
  - Accessibility support: multilingual interface, chatbot assistance, voice-to-text functionality — making the platform inclusive for elderly, differently-abled and low-digital-literacy users.

In short, e-Jagriti aims to make consumer grievance redressal digital, transparent, inclusive and location-agnostic.

2. Early Results: Why e-Jagriti Looks Promising

- With 2.75 lakh registered users in under a year, uptake has been rapid.
- Nearly 130,550 complaints filed, of which 127,058 disposed — showing that nearly all filed cases got addressed.
- NRIs have filed hundreds of complaints (466 so far), proving that distance is no longer a barrier for consumer justice.
- In many states and at the national level (National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, NCDRC), disposal rates in July 2025 exceeded 100% — meaning more cases disposed than filed that month, signaling clearing of backlog.
- Anecdotal success — e.g., a complaint about a malfunctioning fridge got resolved with refund, compensation, and interest, even though the purchase was several years old — shows that old, dormant grievances can find closure.

These results suggest that e-Jagriti is doing more than digitising — it is improving accessibility, speed, and justice delivery.

3. What Makes e-Jagriti a Game-Changer
Global Accessibility & Inclusivity

- NRIs can avail of consumer justice without returning to India — a first of its kind in Indian consumer jurisprudence.
- Multi-language support and voice-to-text/chatbot helps overcome digital-divide and accessibility barriers.

Efficiency and Paperless Processes

- With a unified portal, fragmentation across multiple legacy systems is eliminated.
- Virtual hearings obviate the need for physical attendance, reducing costs and time for consumers.
- Automated notifications (SMS, email) ensure users don't miss hearing dates or procedural updates.

Transparency and Accountability

- Case tracking lets consumers follow progress in real-time — improving trust in institutions.
- Adjudicating bodies receive digital dashboards and analytics to speed up disposal and manage backlog.

4. Challenges & Way Forward

Like any digital transformation, e-Jagriti's success depends on addressing certain challenges:

- Digital Divide: Access still depends on internet connectivity, smartphone availability, and digital literacy — rural, elderly, and marginalized consumers may still struggle.

- Legal Literacy: Even with digital tools, consumers need awareness of when and how to file grievances — NALSA-type outreach and consumer education must complement the portal.
- Infrastructure at Adjudicating Bodies: Virtual hearings require good internet, trained staff, secure servers — state-level courts/commissions must upgrade rapidly.
- Data Security and Privacy: Given sensitive personal and financial information, strong encryption, data protection, and secure payment systems must be ensured (though the official release mentions end-to-end encryption and secure gateways).

If these are addressed, e-Jagriti could evolve into a cornerstone of consumer justice and digital governance in India.

5. Bigger Picture: e-Jagriti and Justice Digitisation

e-Jagriti is part of a broader push by the government to digitise justice and dispute resolution:

- Alongside e-Courts, e-Filing, virtual hearings in regular courts.
- Supporting India's aim of ease-of-living, especially for marginalized groups.
- Aligning with global trends of online dispute resolution (ODR) and accessibility-focused governance.

For consumers, especially those in remote areas or overseas, e-Jagriti closes a long-standing barrier: distance — economic or geographic — no longer denies justice.

PRELIMS / MAINS CONNECT

Prelims Facts

- Launch date: 1 January 2025.
- 2.75 lakh+ registered users (as of Nov 2025)
- Over 130,550 complaints filed; 127,058 disposed by Nov 13, 2025.
- Inclusive features: multi-lingual interface, OTP-based registration, virtual hearings, voice-to-text, chatbot, online fee payment via Bharat Kosh/PayGov.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"The e-Jagriti platform has the potential to revolutionize consumer justice in India, but digital access and institutional readiness remain the key challenge."

Analyse the achievements and limitations of e-Jagriti in aligning consumer grievance redressal with principles of accessibility, transparency and speed.

Legal Aid for All: NALSA and the Significance of National Legal Services Day

Why in News?

National Legal Services Day, observed annually on 9 November, commemorates the enactment of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987—the law that created a nationwide framework for free and competent legal aid.

Page 6

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This year's observance saw NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) highlight digital outreach, victim compensation, legal literacy, and last-mile justice delivery for vulnerable communities through its Pan-India Legal Awareness & Assistance Campaigns.

With rising pendency and growing inequality in access to legal resources, the role of NALSA has become central to justice delivery in India.

1. WHAT IS NALSA AND WHY WAS IT CREATED?

(a) Constitutional Foundation: Article 39A

This Article directs the State to ensure:
- equal access to justice,
- free legal aid,
- no denial of legal services due to economic disability.

The Legal Services Authorities Act operationalised this mandate by creating:
- NALSA (national body),
- SLSAs (State Legal Services Authorities),
- DLSAs (District Authorities),
- Taluka Committees,
- Legal Aid Clinics.

(b) The Vision of NALSA

To provide "effective, affordable and accessible justice" for:
- women,
- SC/ST communities,
- persons with disabilities,
- children in conflict with law,
- victims of trafficking,
- industrial workers,
- persons in custody,
- the poor and marginalised.

NALSA ensures that rights are not denied because representation is unaffordable.

2. WHY NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES DAY MATTERS

(a) Reminds Citizens of a Fundamental Constitutional Promise

Legal assistance is an integral part of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).

Courts have repeatedly held that free legal aid is not charity—it is a right.

(b) Celebrates the Expansion of Legal Aid Infrastructure

NALSA now reaches:
- over 20,000 Legal Services Clinics,
- 39 lakh persons assisted annually,
- millions of cases resolved through Lok Adalats,
- legal awareness campaigns in schools, jails, and villages.

(c) Strengthens Trust in the Justice System

Awareness ≠ Access.

National Legal Services Day bridges this gap by taking legal services to citizens' doorsteps.

3. KEY PROGRAMMES HIGHLIGHTED THIS YEAR

NALSA used the 9 November observance to spotlight several initiatives:

(1) Tele-Law Programme

A Ministry of Law & Justice–NALSA collaboration.

Provides legal advice via:
- video conferencing,
- tele-consultation,
- CSC centres in villages.

Over 50 lakh beneficiaries have used Tele-Law services so far.

(2) Nyaya Setu / Legal Aid Defense Counsels (LADCs)

Modelled on public defender systems.

LADCs guarantee:
- representation for undertrial prisoners,
- legal aid inside courts,
- timely follow-ups.

(3) Pan-India Awareness Campaigns

Covers:
- cybercrime awareness,
- women's rights under PWDVA,
- rights of senior citizens,
- rights of workers and migrants,
- procedures for victim compensation.

(4) Legal Aid Clinics in Jails

Every district jail has Legal Aid Clinics staffed by:
- paralegal volunteers,
- legal aid lawyers.

This supports bail hearings, appeals, and speedy trial rights.

(5) Lok Adalats and Permanent Lok Adalats

NALSA emphasised the role of ADR:
- settlement of petty civil & compoundable criminal cases,
- reduction in pendency,
- quick resolution at low cost.

In some National Lok Adalats, over 50 lakh cases are resolved in a single day.

4. PERSISTENT CHALLENGES IN ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

(a) Awareness Gap

A majority of citizens—especially in rural areas—are not aware:
- they are entitled to free legal aid,
- how to access it,
- what rights they hold in police or court processes.

(b) Quality of Legal Representation

Many legal aid lawyers are:
- overburdened,
- underpaid,
- inadequately trained.

This affects case outcomes.

(c) Infrastructure Limitations

In rural India:
- few legal aid clinics,
- limited digital connectivity,
- understaffed DLSAs.

Digital divide impacts justice delivery.

(d) Prison Overcrowding & Undertrial Crisis

Over 75% of inmates are undertrials.

NALSA's work is crucial but insufficient unless paired with:
- police reforms,
- forensic capacity improvement,
- timely court hearings.

5. THE ROAD AHEAD: WHAT REFORMS ARE NEEDED?

1. Increase funding for legal aid and lawyer training.

Legal aid must offer quality, not just availability.

2. Expand Tele-Law and integrate AI-based legal assistance.

AI tools can:
- screen cases,
- draft basic applications,
- provide legal information in local languages.

3. Institutionalise legal literacy in schools.

Every child must learn:
- basic rights,
- FIR and complaint procedures,
- digital safety laws.

4. Strengthen LADCs as a robust public defender system.

Ensure:
- full-time legal aid lawyers,
- caseload rationalisation,
- performance monitoring.

5. Make legal aid awareness campaigns annual, not occasional.

Door-to-door outreach can transform access.

6. WHY LEGAL AID MATTERS FOR DEMOCRACY

India's Constitution promises substantive justice, not mere procedural equality.

A democracy remains meaningful only if:
- the poorest prisoner,
- the migrant labourer,
- the exploited woman,
- the trafficked child,

can invoke the law with confidence.

Legal aid ensures that rights are lived realities, not distant ideals.

PRELIMS CONNECT
- Article 39A
- Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987
- NALSA, SLSA, DLSA
- Lok Adalat vs Permanent Lok Adalat

- Tele-Law Programme
- NALSA's victim compensation scheme

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Legal aid is not a matter of charity but a constitutional obligation under Article 39A."

Discuss the role of NALSA in shaping access to justice in India, with reference to recent initiatives and persistent challenges.

A New Era for the Supreme Court: Justice Surya Kant Appointed as the 52nd Chief Justice of India

Why in News?

As per the official notification issued by the Ministry of Law & Justice, the President of India has appointed Justice Surya Kant as the 52nd Chief Justice of India (CJI).

He will assume office on 24 November 2025, following the retirement of the incumbent CJI.

This appointment has been made under Article 124(2) of the Constitution, following the long-standing convention of seniority.

1. WHO IS JUSTICE SURYA KANT?

Career Milestones (as per PIB):

- **Born:** 10 February 1962, in Petwar village, Hisar district, Haryana.
- **Education:** Graduated from Government Post-Graduate College, Hisar; obtained LL.B. degree from Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak.
- **Initial legal practice:** Began in the Punjab & Haryana High Court; known for constitutional and service matters.
- **Senior Advocate:** Designated senior advocate at age 37 — one of the youngest in his High Court.
- **Advocate General of Haryana:** Appointed in 2000.
- **Judge:** Elevated as Judge of the Punjab & Haryana High Court in 2004.
- **Chief Justice:** Served as Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court.
- **Supreme Court:** Elevated to the Supreme Court of India on 24 May 2019.

Justice Surya Kant has delivered significant judgments on criminal law, service law, constitutional rights, environment, and governance reforms.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS OF APPOINTMENT

Article 124(2)

The President appoints every judge of the Supreme Court after consultation with the judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts as deemed necessary.

Convention of Seniority

Though not legally binding, the convention dictates:
- The senior-most judge of the Supreme Court is appointed CJI.

- It ensures continuity, neutrality, and institutional stability.

Justice Surya Kant's appointment adheres to this established practice.

3. WHY THIS TRANSITION MATTERS

(a) Leadership at a Critical Moment

Justice Surya Kant takes over at a time when the judiciary faces:

- rising pendency (5 crore+ cases),
- focus on technological reforms,
- demand for transparency in appointments,
- strengthening of e-Courts Phase 3.0,
- need for balancing judicial independence with accountability.

(b) Experience in Administrative Leadership

As former Chief Justice of a high court, he brings experience in:

- judicial administration,
- court modernisation,
- case-flow management,
- coordination with state governments.

(c) Track Record of Progressive Judgments

His judgments reflect emphasis on:

- social justice,
- environmental protection,
- rights of marginalised groups,
- procedural fairness.

4. MAJOR AREAS LIKELY TO DEFINE HIS TENURE

1. e-Courts & AI Adoption

Digitisation, virtual hearings, transcription, and paperless courts will remain priority areas.

2. Judicial Appointments Debate

Ongoing discussions around:

- Collegium reforms,
- Transparency in appointments,
- Calls for a National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) 2.0.

3. Pendency and Timely Justice

Focus on:

- expanding fast-track courts,
- revisiting adjournment rules,
- strengthening alternative dispute resolution.

4. Access to Justice for the Vulnerable

Synergy with:

- NALSA,
- Legal Aid Defence Counsel System (LADC),
- Tele-Law programme.

5. Federal Balance & Judicial Review

His tenure may see key rulings on:

- Centre–State relations,

- Governor's discretionary powers,
- appointment and removal of constitutional authorities.

5. WHAT THE APPOINTMENT SYMBOLISES

- Stability in judicial leadership
- Continuity of constitutional norms
- Institutional strength in democratic transition
- Commitment to rule of law and judicial independence

It reaffirms that India's judiciary remains anchored in constitutional procedure, time-tested conventions, and merit-based progression.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Article 124(2): Appointment of SC judges
- Article 146: Administrative powers of CJI
- Seniority convention
- Supreme Court composition (Article 124)
- NJAC judgment (2015, 4th Judges Case)

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Leadership transitions in the judiciary significantly shape institutional priorities."

Discuss the challenges and expectations before the new Chief Justice of India in strengthening judicial efficiency and public trust.

Constitution Day 2025: Renewing India's Commitment to Constitutional Morality & Citizen-Centric Governance

Why in News?

India observed Constitution Day (Samvidhan Diwas), commemorating the day the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution in 1949.

This year's nationwide celebrations were led by the President of India, the Chief Justice of India, the Ministry of Law & Justice, DoPT, NALSA, and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, with a strong emphasis on:

- constitutional values,
- citizen duties,
- digital justice reforms,
- inclusive governance,
- awareness campaigns for youth and marginalised groups.

Constitution Day continues to be a reminder that democracy thrives not only on institutions but on constitutional culture.

1. WHY CONSTITUTION DAY IS OBSERVED

As per the Government of India's 2015 notification:

- 26 November is observed annually to honour Dr. B.R. Ambedkar,
- strengthen citizens' understanding of the Constitution's spirit,
- and promote the fundamental duties under Article 51A.

It serves as a national civic moment to revisit:

- justice,
- liberty,
- equality,
- fraternity,

which form the core pillars of India's constitutional identity.

2. KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF CONSTITUTION DAY

(1) President's Address on Constitutional Morality

The President emphasised:

- constitutional morality as the guiding light of governance,
- need for strengthening the rule of law,
- harmony between institutions,
- respect for diversity and pluralism,
- upholding the Constitution as a "living document".

(2) Supreme Court's Observance and CJI's Message

The new CJI (Justice Surya Kant), as per official communication, underscored:

- access to justice as the "soul of the Constitution",
- the judiciary's role in protecting liberties,
- continued commitment to e-Courts & digital justice,
- importance of judicial independence.

(3) Ministry of Law & Justice Initiatives

Events included:

- Reading of the Preamble across ministries and schools,
- release of constitutional awareness booklets,
- digital quizzes and competitions,
- workshops on fundamental duties.

(4) DoPT & Government Departments

Civil servants nationwide participated in:

- renewed pledge to uphold constitutional values,
- discussions on governance ethics,
- sessions on constitutional morality & public service.

(5) NALSA & Legal Literacy Campaigns

NALSA launched:

- pan-India outreach on Article 39A – Legal Aid,
- awareness drives in jails, schools, and rural communities,
- legal literacy modules on rights and remedies.

(6) Youth Parliament & Granth Utsav

The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs conducted:

- Youth Parliament competitions,
- Constitution reading sessions,
- deliberations on Ambedkar's vision.

3. THE DEEPER SIGNIFICANCE OF CONSTITUTION DAY

(a) Reinforcing Constitutional Morality

Beyond legality lies constitutional morality:

the culture of fairness, restraint, dialogue, and institutional respect.

Dr. Ambedkar described constitutional morality as:

(b) Educating the Next Generation

School and university programmes aim to ensure:

- Preamble literacy,
- understanding of rights & duties,
- civic responsibility among youth.

(c) Celebrating the Constituent Assembly's Vision

Constitution Day reaffirms:

- India's commitment to democracy,
- social justice,
- secularism,
- parliamentary traditions.

(d) Linking Governance with Constitutional Values

Government institutions use the day to:

- evaluate their functioning,
- promote transparency,
- improve service delivery,
- strengthen inclusion and accountability.

4. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF CONSTITUTION DAY

Increasing Polarisation and Need for Constitutional Anchoring

The day offers a moment to re-center public discourse around:

- equality before law,
- fraternity,
- non-discrimination.

2. Judicial Reforms & Technology

This year's observance reflected India's push towards:

- e-Courts Phase III,
- digital legal aid,
- paperless justice.

3. Governance Reforms & Citizen Engagement

Constitution Day inspires:

- better implementation of welfare schemes,
- transparency through RTI,
- improved service quality.

4. Federal Balance

Emphasising cooperative federalism is crucial for national unity.

5. THE ROAD AHEAD

To make Constitution Day meaningful, India must:

- deepen constitutional literacy at the grassroots,
- integrate civic education in school curricula,
- strengthen accountability institutions,
- uphold non-partisanship in constitutional offices,
- promote constitutional patriotism over symbolic nationalism.

A democracy is strongest when citizens understand not only their rights but the responsibilities that sustain those rights.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Article 51A – Fundamental Duties
- Article 39A – Legal Aid
- Preamble keywords
- Constituent Assembly (1946–49)
- 26 November: Constitution adopted
- 26 January: Constitution enforced (Republic Day)

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Constitution Day provides an opportunity not merely to celebrate a document, but to revive constitutional morality in everyday governance." Discuss in the context of contemporary challenges faced by Indian democracy.

Nitish Kumar Returns as Chief Minister Again: What Bihar's Political Realignment Reveals About Coalition Governance in India

Why in News?

In a fresh political development in Bihar, Nitish Kumar was sworn in again as the Chief Minister, following reconfiguration of alliances and withdrawal of support by previous partners.

This marks yet another shift in the state's coalition landscape and places Bihar at the centre of discussions on coalition stability, anti-defection safeguards, gubernatorial discretion, and federal political trends.

1. THE CONTEXT BEHIND THE POLITICAL TRANSITION

Nitish Kumar's repeated transitions across alliances highlight:

- Bihar's long-standing coalition-dependent political environment,
- the fragility and fluidity of multi-party arrangements,
- strategic recalculations influenced by legislative arithmetic,
- and the broader trend of regional leaders navigating national and state-level pressures.

As with previous transitions, the Governor invited Nitish Kumar to form the government after he submitted letters of support demonstrating majority.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS: THE GOVERNOR'S DISCRETION

The episode brought back attention to the role of the Governor under:

- Article 163 – discretion in situations where no single party has a clear majority,
- Article 164(1) – appointment of Chief Minister,
- Bommai (1994) and Nabam Rebia (2016) – guidelines restricting misuse of gubernatorial powers.

The Governor's primary responsibility in such scenarios is to ensure:

- that the government formed enjoys majority support,
- and that floor test is conducted to verify legitimacy.

Bihar followed this constitutional script, with a floor test ordered to establish majority on the assembly floor — the true determinant of democratic legitimacy.

3. Coalition Politics: Bihar as a Laboratory

With Nitish Kumar's return, Bihar once again demonstrates the three structural features of Indian coalition politics:

(1) Multipolarity within States

Bihar's parties maintain distinct caste, regional, and ideological bases, making alliances constantly negotiable.

(2) Leadership-Centric Stability

Nitish Kumar's personal political capital continues to act as a stabilising force, enabling him to navigate shifting coalitions.

(3) Transactional Coalitions

Modern coalitions rely not only on ideology but on policy bargains, seat arrangements, administrative autonomy, and national-state level negotiations.

4. GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

Regardless of coalition shifts, the new government faces persistent challenges:

- employment generation,
- public health and nutrition deficits,
- school learning outcomes,
- rural connectivity,
- agriculture diversification,
- law and order and cybercrime,
- migration and labour reforms.

Political realignment offers an opportunity for renewed administrative momentum — but also risks distraction from long-term priorities if instability continues.

5. ANTI-DEFECTION AND THE FLUIDITY PROBLEM

Bihar's political changes bring attention to Tenth Schedule concerns:

- Frequent alliance-switching by leaders has reignited debate on the need to refine anti-defection provisions.
- Many scholars argue for clearer rules around pre-poll and post-poll alliance shifts to prevent "governance uncertainty."

The Supreme Court, in recent judgments, has stressed time-bound decisions by Speakers in disqualification cases to prevent strategic delays.

6. FEDERALISM AND PARTY COMPETITION

Bihar's political shift is also part of a broader national pattern:

- rise of regional parties asserting bargaining strength in federal politics,
- coalition-based governance becoming more routine across states,

- central-regional negotiations shaping economic and developmental agendas.

This has implications for:

- GST Council politics,
- centrally sponsored schemes,
- fiscal transfers,
- law and order reforms,
- and federal institutional relations.

7. WHAT THIS TRANSITION SIGNALS FOR INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Coalitions are now a structural feature, not an exception.

Voters accept coalition politics as a legitimate democratic arrangement.

Leadership continuity still influences political stability.

Nitish Kumar's return shows the enduring relevance of strong regional leadership in multi-party contexts.

Constitutional offices remain central arbiters.

The Governor's role, floor tests, and anti-defection safeguards remain crucial mechanisms for maintaining democratic legitimacy.

Policy continuity matters more than coalition continuity.

Bihar's governance model — especially in health, women's empowerment, and the education sector — depends on administrative consistency beyond political changes.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Article 163
- Article 164
- Floor Test
- Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law)
- S.R. Bommai Case (1994) – majority must be proven on the floor
- Nabam Rebia Case (2016) – limits on Governor's discretion
- Governor's role in post-election scenarios

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION (GS-2)

"Bihar's recent political realignment reflects both the resilience and the fragility of coalition politics in India."Analyse this statement in the context of gubernatorial discretion, anti-defection norms, and federal political dynamics.

26/11 and India's Fight Against Terrorism: A Continuing National Security Challenge

Why in News?

26 November marks the anniversary of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, one of the deadliest acts of cross-border terrorism India has ever faced.

The Government of India commemorates this day as a moment of national remembrance, reaffirming its commitment to strengthen counter-terror systems, global cooperation, and internal preparedness to prevent any such attack.

1. WHAT 26/11 REVEALED ABOUT INDIA'S SECURITY LANDSCAPE

The coordinated attacks carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) exposed:

Gaps in coastal security

Terrorists infiltrated through the Arabian Sea undetected, highlighting vulnerabilities in maritime surveillance.

Slow, fragmented response systems

Different agencies operated without unified command, delaying coordinated action.

Intelligence-sharing weaknesses

Isolated intelligence inputs were not processed into actionable alerts.

Need for better urban counterterror readiness

Large metropolitan centres lacked rapid specialised response units.

These challenges became the basis for major reforms in the decade that followed.

2. MAJOR REFORMS UNDERTAKEN AFTER 26/11

India transformed its internal security architecture through structural reforms:

(1) Creation of the National Investigation Agency (NIA)

Established under the NIA Act, 2008, the agency became India's premier terror-investigating body with pan-India jurisdiction.

(2) Strengthening Coastal Security

- National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security (NCSMCS)
- Coastal radar chain across 7,500 km coastline
- Improved surveillance through AIS, VSAT systems
- Training & modernisation of marine police

(3) National Security Guard (NSG) Regional Hubs

Four regional hubs were created to ensure rapid deployment in metros.

(4) Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) Revamp

MAC expanded to a 24×7 real-time intelligence fusion grid, linking:

- IB
- State police
- Coast Guard
- RAW
- Military intelligence

(5) India's Counter-Terror Diplomacy

India used global platforms to push for:

- sanctions on terror entities,
- FATF pressure on Pakistan-based actors,
- rejection of "good vs bad terrorism",
- global zero-tolerance standard,
- extradition of wanted terrorists.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF 26/11

Even 17 years later, 26/11 remains a defining reference point for India's national security because:

State-sponsored terrorism persists in India's neighbourhood

Cross-border infrastructure supporting militant groups continues to be a concern.

Urban terror risks evolving with technology

- drone attacks,
- dark web financing,
- encrypted communication,
- lone-wolf radicalisation.

Hybrid warfare complicates attribution

Disinformation, cyber sabotage, and online radical networks complement physical attacks.

Expanding attack surfaces

Critical infrastructure such as ports, airports, metros, and data centres need constant protection.

4. India's Present Counter-Terrorism Strategy

India's approach rests on four pillars:

1. Prevention

- stronger border fencing,
- biometrics integration,
- coastal & air security upgrades.

2. Intelligence Fusion & Surveillance

- NATGRID integration,
- facial recognition systems,
- financial intelligence monitoring.

3. Capacity Building

- police modernisation,
- special operations training,
- cyber forensics expansion.

4. International Cooperation

- UN Resolution 1373 compliance,
- FATF cooperation,
- bilateral intelligence sharing with US, EU, Israel, Australia, Gulf nations.

5. Why India Still Cannot Look Away

26/11 offers critical lessons:

The need for vigilance, not complacency

Terror tactics evolve; security must anticipate, not react.

Local policing matters as much as intelligence agencies

First responders save lives.

Federal coordination is the backbone of national security

Terror threats do not respect administrative boundaries.

Counterterrorism is no longer only physical—it is digital

Radicalisation, recruitment, planning all operate online.

Public awareness is crucial

A security culture strengthens national resilience.

6. Way Forward

For a safer future, India must continue:

- strengthening coastal & border intelligence,
- enhancing cyber-terror monitoring,
- upgrading forensic investigation,
- building community policing networks,
- accelerating police reforms,
- investing in counter-radicalisation programmes.

Prelims Connect

- NIA Act, 2008
- MAC / SMAC
- Coastal Security Scheme
- FATF Grey List/Black List
- UN 1267 Sanctions Committee
- NATGRID

Mains Practice Question

"The 26/11 attacks reshaped India's counter-terror architecture, but emerging technologies have opened new vulnerabilities." Discuss India's evolving counter-terrorism strategy in this context.

Women's Economic Empowerment or Populist Cash Transfer? Understanding Bihar's ₹10,000 Support Under Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana

Why in News?

According to Prasar Bharati's official broadcast (AIR News), the Bihar Chief Minister transferred ₹10,000 each to 25 lakh women beneficiaries under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana (MMRY).

The scheme aims to promote self-employment, especially among women belonging to socially and economically weaker sections.

This major financial outlay has revived the policy debate on welfare, livelihoods, and the political economy of direct cash support.

1. What the Scheme Actually Does (Based on AIR News Information)

Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana Core Features

- Provides ₹10,000 one-time financial assistance to eligible women.
- Targets self-employment and income generation, not festival expenditure.
- Covers 25 lakh women across Bihar.
- The assistance is meant to support small-scale activities, micro-enterprises, or supplementary household income.
- The transfer is done through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to ensure transparency.

The State Government highlights the scheme as a women-first economic empowerment initiative, especially relevant in a state with low female labour force participation.

2. Why Bihar Needs Targeted Women-Centric Economic Support

Bihar has:

Page 13

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- Low Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR)
- High rates of informal employment, especially among women
- Limited access to credit and entrepreneurship support
- Gaps in mobility, safety, skill training, and market linkages

In such a context, MMRY aims to lower entry barriers for women to start or expand small-scale enterprises—tailoring, food processing, small shops, livestock rearing, etc.

3. How Does This Fit Into the "Freebies vs Welfare" Debate?

Instead of labelling the transfer a "freebie," it is more useful (for UPSC frameworks) to evaluate it through three policy lenses:

A. Welfare Entitlement (Justifiable)

If the scheme:
- addresses structural disadvantages faced by women,
- boosts economic participation,
- aids household-level financial resilience,
- or complements skills and livelihood programmes,

then it falls within legitimate social welfare responsibilities of the state.

B. Economic Stimulus (Conditional)

A one-time ₹10,000 transfer:
- increases rural liquidity,
- supports micro-enterprises,
- boosts local markets,
- enables asset purchases (sewing machines, tools, raw materials).

This can be considered an economic multiplier, if beneficiaries actually invest in livelihoods.

C. Populist Cash Transfers (Risk Area)

Critics point to:
- timing of announcements,
- fiscal stress in Bihar,
- potential dilution of welfare into non-targeted political expenditure,
- lack of institution-building (credit access, skilling, markets).

The sustainability of the scheme depends on whether support is one-time, targeted, and linked to measurable outcomes.

4. Governance and Fiscal Implications

1. Fiscal Pressure

25 lakh beneficiaries × ₹10,000 = ₹2,500 crore total outlay
This is significant for a state with:
- one of the lowest per capita revenues,
- high dependence on central transfers,
- limited tax base.

2. Need for Complementary Ecosystem

Cash alone cannot create sustainable employment without:
- skilling interventions,
- credit linkages,
- market access,
- women's mobility and safety infrastructure.

3. Leakage Control

DBT minimises corruption, but monitoring utilisation remains challenging.

5. Social Impact Potential

If executed well, the scheme can:
- increase female entrepreneurship,
- reduce financial dependency,
- strengthen household resilience,
- build confidence for women entering public spaces,
- support income diversification in rural Bihar.

Women's economic participation is directly linked to:
- reduced poverty,
- better schooling and nutrition outcomes,
- enhanced agency and mobility.

6. A Balanced Way Forward

A. Link Cash Support with Skilling & SHGs

Integrate with:
- JEEViKA self-help groups,
- PM Vishwakarma scheme,
- Skill India Mission.

B. Introduce Micro-Credit + Market Linkage Support

A ₹10,000 grant is helpful, but scaling requires:
- micro-loans,
- procurement systems,
- local entrepreneurship hubs.

C. Build Monitoring Mechanisms

Track:
- how funds are used,
- whether enterprises sustain beyond 6–12 months.

D. Maintain Fiscal Prudence

Periodic review of:
- fiscal deficit,
- long-term commitments,
- effectiveness benchmarking.

Prelims Connect
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)
- SHG models (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–NRLM)
- FLFPR trends (Periodic Labour Force Survey)
- Article 38 & 39 – social justice & livelihood
- Fintech-enabled welfare delivery

Mains Practice Question

"Discuss whether direct cash transfers like the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana represent genuine welfare or competitive populism. Evaluate in the context of women's economic empowerment and fiscal sustainability."

ECONOMY

Finfluencers Regulation

Why in News?

The growing influence of social-media-based financial advisors — popularly called finfluencers — has raised concerns over misleading investment advice, misuse of digital platforms, and growing retail investor vulnerability. Regulators have stepped up scrutiny following multiple cases of market manipulation, unauthorised advisory services, and substantial investor losses driven by unverified recommendations.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

India has witnessed an explosion of first-time retail participants in equity and digital financial markets, largely due to:

- low-cost digital trading platforms,
- massive social media outreach,
- algorithm-driven content recommendations,
- surge in interest among youth investors.

Finfluencers have emerged as content creators who offer:

- stock tips,
- cryptocurrency advice,
- personal finance hacks,
- trading tutorials,
- "get-rich-quick" portfolios.

While some provide genuine financial literacy, many operate without registration, functioning outside the regulatory perimeter.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

1. Misleading Financial Advice

Unregulated recommendations may:

- push risky instruments,
- promote pump-and-dump schemes,
- overstate returns,
- hide risks or disclaimers.

2. Hidden Commercial Interests

Platforms may receive:

- undisclosed commissions,
- affiliate payments,
- revenue-sharing from brokers,
- incentives from crypto exchanges.

3. Investor Vulnerability

New entrants can misinterpret informal advice as expert guidance.

4. Cross-Border Influence

Finfluencers often partner with overseas trading apps or crypto platforms not authorised to operate in India.

REGULATORY MEASURES PROPOSED OR IMPLEMENTED

1. SEBI's Advertisement Code for Influencers

To curb misleading communication:

- financial influencers promoting regulated products must follow advertising codes,
- accuracy and neutrality norms apply,
- promotions must disclose paid partnerships.

2. Mandatory Registration for Investment Advice

Any individual offering:

- buy/sell/hold recommendations,
- customised portfolios,
- fee-based advisory services

must register as a Registered Investment Adviser (RIA) or Research Analyst (RA).

3. Ban on Referral Links for Revenue

SEBI has proposed restricting influencers from generating income through:

- referral codes,
- affiliate links,
- commission-based brokerage arrangements.

4. Monitoring of Social Media Channels

Content is being scanned for:

- manipulative positions,
- unauthorised tips,
- scheme promotions.

This is especially relevant for pump-and-dump operations identified in the past.

SIGNIFICANCE

1. Protecting Retail Investors

Ensures financial decisions are based on authentic and regulated advice.

2. Ensuring Market Integrity

Discourages manipulation through hype-driven trading.

3. Promoting Responsible Financial Literacy

Good influencers can collaborate with regulators to spread awareness.

4. Preventing Fraud via Unregulated Platforms

Especially crucial in the wake of rising overseas forex scams and crypto frauds.

CHALLENGES

1. Enforcement over Global Platforms

Regulating influencers based abroad is difficult.

2. Distinguishing Education from Advice

Financial literacy content often overlaps with personalised recommendations.

3. Rapid Content Proliferation

Thousands of videos circulate daily across platforms; monitoring volume is complex.

4. Youth Investor Behaviour

High-risk appetite driven by social media trends complicates regulation.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- SEBI Act, 1992 — regulatory authority

- Investment Adviser Regulations, 2013
- Research Analyst Regulations, 2014
- ASCI advertising guidelines for social media
- RBI warnings on unauthorised trading platforms

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Discuss the regulatory challenges posed by finfluencers in India. How can regulators balance investor protection with financial literacy in the digital era?

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to finfluencers in India, consider the following statements:

1. Any individual providing personalised investment advice for a fee must be registered with SEBI.
2. Finfluencers cannot promote any financial product under any circumstance.
3. Referral commissions from brokers to influencers may fall under regulatory scrutiny.
4. SEBI has introduced advertising rules that apply to financial content disseminated on digital platforms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1, 3 and 4 only

Hindu GROWTH Rate Debate

Why in News?

The term "Hindu Rate of Growth" resurfaced in national economic discussions following commentary around India's medium-term growth trajectory and the need for structural reforms to sustain high GDP expansion. Policymakers and economists have debated whether India risks reverting to older patterns of slow growth or is firmly positioned for accelerated expansion driven by investment and productivity reforms.

BACKGROUND & MEANING

The phrase "Hindu Rate of Growth" was originally coined to describe India's slow GDP growth — roughly 3.5% per year — between the 1950s and 1980s.

Key features of that period included:

- a heavily regulated economy,
- import substitution policies,
- low private investment,
- limited global integration.

Since the 1991 reforms, India has moved to a higher growth trajectory, averaging 6–7%.

However, periodic global shocks (pandemic-led slowdown, geopolitical tensions, commodity cycles) have triggered discussion on whether India's current momentum is strong enough to avoid long-term stagnation.

WHY THE TERM HAS REAPPEARED

1. Debates on Medium-Term Growth Outlook

Recent growth projections highlight:

- strong domestic demand,
- recovery in investment,
- rising formalisation,
- but lingering global uncertainties.

These mixed signals have reignited debate on India's long-term potential.

2. Structural Reforms Still Incomplete

To achieve sustained high growth, India must strengthen:

- labour markets,
- land reforms,
- financial sector depth,
- manufacturing competitiveness,
- infrastructure investment.

3. Variations Across Sectors

High growth in:

- services,
- digital economy,
- formal employment,

but uneven performance in:

- agriculture,
- labour-intensive manufacturing,
- exports.

4. Global Comparisons

Global agencies frequently compare India's emerging trajectory with historical phases of other economies, prompting renewed usage of the term.

CURRENT ECONOMIC INDICATORS (AS REFLECTED IN GOVT DATA)

- Manufacturing PMI remains in expansion, reflecting robust production.
- GST collections indicate strong consumption.
- Capital expenditure by central and state governments has increased.
- FDI inflows remain stable, especially in electronics, renewable energy, and services.
- Formal employment is increasing, supported by digital platforms and PLI-linked sectors.

These indicators contrast significantly with the earlier "Hindu rate" period.

ARGUMENTS REJECTING THE RETURN TO THE HINDU RATE

1. Higher Investment Cycle

Public investment has been rising sharply, crowding in private investment.

2. Productivity Improvements

Digital public infrastructure, logistics upgrades, and automation enhance productivity.

3. Rising Exports in Key Sectors

Electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and services are gaining global market share.

4. Demographic Strength

A large working-age population provides labour and consumption potential.

5. Strong Domestic Consumption Base

India's large domestic market acts as a stabiliser against external shocks.

CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED BY SOME ECONOMISTS

1. Employment Generation Pace

Although formal jobs are rising, informal employment remains large.

2. Slowdown in Private Consumption Among Lower Income Groups

Uneven recovery can dampen growth momentum.

3. Export Headwinds

Global slowdown affects merchandise exports.

4. Banking Sector Risk Concentration

Credit has expanded but needs broad-based participation.

POLICY OUTLOOK

Government strategies to avoid low-growth traps include:

- continued capital expenditure push,
- production-linked incentives (PLI),
- deepening manufacturing ecosystems,
- skill development,
- AI-driven productivity improvements,
- robust financial sector regulation.

Long-term growth depends on sustaining reforms while managing global uncertainty.

SIGNIFICANCE

The contemporary debate is less about reverting to old growth rates and more about achieving:

- durable, inclusive growth;
- broad-based productivity gains;
- resilience against global shocks;
- expansion of high-quality employment.

India's economic fundamentals today differ significantly from the pre-reform era, making the term more of a policy reminder than a realistic projection.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Post-1991 reforms
- GDP measurement basics
- Factors affecting long-term growth: savings, investment, productivity, demographics
- Economic Survey frameworks (growth potential, structural reforms)

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Discuss the relevance of the term 'Hindu Rate of Growth' in contemporary economic debates. How do structural reforms shape India's long-term growth trajectory?

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. The term "Hindu Rate of Growth" historically refers to:
   1. Low GDP growth in India prior to 1991.

2. A period marked by heavy regulation and restricted trade.
3. Growth driven mainly by service-sector expansion.
4. Stagnation in private investment during the pre-reform era.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

RBI's Exposure Norms

Why in News?

The Reserve Bank of India has reiterated the importance of its Large Exposures Framework (LEF) to strengthen risk management in banks and prevent excessive exposure to single borrowers or groups. Recent financial sector assessments highlighted the need for tighter credit concentration controls as banks expand lending across infrastructure, manufacturing, and emerging sectors.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The Large Exposures Framework is a prudential measure designed to:

- limit concentration risk,
- prevent banks from overexposing themselves to large corporate groups,
- ensure systemic stability,
- promote diversified credit portfolios.

The framework is aligned with the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS) standards.

In simple terms, LEF restricts how much a bank can lend to any single counterparty or group, ensuring that failure of one large borrower does not destabilise the entire banking system.

KEY FEATURES OF THE LARGE EXPOSURES FRAMEWORK

1. Exposure Limit for a Single Counterparty

A bank's exposure to a single borrower cannot exceed 20% of its Tier 1 capital.

2. Exposure Limit for a Group of Connected Counterparties

Exposure to a group cannot exceed 25% of Tier 1 capital.

This prevents excessive credit to business conglomerates.

3. Connected Counterparty Rule

Entities are considered "connected" if they share:

- common ownership,
- economic interdependence,
- cross-guarantees,
- inter-company exposure patterns.

4. Definition of Exposure

Exposure includes:

- fund-based credit,
- non-fund facilities,
- off-balance sheet liabilities,
- derivative exposures.

5. Treatment of NBFCs, HFCs, and Financial Institutions

Guidelines extend to various classes of financial firms, with certain exemptions for infrastructure finance.

6. Reporting Requirements

Banks must report exposures above specified thresholds to RBI at periodic intervals.

WHY LEF MATTERS TODAY

1. Rising Bank Credit Growth

Indian banks have seen credit expand at double-digit rates, particularly in:

- infrastructure,
- renewable energy,
- manufacturing,
- NBFC lending.

As exposures rise, LEF prevents overconcentration.

2. Historical Lessons

The banking crises of the early 2010s were partly driven by:

- large loans to stressed sectors,
- group-level mismanagement,
- weak credit assessment.

LEF ensures past mistakes are not repeated.

3. Protecting Financial Stability

By limiting exposure to large corporates, the framework reduces systemic risk.

4. Encouraging Diversified Lending

Banks must broaden lending across sectors instead of relying on a few large borrowers.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

1. Complex Corporate Structures

Interlinked subsidiaries make it difficult to identify functional "groups."

2. Growing Role of NBFCs

Banks often have significant exposure to large NBFCs, requiring careful calibration.

3. Long Gestation Projects

Infrastructure projects sometimes require credit beyond LEF thresholds.

4. International Borrowers

Cross-border exposures need harmonisation with global risk measures.

RECENT STRENGTHENING MEASURES

RBI has emphasised:

- enhanced disclosure of large exposures,
- better integration of LEF with internal risk scoring models,

- monitoring of inter-connected entities within conglomerates,
- alignment with updated Basel standards,
- improved supervisory review mechanisms.

SIGNIFICANCE

The LEF supports:

- banking sector resilience,
- sustainable credit growth,
- transparency in exposure behaviour,
- systemic shock absorption.

It is central to India's financial stability framework, especially during high credit cycles.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Basel-III norms
- Tier 1 capital components
- Credit concentration risk
- Prudential norms issued by RBI
- Connected counterparty concept

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Explain the significance of the RBI's Large Exposures Framework (LEF) in reducing concentration risks in the Indian banking sector. Discuss the challenges involved in its implementation.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the RBI's Large Exposures Framework, consider the following statements:

1. A bank's exposure to a single borrower is capped at 20% of its Tier 1 capital.
2. Exposure to a group of connected entities is capped at 25% of Tier 1 capital.
3. Only fund-based exposures are counted toward the LEF limits.
4. The framework is aligned with global prudential norms.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Sanchar Saathi App

Why in News?

Consumer awareness updates and new integrations were added to the Sanchar Saathi App, aimed at reducing telecom fraud, securing mobile identities, and helping users manage registered SIMs.

Context

The rise of digital payments and online services has increased mobile-based frauds, impersonation attempts, and illegal SIM usage. Sanchar Saathi strengthens telecom transparency and user control.

Page 18

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Key Features

1. Know Your Mobile Connections (KYM)

Allows users to check all mobile numbers issued in their name.

2. Report & Block Stolen/Lost Phones

IMEI-based blocking prevents misuse of stolen devices.

3. AI-Based Fraud Detection

Alerts on suspicious SIM usage or abnormal activity.

4. Telecom Analytics Integration

Helps detect fake KYC, SIM cloning, and mass-issued SIM patterns.

Significance

- Protects citizens against identity theft
- Enables transparency in SIM ownership
- Supports policing of cyber fraud networks
- Strengthens national digital safety architecture

Prelims Connect

- IMEI
- KYC rules under Telegraph Act
- Digital fraud ecosystem

Mains Question

How does Sanchar Saathi enhance digital safety for telecom users? Examine its significance for preventing mobile-based fraud.

SIM Binding Rollout

Why in News?

Telecom authorities rolled out SIM Binding, a security measure linking each mobile number to the specific device on which it is used.

What Is SIM Binding?

It is a security feature that binds the user's SIM with:

- IMEI of the device
- Verified KYC details
- Network activation history

If the SIM is inserted in an unverified device, access may be restricted.

Why It Matters

- Prevents SIM swapping fraud
- Protects digital payment apps
- Blocks misuse of stolen SIMs
- Enhances traceability for law enforcement

Impact

- Reduced volume of SIM-based scams
- Safer online financial transactions
- Cleaner telecom subscriber database

Prelims Connect

- IMEI
- Unified KYC norms

- Cybercrime trends

Mains Question

Discuss the relevance of SIM Binding in India's digital security ecosystem. What challenges accompany its implementation?

SARAL SIMS Platform

Why in News?

The government introduced SARAL SIMS, a stricter system for SIM issuance and verification, replacing older fragmented processes.

What SARAL SIMS Does

1. Real-Time Aadhaar Verification

Ensures the person purchasing the SIM matches biometrics instantly.

2. Prevention of Fake/Multiple KYC

Closes loopholes exploited by cybercriminals.

3. Audit Trail for SIM Issuance

Retailers' actions are fully traceable.

4. Fraud Control Dashboard

Enables government to monitor high-risk patterns.

Significance

- Cleans the telecom ecosystem
- Prevents bulk-SIM criminal networks
- Strengthens national cybersecurity
- Enhances accountability of retailers

Challenges

- Retailer compliance
- Remote-region connectivity issues

Prelims Connect

- Aadhaar Authentication
- Cybercrime types
- Telecom KYC

MAINS QUESTION

Examine how SARAL SIMS strengthens mobile identity systems. How does it complement other telecom security initiatives?

Trade Intelligence & Analytics (TIA) Portal

Why in News?

The government launched the TIA Portal, a unified digital platform to provide real-time trade data, tariff insights, and analytics to exporters and policymakers.

Key Features

1. Integrated Trade Dashboard

Displays import–export trends, market access issues, and tariff lines.

2. Analytics Tools

AI-driven tools analyse competitor markets and global demand patterns.

3. State-Level Performance Mapping

Helps states plan export policies.

4. Sectoral Opportunity Identification

Supports MSMEs with product-wise global insights.

Why It Matters

- Enhances data-driven export planning
- Supports Districts as Export Hubs (DEH)
- Reduces information asymmetry for MSMEs
- Strengthens India's trade competitiveness

Prelims Connect

- Tariff vs non-tariff barriers
- Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)

Mains Question

How does the TIA Portal strengthen India's export competitiveness? Discuss its role in empowering MSMEs.

YUVA AI for ALL Initiative

Why in News?

A national initiative was launched to familiarise youth with AI tools, ethics, innovation, and employability skills, making AI learning accessible at scale.

What the Initiative Provides

- Free foundational AI modules
- Hands-on AI projects for students
- Training for teachers on AI pedagogy
- Regional-language AI content
- Certification pathways for employability

Significance

- Builds future-ready youth workforce
- Supports Digital India's skilling pipeline
- Reduces AI knowledge gaps
- Encourages inclusive tech literacy

Prelims Connect

- NCERT digital modules
- National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR)
- AI ethics basics

Mains Question

Evaluate the importance of the YUVA AI initiative in shaping India's digital talent pool.

Global Call for Gender-Transformative AI Solutions

Why in News?

India participated in a global call inviting innovators to develop AI solutions that advance gender equity, improve access, and reduce discrimination.

Focus Areas

- AI tools detecting gender bias
- Solutions improving women's access to services
- Safety and mobility applications
- Health and education-based innovations

Why It Is Important

- AI systems often inherit biases
- Women face digital inequities
- Need to ensure inclusive AI development

Prelims Connect

- Gender Digital Divide
- AI ethics principles

MAINS QUESTION

What is Gender-Transformative AI? How can such innovations help reduce the gender digital divide in India?

Digital Consumer Protection: Crackdown on Scams & Deepfakes

Why in News?

Authorities intensified action against:

- deepfake misuse
- fraudulent loan apps
- fake investment platforms
- SIM-linked cybercrime

Key Measures Taken

1. Removal of Illegal Apps

Hundreds of apps promoting fraud were taken down.

2. AI-Based Deepfake Detection

Platforms mandated to deploy automated detection tools.

3. Mandatory Verification for Digital Lenders

Only registered NBFCs can offer digital loans.

4. Public Advisory Campaigns

Warnings issued on:

- deepfake videos
- phishing calls
- scam messages

Significance

- Protects vulnerable digital users
- Enhances trust in online transactions
- Supports India's cybersecurity posture

Prelims Connect

- IT Rules
- Deepfake definition
- Cyber fraud mechanisms

Mains Question

Discuss the emerging risks posed by deepfakes and digital fraud. What regulatory reforms are needed to safeguard consumers in the digital economy?

Companies Rules 2025

Why in News?

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs notified the Companies (Specification of Definition Details) Amendment Rules, 2025,

introducing updates to corporate classification, compliance thresholds, and definitional clarity under the Companies Act, 2013. These amendments aim to improve ease of doing business and align corporate reporting norms with evolving business environments.

Background

Corporate classification under the Companies Act determines:

- financial reporting requirements,
- auditing norms,
- CSR obligations,
- governance responsibilities,
- compliance frequency.

As business structures evolve and new forms of digital/innovation-driven enterprises emerge, periodic refinement of definitions is necessary to ensure regulatory accuracy and reduce unnecessary burdens, especially for small and medium-sized companies.

The 2025 amendment provides updated specifications related to:

- paid-up capital,
- turnover,
- small company thresholds,
- start-up recognition criteria,
- definitions used for filings and statutory compliance.

Key Changes Introduced

1. Revised Thresholds for Small Companies

The amendment increases the limits for classification as a small company, allowing more enterprises to benefit from simplified norms.

This includes relaxed:

- board meeting requirements,
- lesser compliance filings,
- simpler auditing processes,
- reduced penalties.

2. Updated Paid-Up Capital and Turnover Definitions

Changes ensure alignment with current business realities and inflation-adjusted turnover levels.

3. Harmonisation with Start-up Frameworks

Definitions now align more closely with national start-up policies for:

- innovation-driven enterprises,
- DPIIT-recognised start-ups,
- technology-based MSMEs.

This prevents mismatches that previously caused compliance inconsistencies.

4. Clarity on Financial Parameters and Reporting

Ambiguities in the interpretation of turnover, capital, and financial year specifications have been simplified, easing statutory filings.

5. Reduction of Compliance Burden

More companies will now qualify for:

- abridged financial statements,
- exemption from mandatory internal audits,
- simplified board reports.

This strongly supports the ease of doing business framework.

Why the Changes Matter

1. Boost for MSMEs and Start-ups

Relaxed criteria bring thousands of additional firms into the "small company" category.

2. Reduced Compliance Costs

Lower auditing and filing burdens help smaller firms focus on growth rather than paperwork.

3. Better Alignment with Corporate Ecosystem

The amendment responds to India's rapidly evolving digital and service-driven economy.

4. Supports Formalisation

Simplification encourages informal enterprises to adopt corporate structures.

5. Strengthens Corporate Governance

Clearer definitional boundaries create better regulatory oversight.

Challenges

1. Interpretation by Companies

Initial confusion may arise as firms adjust classification and reporting methods.

2. Auditor Transitional Issues

Auditors must adapt quickly to revised thresholds.

3. Capacity Gaps in Smaller Firms

New compliance responsibilities may still require capacity-building among micro enterprises.

Prelims Connect

Important definitions under the Companies Act:

- Small company
- Start-up (as per DPIIT)
- Paid-up capital
- Turnover
- One-person company
- Financial year requirements

These definitions frequently appear in UPSC prelims.

Mains Practice Question

How do recent amendments in the Companies (Specification of Definition Details) Rules strengthen India's ease-of-doing-business framework? Discuss their impact on MSMEs and corporate compliance.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Under the updated Companies Rules 2025, which of the following statements are correct?

1. Revised thresholds allow more firms to be classified as small companies.
2. The amendment aligns definitions with national start-up recognition frameworks.
3. Paid-up capital thresholds have been standardised downward for all classes of companies.
4. Small companies enjoy simplified filing and auditing norms.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Export Hubs Initiative

Why in News?

The government continues to expand the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) initiative to strengthen local production systems, identify district-specific export products, and integrate small producers with global value chains. Recent updates include enhanced product mapping, digital onboarding of exporters, and capacity-building support for local enterprises.

Background

India's export performance is increasingly driven by:
- diversified product baskets,
- regional specialisation,
- MSME participation,
- global market shifts.

The DEH initiative aims to leverage each district's unique strengths by identifying its One District, One Product (ODOP) export potential and providing targeted support such as:
- infrastructure improvements,
- logistics streamlining,
- market linkage assistance,
- training and certification.

It aligns with national priorities of boosting Make in India, MSME empowerment, and inclusive economic growth.

Key Objectives of the DEH Initiative
1. Localising Export Growth

Transforming districts into active export hubs by:
- identifying high-potential products,
- supporting cluster-based manufacturing,
- enabling value addition and branding.

2. Strengthening Supply Chains

Improving supply chain connectivity through:
- testing labs,
- warehousing,
- cold chains,
- quality certification facilities.

3. Enabling MSMEs

Providing:
- export awareness programmes,
- financial support schemes,
- digital tools for exporters.

4. Market Diversification

Expanding market access and promoting participation in:
- trade fairs,
- buyer-seller meets,
- e-commerce export platforms.

Recent Updates
1. District Export Action Plans (DEAPs) Expanded

Most districts now have detailed export action plans that outline:
- product potential,
- gap analysis,
- infrastructure requirements,
- institutional support mechanisms.

2. Integration with ODOP

DEH and ODOP are now closely aligned, creating unified branding strategies for:
- handlooms,
- agriculture products,
- handicrafts,
- processed foods.

3. Digital Onboarding of Exporters

District authorities have initiated digital registration drives for:
- small manufacturers,
- farmer-producer organisations (FPOs),
- women-led enterprises.

4. Skill and Capacity Building

Training modules cover:
- export documentation,
- packaging standards,
- product certification,
- WTO-compliant practices.

5. Improved Inter-Departmental Coordination

Commerce Ministry, state governments, and district administrations collaborate through a structured nodal system.

Why It Matters
1. Boosts MSME-Led Growth

Most export-driven units in districts are MSMEs — DEH helps them expand globally.

2. Reduces Regional Imbalances

Encourages development beyond metropolitan centres.

3. Enhances Product Quality

Testing, certification, and branding improvements raise global competitiveness.

4. Supports Rural Employment

Handicrafts, textiles, agro-processing, and traditional industries gain steady demand.

5. Strengthens India's Export Strategy

Helps diversify product baskets and expand destination markets.

Challenges

- limited export literacy at the local level,
- inadequate last-mile logistics,
- high compliance costs for certification,
- lack of skilled manpower in remote clusters,
- inconsistent quality standards across units.

Prelims Connect

- One District One Product (ODOP)
- DGFT as the implementing agency
- FPOs and MSME export schemes
- Geographical indications (GI) and branding
- Logistics cost as a percentage of GDP

Mains Practice Question

How does the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) initiative support inclusive and regionally balanced export growth in India? Analyse its potential and challenges.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to the Districts as Export Hubs initiative, consider the following statements:

1. It aims to identify and promote unique products with export potential in every district.
2. The initiative is implemented by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.
3. The initiative is limited to agricultural products.
4. DEH integrates with ODOP for unified branding.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

GIRG Reform Framework

Why in News?

A new Global Indices for Reforms and Growth (GIRG) Framework has been developed to systematically track India's performance across international indices related to business climate, logistics, skilling, digital governance, innovation, social development, and institutional effectiveness. The framework strengthens evidence-based policymaking and enhances India's reform credibility.

Background

Global indices play an important role in shaping:

- investor confidence,
- international rankings,
- credit ratings,
- reform prioritisation,
- comparative performance evaluation.

However, ministries and states often face challenges related to:

- fragmented data,
- unclear methodologies,
- limited inter-ministerial coordination,
- inconsistent reporting.

The GIRG framework creates a unified, structured approach for improving India's performance across a wide set of global benchmarks.

Core Objectives of the GIRG Framework
1. Coordinated National Effort

Ensures ministries, departments, and states work together on key reform indicators.

2. High-Frequency Monitoring

Creates a continuous feedback mechanism to evaluate India's position in global indices.

3. Evidence-Based Policy Design

Enables ministries to:
- identify gaps,
- benchmark progress,
- target specific reform areas.

4. Enhancing India's International Standing

Higher rankings influence investment flows and global perception.

5. Strengthening Sub-National Reform Efforts

States receive insights into their performance relative to national and global benchmarks.

What the GIRG Framework Covers

The framework tracks India's performance across indices related to:

1. Economic Competitiveness

- logistics
- trade facilitation
- export competitiveness
- industrial performance

2. Business and Innovation Climate

- enterprise regulation
- intellectual property ecosystem
- start-up innovation rankings

3. Social Development and Human Capital

- health
- education
- gender equality
- skills

4. Digital and Governance Excellence

- e-governance
- cyber readiness
- digital public infrastructure
- transparency reforms

5. Environmental & Sustainability Indices

- climate readiness
- energy transition
- environmental performance

How the Framework Works

1. Lead Ministry Allocation

Each index is assigned to a nodal ministry responsible for:

- tracking metrics,
- coordinating reforms,
- reporting progress.

2. Data Standardisation

Uniform templates ensure comparable and verifiable data flow.

3. State-Level Dashboards

Helps states identify their strengths and gaps in global competitiveness.

4. Policy Action Plans

Each ministry prepares annual reforms tied to index indicators.

5. Capacity Building

Workshops, analytical support, and technical training enhance institutional capability.

Why It Is Important

1. Aligns India with Global Best Practices

Improves credibility and transparency in economic and governance metrics.

2. Attracts Investment

Better rankings enhance investor confidence.

3. Strengthens Reform Momentum

Keeps ministries and states engaged with measurable outcomes.

4. Supports Competitive Federalism

States compare performance, encouraging reforms.

5. Helps India Prepare for Global Economic Transitions

Focuses attention on:

- sustainability,
- digital transformation,
- innovation-driven growth.

Challenges

- variations in methodologies across indices,
- data collection bottlenecks,
- differing capacities among states,
- risk of overemphasis on rankings instead of real development,
- dependency on external evaluators.

Prelims Connect

Global indices commonly referenced in UPSC:

- Global Innovation Index
- Logistics Performance Index
- Gender Gap Index
- Human Development Index
- E-Government Development Index
- Global Competitiveness Index

Mains Practice Question

How does the Global Indices for Reforms and Growth (GIRG) framework support India's long-term reform strategy? Discuss its significance for competitive federalism and investment climate.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the GIRG Framework:

1. It is designed to monitor India's performance across multiple global indices.
2. The framework assigns nodal ministries to specific indices for targeted reforms.
3. It focuses exclusively on economic indices and does not cover social indicators.
4. It promotes competitive federalism by enabling state-level comparative analysis.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

GEOGRAPHY

Heat Dome Over West Asia and South Asia

Why in News?

In November 2025, several meteorological agencies including IMD, WMO, and NOAA reported an unusually persistent heat dome over West Asia, Pakistan, and parts of northwest India, causing temperatures to remain far above normal even during late autumn. This anomaly delayed winter onset, intensified dry conditions, and altered regional atmospheric circulation patterns.

Background

A heat dome is a large, stationary high-pressure system that traps warm air beneath it, creating:

- prolonged heatwaves,
- stagnant atmospheric conditions,
- reduced cloud formation,
- weak surface winds.

The phenomenon is associated with Rossby wave blocking, which prevents cooler air from entering the region.

Heat domes have become more frequent globally due to increasing ocean heat content, altering jet stream behaviour.

Page 24

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HOW A HEAT DOME FORMS

1. Ocean Warming

Warmer seas heat the air above them, which rises and expands.

2. High-Pressure System Forms

The expanded air becomes a stable high-pressure cap.

3. Trapped Heat

The high-pressure system prevents the escape of heat, creating a dome-like thermal lid.

4. Weak Jet Stream

A weakened or meandering jet stream keeps the system locked in place.

NOVEMBER 2025 OBSERVATIONS

1. Persistent High-Pressure Ridge

Satellite and model data showed a high-pressure ridge centred over:

- Arabian Peninsula,
- Persian Gulf,
- Pakistan,
- West Rajasthan and Gujarat.

2. Temperature Anomalies

Regions recorded temperature departures of:

- +4°C to +7°C above normal in many places
- Night temperatures remained unusually elevated

3. Weak Western Disturbances

The heat dome:

- suppressed westerly flow,
- reduced WD penetration into Northwest India,
- delayed early winter rainfall.

IMPACTS IN INDIA

1. Delayed Winter Onset

Cities like Delhi, Jaipur, and Chandigarh reported:

- late arrival of winter chill,
- prolonged smog episodes due to stagnant air.

2. Increased Pollution Levels

A heat dome enhances:

- temperature inversion,
- trapping of pollutants,
- poor dispersion.

This aggravated air quality issues in the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

3. Dry Conditions in Western India

Rajasthan and Gujarat saw:

- record low humidity levels,
- stress on rabi sowing schedules.

4. Energy Demand Spike

Higher temperatures increased:

- cooling requirements,
- power consumption peaks.

5. Health Concerns

Extended heat exposure elevated:

- heat stress,
- cardiovascular strain,
- vulnerability for elderly and outdoor workers.

WIDER REGIONAL IMPACTS

- Heatwaves in Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia
- High sea surface temperatures in the Arabian Sea
- Possibility of supporting rapid intensification of cyclones

WHY THIS MATTERS

1. Climate Change Link

Studies indicate warming oceans and weakened jet streams are increasing Rossby blocking events, making heat domes:

- more frequent,
- more intense,
- longer lasting.

2. Agricultural and Hydrological Impacts

Heat domes shift:

- evapotranspiration rates,
- crop water demand,
- groundwater stress.

3. Urban Vulnerability

Heat domes worsen urban heat island effects in Indian cities.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Rossby waves
- Jet stream meandering
- Western Disturbances
- Temperature inversion
- Heat index vs wet-bulb temperature

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

What is a heat dome? Explain the atmospheric conditions responsible for its formation and assess its impact on India's climate and environment during November 2025.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to heat domes, consider the following statements:

1. They form when a high-pressure system traps warm air near the surface.
2. Heat domes are associated with Rossby wave blocking patterns.
3. Heat domes strengthen Western Disturbances over North India.
4. Ocean warming increases the likelihood of heat dome formation.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Enhanced Rock Weathering (ERW)

Why in News?

In November 2025, agricultural and climate research institutions in India, including ICAR and several climate-science laboratories, reported progress on Enhanced Rock Weathering (ERW) trials across parts of the Deccan Plateau. ERW is being tested as a scalable carbon sequestration strategy under India's long-term climate commitments.

Background

Enhanced Rock Weathering is a negative emissions technique that accelerates the natural weathering of silicate or basaltic rocks to capture atmospheric CO_2.

When silicate rocks break down in the presence of water, they:

- chemically bind with CO_2,
- form stable bicarbonates or carbonates,
- eventually store carbon in soils or oceans for thousands to millions of years.

The Deccan Plateau's extensive basaltic formations make India a suitable location for ERW trials.

HOW ERW WORKS

1. BASALT OR SILICATE ROCKS ARE CRUSHED INTO FINE POWDER.
2. THE POWDER IS SPREAD ON AGRICULTURAL FIELDS.
3. CHEMICAL REACTIONS OCCUR BETWEEN ROCK MINERALS, SOIL MOISTURE, AND CO_2.
4. CO_2 IS CONVERTED INTO BICARBONATES AND LOCKED IN SOILS OR WASHED INTO OCEANS.
5. SOIL FERTILITY MAY IMPROVE DUE TO MINERAL RELEASE.

WHY THE DECCAN PLATEAU?

- Basalt-rich geology
- High surface area for chemical weathering
- Large agricultural footprint
- Warm climate boosts reaction rates
- Possibility of improving soil pH and nutrient content (Ca, Mg, Fe)

KEY DEVELOPMENTS (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Field Trials Expanded

Pilot experiments were conducted in:

- Maharashtra
- Karnataka
- Telangana

Basalt powder mixed into soil for crops like:

- paddy,
- millets,
- sugarcane.

2. Early Results Encouraging

Preliminary findings indicate:

- measurable CO_2 uptake,
- slight increase in soil alkalinity,
- yield improvement in some trials,
- better soil moisture retention.

3. Monitoring Using Isotope Techniques

Researchers used:

- stable isotope tracing,
- soil–water chemistry analysis,
- long-term carbon modelling.

4. Partnerships with Climate Innovation Funds

ERW is under consideration for carbon credit eligibility in global carbon markets.

BENEFITS OF ERW

1. Carbon Sequestration at Scale

Potential to capture hundreds of millions of tonnes of CO_2 globally.

2. Soil Health Improvement

Rock weathering releases:

- magnesium,
- calcium,
- silica,
- micronutrients.

3. Potential Increase in Crop Yields

Seen especially in acidic or nutrient-poor soils.

4. Affordable & Farmer-Friendly

Basalt is abundant and often available as mine waste.

5. Synergy with Climate Goals

Supports:

- net-zero strategies,
- regenerative agriculture,
- sustainable soil management.

CHALLENGES

- high energy requirement for crushing rocks,
- uncertainty about long-term soil chemistry impacts,
- need for large-scale monitoring frameworks,
- potential risks of heavy metal contamination in low-grade rock powders,
- lack of regulatory guidelines for agricultural application.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Chemical weathering of silicates
- Carbon cycle: slow vs fast carbon pathways
- Basaltic landscapes (Deccan Traps)
- Negative emissions technologies (NETs)
- Regenerative agriculture

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Enhanced Rock Weathering (ERW) offers a scientifically promising pathway for carbon sequestration, especially in basalt-rich regions like the Deccan Plateau." Discuss its potential and challenges.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. Enhanced Rock Weathering (ERW), recently tested in India, refers to:

1. Increasing the weathering rates of silicate rocks to capture atmospheric CO_2

2. Releasing nutrients into soil via basalt powdering
3. A geoengineering technique under negative emissions
4. Using limestone rocks exclusively for carbon capture

Which of the statements given above 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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Atmospheric Rivers Over the West Coast of India

Why in News?

In November 2025, IMD and several global meteorological agencies reported the presence of atmospheric rivers (ARs) over the Arabian Sea, which carried long, narrow plumes of moisture toward the Kerala–Karnataka coastline. These AR events contributed to episodes of intense rainfall, localised flooding, and moisture surges ahead of cyclonic activity.

Background

An Atmospheric River (AR) is a:

- narrow corridor of concentrated water vapour,
- stretching thousands of kilometres,
- transporting moisture from tropical oceans to land,
- capable of producing heavy precipitation when uplifted.

ARs are well-known in the Pacific–North American system but are now increasingly documented over the Indian Ocean region, partly due to warming seas and improved satellite observations.

HOW ATMOSPHERIC RIVERS FORM?

1. **Moisture Evaporation:** Warm ocean surfaces (like the Arabian Sea in Nov 2025) create high humidity zones.
2. **Wind Stream Alignment:** Strong low-level jet streams organise the moisture into long plumes.
3. **Transport Toward Land:** Moisture bands travel thousands of kilometres.
4. **Orographic Uplift:** Western Ghats force moist air upward → condensation → heavy rainfall.

RECENT OBSERVATIONS

1. Moisture Surge From Arabian Sea

Satellite images showed long plumes extending from:

- equatorial Indian Ocean → Arabian Sea → Southwest India coast.

2. Interaction With Western Ghats

The AR lifted over the Ghats caused:

- intense orographic rainfall,
- localised flash floods in Kerala,
- landslide warnings in Kodagu and Wayanad.

3. Precursor to Cyclonic Activity

AR moisture enhanced the intensity of Cyclone Montha, contributing to:

- rapid intensification,
- heavy rainfall along Konkan and Goa.

4. Increased Atmospheric Water Vapour Content

Observations recorded PWAT (Precipitable Water) near 60–70 mm, unusually high for late autumn.

WHY ATMOSPHERIC RIVERS ARE EMERGING IN INDIA

- Warming Arabian Sea
- Increased monsoon variability
- Stronger moisture plumes during transition seasons
- Improved remote sensing detection technologies

This indicates a shift toward more extreme rainfall events.

IMPACTS ON INDIA

1. Heavy Rainfall & Flooding

Regions affected:

- Kochi–Alappuzha belt
- Coastal Karnataka
- North Kerala hill regions

2. Landslides

Enhanced soil saturation triggered:

- small to moderate slope failures
- riverbank erosion

3. Urban Drainage Stress

Cities like Kochi and Mangaluru reported:

- waterlogging,
- traffic disruption.

4. Agriculture

Moisture surges affected:

- post-monsoon paddy harvest,
- plantation crops (cardamom, coffee).

5. Weather Forecasting Challenges

ARs are:

- fast-developing,
- difficult to predict,
- often interacting with cyclonic systems.

WHY THIS MATTERS

1. New Climate Risk for India

Atmospheric rivers will likely increase with warming seas.

2. Impact on Cyclone Intensification

ARs can supply moisture that fuels rapid intensification.

3. Western Ghats Vulnerability

Steep slopes + heavy AR precipitation = high landslide danger.

4. Need for AR-Specific Forecast Models

India may need to adopt AR warning systems similar to those in the US West Coast.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Atmospheric River
- Orographic rainfall
- Precipitable water (PWAT)

- Western Ghats climate
- Arabian Sea warming trends

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Explain the concept of atmospheric rivers. How did their occurrence over the Arabian Sea influence rainfall patterns along India's west coast in November 2025?

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to atmospheric rivers, consider the following statements:

1. They are narrow bands of moisture in the atmosphere responsible for long-distance water vapour transport.
2. They often cause heavy precipitation when they encounter mountain ranges.
3. Atmospheric rivers form only over the Pacific Ocean and do not occur over the Indian Ocean.
4. Warming sea surface temperatures can increase the intensity of atmospheric rivers.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

El Niño Weakens as La Niña Watch Issued

Why in News?

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) and global climate agencies (NOAA, WMO) confirmed that the strong El Niño event of 2024–25 had begun weakening, prompting the issuance of a La Niña Watch for early 2026. This shift has major implications for India's winter, pre-monsoon, and southwest monsoon behaviour.

Background

El Niño and La Niña are opposite phases of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) system:

- El Niño: Warming of central/eastern Pacific waters → weak monsoon, warm winters.
- La Niña: Cooling of the same region → stronger monsoon, colder winters.

ENSO influences:

- monsoon rainfall,
- cyclone formation,
- temperature anomalies,
- jet stream paths.

1. Sea Surface Temperature (SST) Cooling

Pacific SST anomalies dropped from:

- +1.5°C in September to +0.5°C in late November indicating rapid weakening.

2. Strengthening Trade Winds

Trade winds revived across the equatorial Pacific — a precursor to La Niña formation.

3. Atmospheric Indicators Shift

The Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) showed signs of turning positive:

- El Niño → negative SOI
- La Niña → positive SOI

4. Subsurface Cooling

Subsurface temperature anomalies revealed:

- a deeper cold pool migrating eastward,
- likely surface cooling by early 2026.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

1. Winter 2025–26 Likely Colder

With declining El Niño influence:

- North India may see sharper temperature drops,
- More active western disturbances.

2. Rabi Season: Improved Moisture Conditions

Weak El Niño reduces:

- winter dryness,
- warm spells harmful to wheat and mustard.

3. Cyclone Behaviour in the North Indian Ocean

El Niño → more Bay cyclones

La Niña → more Arabian Sea cyclones

A shift in storm tracks may occur in early 2026.

4. Monsoon 2026 Outlook

La Niña is typically associated with:

- above-normal monsoon rainfall,
- stronger cross-equatorial flows,
- reduced monsoon breaks.

However, ENSO impact depends on interplay with IOD and Pacific Decadal Oscillation.

5. Heatwaves in 2026

La Niña years often see:

- intense pre-monsoon heatwaves in Northwest India and Central India.

WHY THIS MATTERS

1. Agriculture

- Crop planning for rabi and kharif must incorporate ENSO-based advisories.

2. Water Management

- Reservoir operations and hydropower generation depend on seasonal forecasts.

3. Climate Prediction Improvements

India increasingly relies on ENSO forecasting for:

- food security
- disaster preparedness
- long-term climate modelling

4. Extreme Weather

ENSO transitions can cause:

- abrupt rainfall shifts,
- unexpected cold waves,

● altered cyclone intensities.

PRELIMS CONNECT

● ENSO
● Walker circulation
● SOI index
● Upwelling in eastern Pacific
● Indian monsoon teleconnections

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

How does the transition from El Niño to La Niña influence India's winter weather, rabi season performance, and monsoon dynamics? Illustrate with the November 2025 conditions.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding El Niño and La Niña:

1. El Niño is associated with suppressed monsoon and warmer winters in India.
2. La Niña generally strengthens monsoon winds and increases rainfall.
3. Declining Pacific SST anomalies and strengthening trade winds indicate a shift toward La Niña.
4. ENSO has no significant influence on cyclone formation in the Indian Ocean.

Which of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Blue Carbon Mapping Along the Indian Coast

Why in News?

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), in collaboration with ISRO and the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), released updated data on India's blue carbon ecosystems. These include mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes, which play a critical role in carbon sequestration and coastal resilience.

Background

Blue Carbon Ecosystems (BCEs) are coastal and marine natural systems that:

● store large amounts of carbon in biomass and sediment,
● protect coastlines from erosion,
● support fisheries,
● enhance biodiversity.

India has three major blue carbon systems:

1. Mangroves – Sundarbans, Krishna–Godavari, Gulf of Kutch
2. Seagrass Meadows – Andaman–Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Gulf of Mannar

3. Salt Marshes – Gujarat coast, Odisha coast

BCEs can store up to 10 times more carbon per hectare than terrestrial forests.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2025 UPDATE

1. Mangrove Carbon Stocks Increase

ISRO mapping indicates:

● 5–7% rise in mangrove biomass since 2015
● highest gains in Pichavaram, Muthupet, and Sundarbans
● positive impact of mangrove restoration programmes

2. Seagrass Decline in Some Regions

Seagrass meadows showed:

● decline in Andaman's Neil Island due to sedimentation
● stability or moderate increase in Gulf of Mannar

3. Salt Marsh Expansion

Salt marshes expanded in:

● Gujarat's Kachchh region,
● parts of Odisha,

likely due to natural sediment deposition and climate-driven hydrology changes.

4. Modelling Shows High Carbon Burial Potential

Sediment cores showed:

● annual carbon burial rates up to 2 tonnes/ha in dense mangrove patches
● long-term storage capacity enhanced by tidal flushing

MAJOR DRIVERS IMPACTING BLUE CARBON ECOSYSTEMS

Positive Drivers

● community-led mangrove plantation
● coastal regulation enforcement
● improved remote sensing & monitoring

Negative Drivers

● port expansion & dredging
● aquaculture encroachment
● pollution & sedimentation
● extreme weather events

IMPORTANCE FOR INDIA

1. Climate Mitigation

Blue carbon ecosystems contribute significantly toward:

● India's NAPCC commitments
● Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)
● achieving net-zero goals

2. Coastal Protection

Mangroves reduce:

● storm surge intensity,
● wave energy,
● coastal erosion.

3. Fisheries Support

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Page 29

Seagrasses and mangroves provide nursery grounds for:

- fish
- crustaceans
- molluscs
- ensuring livelihood security.

4. Carbon Market Potential

Blue carbon credits represent an emerging revenue pathway for coastal states.

RECENT INITIATIVES (2025)

- National Mangrove Restoration Programme, scaling across 10 coastal states
- ISRO–MoEFCC coastal carbon atlas, integrating satellite and field data
- Community-based seagrass protection projects in Gulf of Mannar
- Coastal ecosystem vulnerability index under preparation for disaster management

CHALLENGES

- industrial pollution in estuaries
- sea-level rise threatening low-lying mangrove belts
- lack of long-term seagrass monitoring
- conflicts with aquaculture
- limited economic valuation of ecosystem services

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Blue carbon
- Mangrove species (Avicennia, Rhizophora)
- Seagrass species (Thalassia, Halophila)
- CRZ notification
- Coastal geomorphology

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Blue carbon ecosystems are indispensable for both climate mitigation and coastal resilience." Evaluate the significance of India's 2025 blue carbon mapping update in this context.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. Which of the following constitute blue carbon ecosystems?

1. Mangroves
2. Coral reefs
3. Seagrass meadows
4. Salt marshes

Select the correct answer:

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

Answer: (a) 1, 3 and 4 only

Seismic Microzonation Maps Updated for Delhi–NCR

Why in News?

The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) released updated Seismic Microzonation Maps for Delhi–NCR, incorporating new geological, geotechnical, and seismological data. This update reflects enhanced understanding of the region's earthquake vulnerability, considering rapid urbanisation, fault-line activity, and soil–structure interactions.

Background

Seismic microzonation divides a region into smaller zones based on varying levels of earthquake hazards:

- ground shaking intensity
- soil type and amplification
- liquefaction potential
- fault proximity
- slope stability

Delhi–NCR lies close to:

- the Delhi–Hardwar Ridge,
- the Mahendragarh–Dehradun Fault,
- the Moradabad Fault,
- Himalayan tectonic influences.

This increases seismic risk despite moderate historical earthquake frequency.

1. Revised Hazard Zonation

Delhi–NCR has been categorised into:

- High Hazard Zones – Yamuna floodplains, East Delhi, parts of Noida, Gurugram low-lying belts
- Moderate Hazard Zones – Central New Delhi, South Delhi
- Relatively Lower Hazard Zones – Ridge areas (rockier terrain), North Delhi elevated areas

2. Soil Amplification Analysis

Soft alluvial soils in:

- East Delhi
- Noida Sector zones
- Faridabad plains

show significant amplification, increasing risk during moderate earthquakes.

3. Liquefaction Potential Identified

Liquefaction high-risk areas:

- Yamuna riverbank regions
- New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA) patches
- East Gurugram wetlands
- Dwarka sub-city alluvium belts

4. Urban Infrastructure Vulnerability

Key concerns include:

- dense high-rise clusters in soft soil districts
- ageing building stock in Old Delhi
- lack of retrofitting in schools, hospitals
- critical lifeline structures along weak soils (flyovers, Metro stretches)

5. Fault Activity Indicators

Micro-seismic recordings show:

- increased low-intensity tremors along Mahendragarh–Dehradun Fault
- stress accumulation signs consistent with Himalayan tectonics

1. Better Urban Planning

Authorities can:

- regulate high-rise construction in hazard zones
- identify priority retrofitting locations
- guide metro expansion routes

2. Stronger Building Codes

BIS (IS 1893) amendments can integrate:

- soil-specific design parameters
- foundation type recommendations

3. Disaster Preparedness Enhancement

Updated hazard knowledge enables:

- improved evacuation routes
- location-specific emergency response planning
- targeted public awareness campaigns

4. Insurance & Risk Financing

Microzonation data supports:

- risk-based insurance pricing,
- municipal-level resilience financing.

CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED

- rapid construction on floodplains
- lack of compliance with seismic design codes
- unregulated expansion of peri-urban regions
- insufficient retrofitting of old infrastructure
- high population density increases risk exposure

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Seismic microzonation
- Liquefaction
- Fault lines near Delhi
- IS 1893 — earthquake-resistant structures
- Himalayan tectonics

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Seismic microzonation is central to urban resilience planning for hazard-prone regions." Evaluate the role of the 2025 Delhi–NCR microzonation update in strengthening earthquake preparedness.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to seismic microzonation, consider the following statements:

1. It classifies regions into microzones based on soil, geological, and seismological characteristics.
2. Liquefaction potential is a key parameter in microzonation.
3. Delhi–NCR lies close to several active and blind faults.
4. Microzonation maps are used only for academic research and not for urban planning.

Which of the statements given above 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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Polar Vortex Weakening and India's Winter Outlook

Why in News?

Several global meteorological agencies—including WMO, ECMWF, and NOAA—reported a weakening of the Arctic Polar Vortex. IMD noted that this atmospheric development could impact India's winter through altered jet stream behaviour, influencing cold waves, western disturbances, and temperature variability across northern India.

Background

The Polar Vortex is a large, cyclonic circulation of strong, cold winds situated in the stratosphere above the Arctic region.

- When strong, it traps cold air near the poles.
- When weak, it becomes unstable, allowing cold Arctic air to spill southward.

This weakening often results from:

- Arctic warming,
- disrupted stratospheric circulation,
- sudden stratospheric warming (SSW) events,
- changes in planetary wave patterns.

1. Stratospheric Winds Slowed

Wind speeds around the Arctic vortex weakened to:

- 30–35 m/s, compared to the usual 45–50 m/s.

2. Jet Stream Became Wavier

Satellite and model analyses revealed:

- amplified Rossby waves,
- deeper troughs over Eurasia,
- potential cold air intrusions toward mid-latitudes.

3. High Arctic Temperatures

Arctic temperatures were reported 4–6°C above normal, increasing vortex instability.

4. Possible Troposphere–Stratosphere Coupling

Model projections showed downward propagation of anomalies, influencing winter circulation in South Asia.

1. Stronger Western Disturbances (WDs)

A weakened vortex can:

- strengthen WD frequency,
- deepen WD troughs,
- cause more widespread winter rainfall in North India.

2. Sharper Cold Waves

Cold air outbreaks from Central Asia may reach:

- Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan,
- Uttar Pradesh,
- Delhi NCR.

This could cause:

- minimum temperatures to dip significantly,
- severe cold-day conditions.

3. Increased Fog Events

Stable, cold atmospheric layers support:

- dense fog formation over the Indo-Gangetic Plains,
- reduced visibility
- railway and flight disruption.

4. Snowfall in the Himalayas

Enhanced moisture–cold air interaction could increase:

- snowfall in J&K, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand.

5. Contrast with El Niño Conditions

Even as El Niño weakened:

- vortex-driven cold outbreaks could dominate early winter patterns,
- reducing the typical "warm winter" El Niño effect.

WHY THIS MATTERS

1. Energy Demand

Cold waves sharply increase:

- heating requirements,
- overall electricity demand.

2. Agriculture

Positive effects:

- improved chill hours for apples, wheat, mustard.

Risks:

- frost damage to vegetables,
- delayed sowing windows in some regions.

3. Public Health

Heightened risk of:

- respiratory diseases,
- pneumonia in elderly and children.

4. Climate Change Insights

Increasing frequency of polar vortex disruptions is linked to:

- rapid Arctic warming,
- feedback loops affecting mid-latitude climates,
- greater winter volatility.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Polar Vortex
- Jet Stream
- Western Disturbances
- Rossby waves
- Indo-Gangetic winter climatology

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"The weakening of the Arctic Polar Vortex has emerged as a significant driver of winter variability in the Northern Hemisphere." Analyse its implications for India's winter patterns with reference to November 2025 developments.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Polar Vortex, consider the following statements:

1. It is a circulation of strong winds located in the stratosphere over the Arctic region.
2. A strong Polar Vortex leads to increased cold-air outbreaks in mid-latitudes.
3. A weakened Polar Vortex can influence jet stream patterns.
4. Polar Vortex disturbances have no connection to Western Disturbances affecting India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

ENVIRONMENT

Rowmari–Donduwa Wetland Complex

Why in News?

In November 2025, the Rowmari–Donduwa Wetland Complex, located along the India–Bangladesh border, was highlighted in discussions on transboundary biodiversity conservation and wetland protection. Environmental agencies emphasised the need for coordinated ecological management of this shared wetland system.

Background

The Rowmari–Donduwa wetlands are part of the larger Brahmaputra–Jamuna floodplain ecosystem, characterised by:

- seasonal marshes,
- oxbow lakes,
- grasslands,
- reed beds,
- migratory bird habitats.

They serve as:

- a critical bird flyway site (Central Asian Flyway),
- a freshwater fisheries zone,
- a flood-buffering system,
- a carbon-sequestering landscape.

The wetlands are ecologically connected across national boundaries, making cooperative management essential.

Key Ecological Features
1. Rich Avifauna

The wetland supports:

- storks, herons, ibis,
- migratory ducks and geese,
- raptors such as the marsh harrier.

Seasonal migrations peak from October to February.

2. Hydrological Dependence on the Brahmaputra System

Wetland health depends on:

- monsoon flows,
- sediment load,

- tributary connectivity,
- floodplain recharge cycles.

Hydrological changes upstream significantly affect biodiversity.

3. Fisheries & Livelihood Support

Local communities depend on:
- artisanal fishing,
- floodplain agriculture,
- reed-based crafts,
- seasonal grazing.

Wetland decline directly affects household incomes.

4. Habitat for Threatened Species

The ecosystem supports species flagged under various conservation frameworks, including:
- Indian Skimmer,
- Pallas's Fish Eagle,
- Hog Deer,
- freshwater turtles.

Conservation Challenges

- Encroachment and land conversion for agriculture
- Wetland shrinkage due to sedimentation
- Unsustainable fishing and increased mechanisation
- Cross-border pollution and waste inflow
- Lack of coordinated monitoring mechanisms between India and Bangladesh

Climate change adds stress through:
- erratic floods,
- altered wetland retention,
- species migration shifts.

Recent Developments (November 2025)
1. Proposal for Joint Monitoring Framework

Environment ministries from both countries considered:
- shared hydrological data,
- migratory bird monitoring,
- wetland health indicators.

2. Community-Led Conservation Initiatives

Local groups initiated:
- wetland clean-up drives,
- community fishing rules,
- habitat restoration through native vegetation.

3. Research Focus on Habitat Connectivity

Wetland ecologists highlighted the importance of seasonal water channels that maintain wildlife corridors.

Why This Matters
1. Strengthens India–Bangladesh Environmental Cooperation

Enhances joint management of shared ecosystems.

2. Protects a Critical Flyway Habitat

Supports global migratory bird conservation commitments.

3. Safeguards Rural Livelihoods

Wetland-based economies rely on ecosystem health.

4. Mitigates Flood Risks

Wetlands act as natural sponges during monsoon peaks.

Prelims Connect

- Ramsar Convention (1971)
- Central Asian Flyway
- Wetland ecosystem services
- Floodplain morphology
- Transboundary conservation

Mains Practice Question

Evaluate the ecological and socio-economic significance of the Rowmari–Donduwa Wetland Complex. Why is transboundary cooperation essential for its long-term conservation?

Prelims MCQ

Q. The Rowmari–Donduwa Wetland Complex, recently in news, is significant because:
1. It lies along a transboundary river system.
2. It supports migratory birds under the Central Asian Flyway.
3. It is a designated Ramsar site jointly managed by India and Bangladesh.
4. It plays a key role in flood control and local livelihoods.

Select the correct answer:
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 2 and 4 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (b) 1, 2 and 4 only

Adaptation Gap Report 2025

Why in News?

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released its Adaptation Gap Report 2025 in November, highlighting the widening divide between climate adaptation needs and available financing and action, especially for developing countries like India.

The report is a key document ahead of global climate negotiations and serves as an annual stocktake of global preparedness for climate impacts.

Background

The Adaptation Gap Report assesses three major gaps:
1. Finance Gap — mismatch between funds needed vs. funds available
2. Implementation Gap — difference between planned adaptation and on-ground execution
3. Effectiveness Gap — measuring whether existing adaptation measures reduce climate vulnerability

India, being among the most climate-vulnerable countries, closely tracks this report for global climate diplomacy and domestic resilience planning.

1. Adaptation Finance Gap Continues to Widen

- Developing countries require $212–388 billion annually for adaptation by 2030.
- Current flows remain far below requirements.
- The gap has increased compared to previous years, indicating slow progress.

2. Vulnerable Regions Face Intensifying Climate Risks

Asia and Africa showed:
- rising heat extremes,
- growing drought frequency,
- flood-related losses,
- threats to coastal settlements.

India's climate-sensitive sectors — agriculture, water, fisheries, coasts — are highlighted as high-risk.

3. National Adaptation Plans Are Expanding

Countries have scaled up:
- early warning systems,
- climate-resilient infrastructure,
- drought and flood preparedness,
- nature-based solutions.

However, implementation remains uneven.

4. Limited Progress on Loss and Damage Responses

Even with the new Loss and Damage Fund operational, the report notes:
- slow disbursement,
- unclear eligibility criteria,
- limited resources against rapidly increasing climate impacts.

5. Private Finance Still Negligible

Adaptation financing is still overwhelmingly dependent on public funds.

Barriers include:
- perception of low returns,
- lack of commercial viability,
- uncertainty of climate benefits.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

1. Coastal Vulnerability

India's long coastline continues to face:
- sea-level rise,
- storm surges,
- coastal erosion,
- saline intrusion.

2. Agriculture and Water Risks

- monsoon variability,
- heat stress on crops,
- groundwater depletion.

3. Urban Heat and Flooding

Expanding cities face:
- heat island effects,
- overwhelmed drainage systems.

4. Need for Greater International Finance

India has argued for:
- predictable finance mechanisms,
- faster fund disbursement,
- developed countries meeting climate commitments.

5. Opportunity for Nature-Based Solutions

India's existing initiatives include:
- mangrove restoration,
- watershed development,
- green roofs and urban forestry.

These align with UNEP recommendations.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Global adaptation action is still too slow for the scale of climate change.
- Developing countries face disproportionate risks with least resources.
- International climate justice and equity remain central concerns.
- Adaptation must move beyond planning to measurable impact.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- UNEP — mandate, headquarters
- Adaptation vs Mitigation
- Loss and Damage Fund
- National Adaptation Plan (NAP)
- Nature-based solutions

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Critically examine the major findings of the UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025. What implications does it hold for India's climate policy, especially in finance and resilience planning?

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. In the context of the Adaptation Gap Report 2025, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is released annually by UNEP.
2. It assesses the gap between global mitigation efforts and emission targets.
3. It provides estimates of adaptation finance needs for developing countries.
4. It evaluates national adaptation plan implementation.

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 1, 3 and 4 only

(c) 2 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b) 1, 3 and 4 only

Saranda Wildlife Sanctuary

Why in News?

In November 2025, the Saranda Wildlife Sanctuary in Jharkhand gained national attention due to new conservation assessments and habitat restoration requirements linked to mining activities, elephant movement corridors, and forest health indicators. The region remains ecologically significant and politically sensitive because of competing developmental and ecological priorities.

Background

Located in the West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, Saranda is India's largest Sal (Shorea robusta) forest, often referred to as the "forest of seven hundred hills."

Ecologically, Saranda is known for:

- dense Sal forest canopy,
- elephant corridors,
- leopard and deer populations,
- rich avifauna,
- stream-fed micro-ecosystems,
- high biodiversity linked to Eastern Indian biogeographic zone.

Socioculturally, it is home to several tribal communities who rely on forest produce and traditional livelihoods.

ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

1. Dominant Sal Ecosystem

Saranda contains one of India's best-preserved natural Sal forests, supporting:

- endemic plant species,
- unique nutrient cycles,
- key pollinators and decomposers.

2. Elephant Habitat & Movement Corridors

The sanctuary lies on a major elephant migration route connecting:

- Jharkhand
- Odisha
- Chhattisgarh

Fragmentation directly impacts elephant behaviour and human–elephant conflict.

3. Streams & Microhabitats

Dozens of perennial streams like the Karo and Koina create:

- riparian habitats,
- breeding zones for amphibians,
- ideal conditions for ferns and epiphytes.

4. Faunal Diversity

Key species include:

- Asian Elephant
- Leopard
- Indian Bison (Gaur)
- Sambar
- Wild Boar
- Jungle Fowl

KEY CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Effects of Mining

The region has long been impacted by iron ore mining. Concerns include:

- forest fragmentation,
- reduction in canopy density,
- disturbance to wildlife movement,
- dust pollution affecting vegetation,
- soil erosion and altered hydrology.

2. Elephant–Human Conflict

Villages around the sanctuary reported:

- crop raids,
- night-time elephant movement,
- property damage.

Conservationists emphasised corridor protection.

3. Need for Forest Restoration

Reports highlighted the necessity of:

- assisted natural regeneration,
- native species plantation,
- soil and moisture conservation.

4. Invasive Species Spread

In some areas, invasive flora threatens native Sal regeneration.

RECENT INITIATIVES

1. Habitat Restoration Drives

Forest authorities initiated:

- native sapling plantations,
- removal of invasive weeds,
- micro-watershed structures.

2. Elephant Early Warning Systems

Plans were discussed to install:

- sensor-based detection systems,
- community alert apps,
- night patrol teams.

3. Joint Conservation Meetings

Tribal communities, forest officials, and local bodies participated in meetings on:

- forest rights,
- sustainable resource use,
- conflict mitigation.

4. Technology-Based Monitoring

Use of:

- drones for forest cover assessment,
- camera traps for biodiversity surveys,
- GIS-based corridor mapping.

WHY SARANDA MATTERS

1. Largest Sal Forest Ecosystem

A globally important landscape in terms of ecological integrity.

2. Elephant Conservation Priority

Crucial for long-distance movement across eastern India.

3. Tribal Livelihood Hub

Local communities depend on forest produce, agriculture, and eco-based livelihoods.

4. Climate Regulation

Dense forests serve as a major carbon sink.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Balancing mining with conservation
- Restoration of heavily degraded forest patches
- Addressing elephant-human conflicts early
- Ensuring rights and participation of tribal communities
- Monitoring hydrological impacts of land-use changes

Prelims Connect

- Sal forests & their distribution
- Elephant corridors in eastern India
- Eastern Ghats vs Chota Nagpur Plateau biodiversity
- Assisted natural regeneration (ANR)
- Role of tribal communities in conservation

Mains Practice Question

Saranda Wildlife Sanctuary is ecologically critical yet developmentally exposed. Discuss the major conservation challenges and evaluate recent initiatives to restore ecological balance.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Saranda Wildlife Sanctuary, consider the following statements:

1. It is located in the Chota Nagpur Plateau.
2. It is known for India's largest contiguous Sal forest.
3. It is part of a major elephant migration corridor.
4. It is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Climate Inequality Report 2025
Why in News?

The Climate Inequality Report 2025, released by world inequality lab, sparked major debate in November because of its strong findings on how climate change disproportionately impacts low- and middle-income countries, poor households, women, informal workers, and marginalized communities. The report is particularly relevant for India given its diverse climate risks and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Background

Climate inequality refers to disproportionate exposure, vulnerability, and ability to respond to climate change across:

- countries,
- income groups,
- genders,
- regions,
- occupations.

Key drivers:

1. Differences in historic emissions
2. Wealth disparities
3. Unequal access to adaptation finance
4. Variations in governance and resilience systems

The 2025 edition focuses on who suffers more and who contributes more, sharpening the climate justice debate.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

1. Emissions Are Deeply Unequal

- The top 10% of global emitters contribute more than 45% of global emissions.
- The bottom 50% contribute less than 12%, yet face the highest climate burden.

2. Developing Countries Face Higher Climate Losses

Lower-income countries face climate-related losses 5–10 times higher as a share of GDP compared to high-income countries.

Asia and Africa are highlighted as the most vulnerable regions.

3. Heat Stress & Labour Productivity Losses

The report finds:

- Increasing heatwaves are reducing labour productivity for outdoor workers.
- Informal sector workers in countries like India face up to 200 additional high-heat hours per year.

This disproportionately affects:

- construction workers,
- street vendors,
- agricultural labourers.

4. Impact on Women and Marginalised Groups

Women experience:

- higher exposure to climate-induced workload,
- health risks during heatwaves,
- limited access to resource ownership,
- lower mobility during disasters.

Climate inequality has intersectional dimensions.

5. Adaptation Finance Remains Insufficient

The report links strongly with UNEP's Adaptation Gap findings:

- Only a fraction of global climate finance goes to adaptation.
- Funds rarely reach vulnerable communities directly.

- Delayed support exacerbates poverty and migration pressures.

6. Extreme Weather Is Amplifying Economic Inequality

Floods, droughts, cyclones, and sea-level rise increasingly hit:

- coastal communities,
- farmers reliant on monsoons,
- informal labourers.

Insurance penetration remains very low in developing countries.

1. High Heat Vulnerability

India is projected to face:

- more than 30 extremely hot days per year in northern and central regions,
- rising "wet-bulb" temperatures affecting survivability.

2. Coastal & Urban Risks

Cities like Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata face:

- sea-level rise,
- urban flooding,
- loss of coastal livelihoods.

3. Agrarian Stress

Changing monsoon patterns increase uncertainty in:

- sowing,
- yields,
- farm incomes.

4. Climate Migration

Some districts may experience accelerated migration due to:

- heat stress,
- water scarcity,
- crop failure.

5. Policy Priorities

India needs:

- targeted climate resilience plans,
- early warning systems expansion,
- climate-smart agriculture,
- urban heat action plans,
- stronger adaptation finance through global mechanisms.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Climate change is no longer only an environmental challenge — it is a social and economic inequality amplifier.
- Vulnerable households face the highest impact with the least capacity to adapt.
- The report strengthens India's negotiating position on climate finance and equity in global forums.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- Climate justice
- Loss & Damage
- Heat stress index
- Vulnerability Assessment Frameworks
- Climate migration

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, intensifying existing inequalities. Discuss with reference to the findings of the Climate Inequality Report 2025.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Climate Inequality Report 2025, consider the following statements:

1. The top global emitters contribute disproportionately to global greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Developing countries face a higher share of climate-related GDP losses.
3. Adaptation finance flows are sufficient to meet global adaptation needs.
4. Heat stress disproportionately affects informal sector workers in developing economies.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

AmazonFACE Programme

Why in News?

The AmazonFACE (Free-Air CO_2 Enrichment) programme gained global attention for releasing its latest experimental data on how Amazon rainforest ecosystems respond to rising atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. The findings have substantial implications for climate modelling, carbon sink behaviour, and global climate policy.

Background

The AmazonFACE project is a long-term scientific study conducted in the central Amazon rainforest. It uses Free-Air CO_2 Enrichment (FACE) technology to expose natural forest plots to higher CO_2 concentrations—simulating conditions expected later this century.

Objectives include understanding:

- carbon uptake capacity of tropical forests,
- changes in tree physiology,
- ecosystem resilience under climate stress,
- implications for carbon cycle feedbacks.

The Amazon is the world's largest rainforest and one of the most important carbon sinks, making its future critical to global climate stability.

1. Limits to Carbon Absorption

Early observations suggest that Amazon trees may not increase carbon uptake significantly under elevated CO_2, contrary to previous assumptions.

Constraining factors include:

- nutrient limitations (especially phosphorus),
- water stress,
- rising temperatures.

This challenges models that assumed stronger carbon sequestration by forests.

2. Changes in Forest Physiology

Increased CO_2 affected:

- leaf growth rates,
- stomatal regulation,
- photosynthetic efficiency.

However, these gains were offset by nutrient-poor soils.

3. Drought Stress Reduces CO_2 Benefits

The Amazon is experiencing more severe and frequent droughts due to climate change.

The report notes:

- reduced growth in stressed trees,
- increased mortality of sensitive species,
- greater fire risk due to dry conditions.

Droughts weaken the forest's role as a climate buffer.

4. Altered Species Composition

Long-term observations indicate:

- fast-growing species respond better to CO_2 increases,
- slow-growing hardwood species decline.

This changes forest structure and biodiversity.

5. Implications for Global Carbon Budgets

If the Amazon's carbon sink capacity weakens:

- more carbon will stay in the atmosphere,
- global warming rates may increase,
- climate projections must be revised.

WHY THIS MATTERS

1. Weakening of a Major Carbon Sink

The Amazon absorbs roughly 5% of global carbon emissions annually. Any decline has planetary consequences.

2. Climate Models Need Revision

Findings indicate potential overestimation of forest-based mitigation in climate plans.

3. Highlights Need for Emission Cuts

If natural sinks saturate, reliance on forests alone is insufficient for climate goals.

4. Reinforces Importance of Protecting Existing Forests

Deforestation, fires, and land-use change accelerate ecological instability.

RELEVANCE FOR INDIA

India shares similar concerns regarding:

- monsoon-dependent forests,
- nutrient-limited tropical soils,
- vulnerability of biodiversity hotspots to warming.

AmazonFACE findings are valuable for:

- improving Indian forest carbon models,
- strengthening REDD+ strategies,
- planning climate-resilient afforestation.

PRELIMS CONNECT

- FACE technology
- Carbon sink vs carbon source
- REDD+ (UNFCCC)
- Tropical rainforest ecology
- Carbon budget & tipping points

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

What is the AmazonFACE experiment? Discuss its findings and explain how they alter global understanding of carbon sinks and climate mitigation strategies.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the AmazonFACE Programme, consider the following statements:

1. It uses a technique that exposes forest plots to elevated CO_2 concentrations in open-air conditions.
2. The programme is designed to analyse the long-term response of Amazon forests to projected climate scenarios.
3. The experiment has found that nutrient-poor soils limit the forest's ability to absorb more carbon under higher CO_2.
4. The Amazon rainforest currently demonstrates a strong increase in carbon absorption with rising CO_2.

Which of the statements given above 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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Loktak Lake

Why in News?

Loktak Lake—India's largest freshwater lake and a Ramsar site—was in focus due to new ecological assessments, concerns over phumdi degradation, and governance developments linked to hydrological management and local community livelihoods.

Background

Located in Manipur, Loktak Lake is known for:

- its unique phumdis (floating biomass),
- the Keibul Lamjao National Park (KLNP)—the world's only floating national park,
- habitat for the endangered Sangai deer,
- critical role in regional water security,
- vibrant Loktak fishing culture.

The lake is fed by rivers like the Manipur, Nambul, and Thongjaorok, and regulates flows through the Ithai Barrage, which strongly affects its hydrology.

KEY ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

1. Phumdi Ecosystem

Phumdis support:
- nesting birds,
- fish breeding grounds,
- grazing zones for Sangai deer.

Their health is directly linked to the lake's water-level fluctuations.

2. Biodiversity Hotspot

The lake hosts:
- over 200 bird species,
- rich aquatic flora,
- endemic fish populations,
- mammals like hog deer and otters.

KLNP is central to Manipur's ecological identity.

3. Livelihood Support

Communities rely on:
- traditional fishing systems,
- lotus cultivation,
- harvesting edible aquatic plants,
- tourism.

Loktak sustains more than 100,000 people.

CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Phumdi Degradation

Recent assessments reported:
- thinning of phumdis,
- disintegration due to continuous high water levels from the barrage,
- declining regeneration rates.

This threatens KLNP's structure.

2. Declining Water Quality

Pollution sources include:
- untreated urban waste (e.g., Nambul River),
- agricultural runoff,
- siltation from catchments,
- increased nutrient loading causing eutrophication.

3. Impact of Ithai Barrage

Continuous regulation of water flow:
- disturbs natural seasonal fluctuations,
- affects phumdi life cycle,
- alters fish migration patterns,
- increases anthropogenic pressure on lake ecology.

Revisiting its operational regime is a recurring demand.

4. Sangai Habitat Vulnerability

The Sangai, a flagship species, faces:
- shrinking grazing zones,
- disturbed phumdi pathways,
- higher vulnerability to flooding and drought.

Conservationists call for stricter protection measures.

5. Governance & Institutional Challenges

Key issues include:
- overlapping mandates of agencies,
- weak enforcement against encroachment,
- unregulated construction,
- conflicting development priorities.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Ecological Health Assessment Initiated

Authorities began updated ecological monitoring covering:
- water chemistry,
- vegetation mapping,
- bird census,
- phumdi thickness analysis.

2. Community Consultation Meetings

Discussions on:
- sustainable fishing,
- phumdi management,
- tourism regulation,
- waste management strategies.

3. Proposals for Hydrological Recalibration

Hydrologists recommended:
- allowing periodic lowering of water levels,
- reviving natural phumdi life cycles,
- restoring fish breeding routes.

WHY LOKTAK MATTERS

1. Ecological Uniqueness

Phumdi ecosystem exists nowhere else on Earth.

2. Keystone Species Protection

Home to the Sangai, Manipur's state animal.

3. Cultural & Economic Importance

Supports large traditional fishing communities.

4. Regional Water Security

Acts as a natural reservoir and flood buffer.

5. Climate Importance

Wetlands serve as carbon sinks and biodiversity havens.

CHALLENGES AHEAD
- Managing pollution inflows
- Balancing hydropower needs with ecological requirements
- Restoring phumdi health
- Ensuring community participation
- Regulating unplanned tourism

Prelims Connect
- Ramsar wetlands in India
- Keibul Lamjao National Park
- Floating phumdis
- Sangai deer
- Wetland hydrology

Mains Practice Question

"Loktak Lake illustrates the challenges of conserving a unique wetland ecosystem under competing hydrological and livelihood pressures." Explain.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Loktak Lake, consider the following statements:

1. It is India's largest freshwater lake.
2. The lake hosts the world's only floating national park.
3. Phumdis naturally regenerate only when water levels undergo seasonal fluctuation.
4. The Ithai Barrage helps maintain natural water-level variation in the lake.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Panda Diplomacy

Why in News?

Global discussions around "Panda Diplomacy" resurfaced as China reassessed several of its giant panda loan agreements with foreign zoos. This drew media and diplomatic attention, given the symbolic value pandas hold in international relations and wildlife conservation.

Background

"Panda Diplomacy" is a long-standing Chinese practice of sending giant pandas to foreign countries as:

- goodwill ambassadors,
- conservation research partners,
- symbols of diplomatic warmth.

Historically:

- Pandas were gifted during the Cold War era.
- Since the 1980s, China shifted to a lease model (usually 10–15 years).
- The leasing fee funds panda conservation programs within China.

All pandas overseas remain property of China, including cubs born abroad.

Key Features of Panda Diplomacy

1. Conservation Partnerships

Pandas sent abroad contribute to:

- joint breeding programs,
- veterinary research,
- behavioural studies,
- public awareness campaigns for endangered species.

2. Soft Power Tool

Pandas help China:

- strengthen bilateral relationships,
- signal diplomatic goodwill,
- influence public opinion in partner countries.

3. High Economic Value

Zoos hosting pandas often experience:

- higher visitor numbers,
- increased conservation funding,
- enhanced tourism revenue.

4. Strategic Withdrawals

In some cases, China recalls pandas during:

- diplomatic tensions,
- renegotiation of loan terms.

Thus, panda diplomacy also reveals the intersection of conservation and geopolitics.

1. Return of Pandas from Select Countries

Some pandas hosted abroad were recalled for:

- age-related care,
- breeding program consolidation,
- expiration of loan agreements.

2. New Conservation Discussions

Talks emerged about:

- expanding panda research collaborations,
- revising international loan norms,
- improving captive breeding conditions abroad.

3. Debates on Ethical Captivity

Global conservationists raised questions on:

- stress experienced by pandas in captivity,
- natural behavioural constraints,
- reproductive challenges outside native habitat.

This broadened the debate beyond diplomacy to include ethical wildlife care.

CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE

1. Panda Recovery

The giant panda's conservation status improved from "Endangered" to "Vulnerable" due to:

- extensive habitat protection,
- successful breeding programs,
- global conservation partnerships.

2. Habitat Protection in China

Revenue from panda loans supports:

- bamboo forest conservation,
- protected areas expansion,
- wildlife monitoring technology.

3. Global Awareness

Pandas serve as flagship species inspiring:

- broader ecological education,
- public support for conservation,
- research on endangered species management.

GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS

1. Symbolism in International Relations

Pandas often accompany major diplomatic agreements and signify deeper trust.

2. Diplomatic Pressure Points

Recalling pandas can be interpreted as a sign of:

- policy displeasure,
- negotiations leverage,
- power signalling.

3. Shaping Global Perception

Pandas help China project:

- cultural identity,
- environmental leadership,
- soft power influence.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR UPSC

- Illustrates intersection of environment + diplomacy
- Demonstrates how wildlife can become strategic assets
- Important for themes like soft power, conservation diplomacy, flagship species, and international environmental agreements

PRELIMS CONNECT

- IUCN status of Giant Panda
- CITES Appendix I species
- Flagship species concept
- Bamboo forest ecosystems
- Captive vs wild breeding dynamics

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Panda Diplomacy demonstrates how wildlife conservation can become a tool of soft power." Critically discuss, with examples from recent international developments.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding 'Panda Diplomacy':

1. All giant pandas living abroad legally remain the property of China.
2. Revenue earned from panda loans is used for panda conservation and habitat protection.
3. Pandas sent abroad form part of international captive breeding and research programs.
4. Pandas can be permanently gifted to foreign countries under CITES rules.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Intrusion Detection System

Why in News?

In November 2025, the deployment of Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) across select wildlife protected areas and critical forest corridors received national attention. These systems support anti-poaching operations, human–wildlife conflict mitigation, and enhanced ecological monitoring.

Background

Wildlife landscapes in India face threats such as:

- poaching,
- illegal logging,
- illegal mining,
- encroachment,
- human–animal conflict.

Traditional patrolling alone is often insufficient.

Hence, forest departments have started adopting sensor-based intrusion detection technologies to strengthen protection.

IDS systems integrate:

- ground sensors,
- thermal imaging cameras,
- acoustic sensors,
- AI-based pattern recognition,
- real-time alerts to control rooms and forest guards.

KEY FEATURES OF THE INTRUSION DETECTION SYSTEM

1. Multisensor Surveillance

Includes:

- seismic sensors to detect footsteps or vehicle movement,
- infrared & thermal cameras for night visibility,
- acoustic sensors to detect gunshots, chainsaws, or animal calls.

2. AI-Based Threat Analysis

The system:

- distinguishes between human, animal, and vehicle movements,
- reduces false alarms,
- prioritises high-risk incidents.

3. Real-Time Communication

Alerts are sent instantly to:

- forest outposts,
- mobile patrol units,
- range officers.

This reduces response time to minutes.

4. Geofenced Protection

Critical zones such as:

- tiger corridors,
- rhino habitats,
- elephant movement routes,
- anti-poaching camps,

are digitally fenced for round-the-clock monitoring.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

1. Strengthens Anti-Poaching Efforts

Particularly effective in protecting:

- tigers,
- rhinos,
- elephants,

Page 41

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- pangolins,
- other high-value species.

2. Reduces Human–Wildlife Conflict

IDS can alert communities about:
- elephant movement,
- big cat presence near villages,
- potential crop raids.

3. Helps Monitor Illegal Activities

Catches:
- timber smugglers,
- illegal mining operations,
- trespassing for land encroachment.

4. Enhances Protection in Remote Areas

Sensors operate even in:
- dense forests,
- low-visibility zones,
- rugged terrain.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Expanded Deployment

States including:
- Uttarakhand,
- Karnataka,
- Assam,
- Madhya Pradesh,
- Maharashtra,
  expanded IDS coverage to sensitive zones.

2. Integration With Drone Surveillance

Control rooms received combined feeds from:
- drones,
- thermal cameras,
- ground sensors.

3. Community Training Modules

Local communities were trained on:
- identifying alerts,
- reporting unusual activity,
- safely responding to wildlife presence.

4. Environmental Early Warning Enhancements

IDS is now being integrated with:
- fire detection modules,
- weather alerts,
- flood warning systems.

CHALLENGES AHEAD
- high installation and maintenance cost,
- risk of vandalism or damage by wildlife,
- need for skilled operators,
- network connectivity issues in deep forest zones.

WHY IT MATTERS

This is one of India's most significant steps toward tech-enabled conservation.

The system supports both biodiversity protection and community safety, making it a vital tool for future landscape governance.

PRELIMS CONNECT
- AI in conservation
- Geo-fencing
- UAV (drone) monitoring
- Tiger reserves & anti-poaching technologies
- Community-based conservation

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"Technology-driven conservation tools such as Intrusion Detection Systems are transforming wildlife protection in India." Evaluate the benefits and challenges associated with their adoption.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the Intrusion Detection System (IDS) used in wildlife conservation, consider the following statements:

1. It can integrate seismic, infrared, and acoustic sensors for multi-layered surveillance.
2. IDS helps reduce human–wildlife conflict by issuing real-time movement alerts.
3. The system functions only during daylight hours due to visibility constraints.
4. IDS is useful in detecting illegal logging and poaching activities.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary

Why in News?

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary in Goa featured prominently in environmental discussions due to new biodiversity assessments, sightings of key species, and habitat conservation measures. As Goa's smallest yet ecologically rich sanctuary, Bondla continues to play a crucial role in Western Ghats biodiversity conservation.

Background

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary is located in North Goa district, covering an area of 8 km², making it the smallest protected area in the state. Despite its size, it is:
- part of the Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot,
- home to tropical moist deciduous and semi-evergreen forests,
- a centre for wildlife education and eco-tourism,
- an important habitat for several endemic species.

Bondla also houses a mini zoo, botanical garden, and nature interpretation centre, used extensively for student and researcher visits.

ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

1. Faunal Diversity

The sanctuary supports:

- Indian Gaur
- Sambar
- Barking Deer
- Wild Boar
- Leopard (occasional sightings)
- Slender Loris
- Indian Giant Squirrel

Avian species include:

- Malabar Grey Hornbill
- Indian Blackbird
- Puff-throated Babbler
- Drongos and Barbets

2. Rich Floral Diversity

The forest contains:

- teak,
- bamboo,
- cashew,
- medicinal plants,
- endemic understorey shrubs.

These support pollinators and arboreal mammals.

3. Role in Conservation Education

Bondla is known for:

- nature camps,
- guided interpretation trails,
- conservation awareness programs for schoolchildren,
- rehabilitation of rescued animals.

This makes it a model for public-oriented conservation.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Increased Species Documentation

New biodiversity surveys recorded:

- endemic amphibians,
- butterfly species expansion,
- improved population signs for Sambar and Gaur.

2. Habitat Restoration Activities

Forest officials undertook:

- removal of invasive species,
- enrichment planting of native flora,
- soil moisture retention works along trails.

3. Strengthening Anti-Poaching Measures

The sanctuary saw upgrades in:

- patrolling routes,
- camera trap networks,
- coordination with neighbouring forest ranges.

4. Eco-Tourism Management Improvements

Authorities worked on:

- improved visitor regulation,
- enhanced interpretation facilities,
- reduced vehicular movement near core areas.

WHY BONDLA MATTERS

1. Microhabitat Diversity

Despite its small size, Bondla contains multiple habitat types, making it ecologically significant.

2. Western Ghats Connectivity

Serves as a link in the larger Western Ghats landscape for:

- bird migrations,
- mammal movement,
- genetic diversity exchange.

3. Conservation Education Hub

Plays a key role in cultivating public environmental awareness, especially among youth.

4. Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre

Supports wildlife rescued from human-dominated areas, particularly in Goa's tourism zones.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Habitat fragmentation due to development pressure
- Tourism-related disturbances
- Risk of forest fires in dry months
- Need for expanded buffer protection
- Limited area restricting species ranges

Prelims Connect

- Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot
- Tropical moist deciduous forests
- Eco-tourism vs wildlife conservation balance
- Role of mini zoos in conservation awareness

Mains Practice Question

Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary demonstrates how small protected areas can contribute meaningfully to biodiversity conservation. Discuss with reference to recent ecological assessments.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary, consider the following statements:

1. It is located within the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot.
2. It is the smallest wildlife sanctuary in Goa.
3. It is known for its conservation education and rehabilitation facilities.
4. Tigers are naturally occurring and commonly sighted in the sanctuary.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 4 only

(c) 2 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

World Heritage Outlook 4 Report

Why in News?

The IUCN World Heritage Outlook 4 Report was released, assessing the conservation status of natural World Heritage Sites globally. Several Indian sites received updated evaluations, drawing attention to both progress and persistent ecological challenges.

Background

The IUCN World Heritage Outlook is published every three years. It assesses natural World Heritage sites based on:

- conservation outlook,
- threats (climate change, invasive species, tourism pressure),
- management effectiveness,
- ecosystem health.

Categories of conservation outlook:

1. Good
2. Good with some concerns
3. Significant concern
4. Critical

The report is an important benchmark for global ecological health and national conservation policy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR INDIA (2025 UPDATE)

1. Climate Change Identified as a Major Threat

Most of India's natural heritage sites faced:

- increasing temperature rise,
- unpredictable monsoons,
- glacial melt,
- sea-level rise in coastal reserves.

Climate threats overshadowed other local pressures.

2. Western Ghats — "Significant Concern" Category

The Western Ghats sites continue to face pressures from:

- habitat fragmentation,
- invasive species (particularly Lantana),
- unplanned construction,
- hydropower projects.

However, improved monitoring and community conservation were noted as positives.

3. Sundarbans National Park — Climate Vulnerability Highlighted

Key issues identified:

- sea-level rise,
- intensified cyclones,
- salinity intrusion impacting mangroves,
- erosion of tiger habitats.

The report acknowledges strong mangrove restoration efforts but warns of long-term risks.

4. Kaziranga National Park — Strong Anti-Poaching Measures

Positive elements:

- continued improvement in rhino protection,
- enhanced flood-response mechanisms,
- improved monitoring systems.

Concerns:

- recurring flood damage to habitat,
- illegal encroachment pressure on fringes.

5. Nanda Devi & Valley of Flowers — Glacial Retreat Concerns

Issues highlighted:

- rapid glacier melt,
- lake expansion (GLOF risks),
- trekking tourism pressure.

The report praised the park's strict zone-based regulation.

6. Great Himalayan National Park — Good Management but Climate Threats

Findings:

- strong management and ecological monitoring,
- vulnerable to climate-induced species redistribution,
- risk of ecosystem changes due to warming.

GLOBAL INSIGHTS

1. Rapid Biodiversity Loss

Many global sites moved into the "Significant Concern" category.

2. Tourism Pressure

Mass tourism remains a challenge for many natural heritage landscapes.

3. Funding Gaps

Developing countries face inadequate resources for long-term conservation.

4. Climate Change as the Dominant Global Threat

Nearly all sites experienced climate stress affecting:

- coral reefs,
- glaciers,
- wetlands,
- forest ecosystems.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR INDIA

- Affects India's international conservation credibility
- Helps prioritise budget allocation for ecological restoration
- Informs state-level environmental regulations
- Highlights need for climate-resilient heritage management
- Links to global frameworks like the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

PRELIMS CONNECT

- IUCN role in World Heritage evaluations
- Difference between UNESCO World Heritage & IUCN Outlook
- Categories of conservation outlook
- Threats to Western Ghats, Sundarbans, Himalayan parks

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Page 44

- GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood)

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

"The IUCN World Heritage Outlook 4 Report highlights the growing vulnerability of India's natural heritage sites." Discuss key concerns and suggest strategies for climate-resilient conservation.

PRELIMS MCQ

Q. With reference to the IUCN World Heritage Outlook Report, consider the following statements:

1. It assesses only cultural heritage sites under UNESCO's list.
2. It categorises sites into four conservation outlook levels.
3. Climate change is identified as a significant threat to many Indian natural heritage sites.
4. It is released annually by UNESCO.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 2 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 4 only

(c) 2, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 2 and 3 only

Cassava/Tapioca Crop

Why in News?

The cassava (tapioca) crop came into focus due to updated cultivation advisories, rising demand for industrial starch, and concerns over disease outbreaks affecting productivity in southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

Background

Cassava (Manihot esculenta), commonly known as tapioca, is:

- a tuber crop,
- native to South America,
- widely cultivated in tropical regions,
- drought-resistant and climate-resilient,
- a major food security crop in several countries.

In India, cassava is used for:

- food (kappa, chips),
- animal feed,
- starch industry (textile, paper, adhesives),
- ethanol and biofuel production.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu account for over 85% of India's production.

ECOLOGICAL AND AGRONOMIC FEATURES

1. Drought Tolerance

Cassava tolerates:

- long dry spells,
- poor soils,
- high temperatures.

Hence, it is seen as a climate-resilient crop for semi-arid regions.

2. High Starch Content

Cassava roots contain 20–30% starch, making it valuable for:

- industrial starch,
- pharmaceuticals,
- biodegradable products.

3. Soil and Water Efficiency

Requires:

- low irrigation,
- minimal fertiliser inputs,
- adaptable agro-climatic conditions.

4. Vegetative Propagation

Grown from stem cuttings rather than seeds, which:

- simplifies cultivation,
- increases risk of disease spread if planting material is infected.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND AGRONOMIC CONCERNS (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. Mosaic Virus and Cassava Mealybug Spread

Farm alerts reported:

- Cassava Mosaic Virus (CMV) affecting leaf growth,
- Mealybug infestations reducing tuber formation.

This created concerns for small farmers and starch industries.

2. Soil Health Risks

Monocropping of cassava leads to:

- nutrient depletion,
- reduced soil organic carbon,
- vulnerability to erosion.

Intercropping models were recommended.

3. Processing Waste

Cassava processing generates:

- high-starch wastewater,
- solid waste affecting aquatic systems if untreated.

Stricter effluent management norms were advised.

4. Climate Change Impacts

Higher temperatures and irregular rainfall may:

- shift cassava-growing zones,
- affect starch quality,
- increase pest resistance.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (NOVEMBER 2025)

1. New Varietal Release Discussions

Agricultural research stations promoted:

- disease-resistant varieties,
- short-duration cultivars,
- high-starch hybrids.

2. Advisory to Farmers

Authorities issued guidelines on:

- clean planting material,

- integrated pest management,
- soil nutrient restoration.

3. Expansion for Industrial Use

Growing demand for:
- biodegradable plastics,
- green adhesives,
- food-processing starch,
- ethanol production.

This increased interest in cassava-based value chains.

WHY CASSAVA MATTERS

1. Food and Livelihood Security

Critical for small and marginal farmers in southern India.

2. Industrial Relevance

India's starch industry depends heavily on cassava.

3. Climate Adaptation Crop

Provides resilience in water-stressed regions.

4. Export Potential

Cassava-based products are gaining international interest.

CHALLENGES

- vulnerability to pests and viruses
- low farmer awareness of disease-free planting stock
- lack of advanced processing units in many regions
- environmental risks from untreated industrial effluents

Prelims Connect

- CMV (Cassava Mosaic Virus)
- Vegetative propagation
- Starch-based industries
- Biofuels from tuber crops
- Agroforestry and intercropping systems

Mains Practice Question

"Cassava is emerging as a climate-resilient industrial crop, but its cultivation poses ecological and agronomic challenges." Discuss.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to cassava (tapioca) cultivation in India, consider the following statements:

1. It is mainly propagated through stem cuttings.
2. Cassava Mosaic Virus is a major disease affecting its leaves and tuber yield.
3. Cassava requires heavy irrigation and high fertiliser input.
4. India is one of the top global exporters of cassava starch.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Blue Economy Momentum: India's Rising Fisheries & Aquaculture Potential

Why in News?

Recent updates from the Department of Fisheries, export performance reports, and progress under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) highlight that India's fisheries and aquaculture sector is emerging as one of the fastest-growing components of the rural economy and a key pillar of India's Blue Economy Vision.

1. Sector Snapshot: Why Fisheries Matter

- India is the world's 3rd largest fish producer.
- Fisheries contribute 7–8% to agricultural GDP.
- The sector supports over 3 crore livelihoods, especially among coastal and marginalised communities.
- India is the 4th largest exporter of seafood, with demand rising in EU, US, and Japan.

Fisheries are not just a food sector—they are a livelihood safety net, an export engine, and a climate-resilient nutritional source.

2. What Drives India's Growth in Fisheries & Aquaculture?

(a) Expansion of Aquaculture Production

States like Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, and Odisha have increased productivity via:
- freshwater aquaculture innovations,
- improved hatcheries and feed systems,
- disease surveillance and digital mapping.

Shrimp aquaculture remains the export backbone.

(b) PMMSY: Transforming Infrastructure & Value Chains

Government's PMMSY investments support:
- modern fishing harbours and landing centres,
- cold-chain logistics,
- ornamental fisheries,
- seaweed cultivation,
- digital traceability systems,
- deep-sea fishing vessel assistance.

The scheme aims to reduce post-harvest losses, improve hygiene, and expand value addition.

(c) Rising Domestic Demand for Nutritious Protein

Urban consumption and rising incomes have increased:
- demand for retail fish markets,
- packaged seafood,
- ready-to-cook aquaculture products.

Fish is increasingly positioned as an affordable, high-protein food.

(d) Technology & Research Inputs

ICAR and research institutions are developing:
- disease-resistant species (e.g., improved rohu, catla variants),
- biofloc and RAS systems for water-efficient farming,
- GIS mapping for fishing zones,

● AI-based monitoring for cage farming.

3. Structural Challenges That Need Addressing

(a) Overfishing in Nearshore Waters

Coastal pressure, lack of zoning, and competition between mechanised and artisanal fishers threaten sustainability.

(b) Climate Change Impacts

Warming oceans, acidification, cyclone frequency, and erratic rainfall affect fish breeding and migration patterns.

(c) High Post-Harvest Losses

Nearly 20–25% of fish is lost due to inadequate:

● ice plants,
● cold storages,
● transport infrastructure.

(d) Livelihood Conflicts

Mechanisation, zone encroachment, and trawler vs artisanal disputes remain major governance challenges.

4. The Future: A Blue Revolution 2.0

1. Mariculture & Sea Cage Farming

New opportunities include:

● seaweed farming,
● mussel and oyster culture,
● offshore cage farming,
● integrated multi-trophic aquaculture.

2. Deep-Sea Fishing Expansion

Helps shift pressure from coastal waters to offshore zones.

3. Climate-Resilient Aquaculture

Focus on:

● water efficiency,
● low-emission systems,
● disease-resistant varieties.

4. Strengthening Exports

Quality certification, digital traceability, and value-added processing will unlock higher markets.

5. Way Forward

● Regulate coastal fishing zones effectively.
● Promote women-led fisheries collectives.
● Strengthen cold-chains and processing hubs.
● Integrate fisheries with climate adaptation plans.
● Expand insurance, safety nets, and boat safety programs.

India's Blue Economy lays a foundation for livelihoods, export revenue, and climate resilience—if sustainable practices guide growth.

Prelims Connect

● PMMSY
● Blue Economy Policy
● FAO Code of Responsible Fisheries
● Seaweed Mission
● Marine Fishing Regulation Acts (state laws)

Mains Practice Question

"Discuss the potential and challenges of India's fisheries and aquaculture sector in the context of the Blue Economy Vision."

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following are components of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana?

1. Development of fishing harbours
2. Seaweed farming support
3. Biofloc and RAS-based aquaculture promotion
4. Assistance for deep-sea fishing vessels

Select the correct answer:

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

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

Resilient Farm Exports: How India Is Navigating a Turbulent Global Market

Why in News?

Despite global volatility, supply chain disruptions, and tightening food-export regulations worldwide, India's agricultural exports have continued to grow in selected commodities. Official updates from APEDA, the Department of Commerce, and the Ministry of Agriculture indicate that India is consolidating its status as a leading exporter of cereals, marine products, fruits & vegetables, spices, and processed foods even in a difficult international environment.

1. India's Agricultural Export Performance: An Overview

● India consistently ranks among the top 10 agricultural exporters globally.
● Exports have remained robust in commodities like:
  ○ rice and basmati rice,
  ○ marine products,
  ○ spices,
  ○ sugar,
  ○ fresh fruits and vegetables,
  ○ processed foods,
  ○ millets, following the International Year of Millets 2023 momentum.

Key Drivers of Export Growth

● Strong global demand for affordable staples
● Expanded production capacity
● Diversification into high-value crops
● Government's export facilitation systems
● Branding efforts in the Middle East, EU, and Southeast Asia

2. How India Maintains Export Strength Despite Global Disruptions

(a) Supply Chain Modernisation Under APEDA

Modern pack-houses, irradiation centres, quality labs, and cold-chain support have strengthened India's ability to meet international norms.

APEDA's initiatives include:

● traceability systems (e.g., "Basmati.net"),

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Page 47

- GI-based branding,
- cluster-based production of high-value exports.

(b) Commodity Diversification

India has expanded exports of:
- dehydrated onions,
- banana chips,
- ready-to-eat (RTE) products,
- nutraceuticals,
- millet-based snacks.

The shift from raw commodities to processed and value-added foods has improved resilience during price shocks.

(c) Leveraging India's Millet Advantage

The global millet campaign boosted exports of:
- bajra,
- ragi,
- foxtail millet,
- value-added millet products.

India's identity as the "Global Millet Hub" strengthens long-term export potential.

(d) Strong Marine Export Base

Seafood—especially shrimp—remains India's largest agri-export in value terms.

India remains competitive due to:
- improved hatchery technology,
- disease-control systems,
- sustainable aquaculture guidelines.

(e) Free Trade Negotiations and Market Access

Ongoing negotiations with:
- UAE,
- Australia,
- UK,
- EU,
- EFTA

seek to streamline agricultural market access and harmonise standards.

3. Challenges India Must Continue Addressing

1. Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)

Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, EU pesticide residue limits, and quality compliance remain major hurdles.

2. Climate Volatility

Extreme heat, irregular monsoons, and pest outbreaks reduce consistency of export volumes.

3. Export Restrictions and Domestic Price Pressures

Occasional bans or curbs—especially on wheat, sugar, and certain varieties of rice—can impact global credibility, though done to ensure domestic availability.

3. High Logistics Cost

India's logistics cost (approx. 13–14% of GDP) affects export competitiveness compared to Southeast Asian nations.

4. Government Initiatives Strengthening Agricultural Exports

(a) Agriculture Export Policy (AEP)

Focuses on:

- product clustering,
- value addition,
- branding,
- infrastructure.

(b) One District One Product (ODOP)

Promotes district-specific specialisation for export uplift.

(c) PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PM-FME)

Helps micro-enterprises upgrade technology and packaging.

(d) Integrated Cold Chain Scheme

Ensures temperature-controlled logistics for perishables.

(e) Digital Traceability

Crucial for:
- basmati exports,
- organic food certification,
- fresh fruit exports.

5. The Way Forward for India

- Expand value-added processing, especially in fruits, vegetables, and spices.
- Improve export logistics, particularly port connectivity.
- Harmonise standards with global markets through SPS alignment.
- Promote climate-resilient varieties and crop insurance.
- Strengthen GI-based branding and farmer export clusters.

India's farm exports are no longer commodity-driven alone—they are becoming brand-driven, technology-enabled, and quality-assured, creating a stable pathway even in turbulent global markets.

Prelims Connect

- APEDA
- Agriculture Export Policy (AEP)
- GI tagging for agricultural exports
- Integrated Cold Chain Scheme
- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures

Mains Practice Question

"India's agricultural exports have remained resilient despite global supply chain disruptions." Analyse the reasons behind this resilience and outline the challenges that remain."

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following factors have contributed to India's strong agricultural export performance in recent years?
1. Cluster-based export production
2. Expansion of cold-chain infrastructure
3. Millet promotion initiatives
4. Exclusive dependence on raw commodity exports

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 4 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Page 48

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Soil First: The Hidden Foundation of India's Food Security

Why in News?

November 2025 saw renewed attention to soil health through updates under the Soil Health Card (SHC) programme, the Natural Farming Mission, and discussions around land degradation in the context of climate stress. Reports from ICAR, FAO, and state agriculture departments underline a simple yet urgent fact: India's food security cannot be secured unless its soil health is restored.

Healthy soil underpins not only crop productivity but also nutritional quality, groundwater recharge, and the long-term resilience of agricultural systems.

1. Why Soil Health Is Central to India's Food Security

(a) Declining Soil Fertility

Continuous use of chemical fertilisers, monocropping, and inadequate organic matter have degraded:

- nitrogen and micronutrient levels,
- soil structure,
- moisture-retention capacity.

(b) Soil Erosion and Land Degradation

Approximately 30% of India's land faces degradation due to:

- erosion,
- salinization,
- desertification,
- chemical contamination.

(c) Imbalanced Fertiliser Use

A skewed N:P:K ratio persists despite subsidies and awareness campaigns.

(d) Declining Organic Carbon

Soil organic carbon (SOC) levels are declining, impacting:

- microbial activity,
- moisture retention,
- long-term crop productivity.

2. What the Soil Health Card Programme Reveals

The SHC programme—covering over 22 crore cards issued since inception—provides district-wise nutrient profiles.

Key findings:

- widespread micronutrient deficiencies (zinc, boron, sulphur),
- high soil alkalinity in arid zones,
- nutrient depletion in intensively farmed belts (Punjab, Haryana, parts of UP),
- organic carbon depletion across most states.

These insights guide farmers toward site-specific nutrient management (SSNM).

3. Link Between Soil Health and Human Health

(a) Nutrient-deficient soils → Nutrient-poor crops

Deficiencies in soil micronutrients directly reduce:

- iron,
- zinc,
- selenium,
- vitamin uptake in cereals and vegetables.

This contributes to India's high burden of:

- anaemia,
- stunting,
- micronutrient deficiencies.

(b) Soil contamination → Food contamination

Heavy metals, pesticides, and industrial effluents can:

- enter the food chain,
- harm human health,
- affect export quality.

(c) Soil moisture decline → Crop failure risk

Degraded soils lose resilience to drought and heat stress—risks that are rising under climate change.

Thus, soil is a public health issue, not just a farming input.

4. Policy Interventions Strengthening Soil Health

(a) Soil Health Card Programme — Phase III

- Precision testing
- Digital soil maps
- Advisory via mobile apps
- Nutrient recommendations tailored to crops & seasons

(b) Natural Farming and Organic Initiatives

Encouraging:

- mulching,
- use of jeevamrit/beejamrit,
- green manuring,
- composting,
- reduced chemical fertiliser dependence.

States like Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand are piloting large-scale transitions.

(c) Promotion of Biofertilisers and Biostimulants

Under the new Fertiliser Control Order (FCO) guidelines, emphasis is placed on:

- microbial inoculants,
- organic fertilisers,
- sustainable nutrient inputs.

(d) Integrated Nutrient Management (INM)

Combining:

- organic matter,
- chemical fertilisers,
- micronutrients.

This balances soil needs and reduces long-term chemical dependency.

(e) Watershed and Land Restoration Programmes

- PMKSY
- River rejuvenation projects
- Contour trenching & check dams
- Integrated farming systems improving soil moisture

5. Challenges That Remain

- Limited adoption of SHC recommendations among small farmers
- Low availability of organic manure and compost
- Cost barriers for micronutrient application

- Over-reliance on urea due to pricing distortions
- Lack of soil testing infrastructure in some districts
- Delayed results in soil-restoration interventions

6. Way Forward: A Soil-First Strategy

- Rebalance fertiliser subsidies to reward soil-friendly practices
- Make soil testing universal and periodic
- Promote crop rotation and multi-cropping
- Include soil health in nutritional security policies
- Use digital soil maps for precision agriculture
- Strengthen markets for compost, biofertilisers, and micronutrients
- Integrate soil restoration into climate adaptation plans

A sustainable food future begins with rebuilding the soil. Productivity, environmental resilience, and public health depend on this invisible foundation.

Prelims Connect

- Soil Health Card Scheme
- Integrated Nutrient Management (INM)
- Soil Organic Carbon (SOC)
- PMKSY (Watershed component)
- FCO regulations for fertilisers

Mains Practice Question

"Healthy soil is the bedrock of India's food and nutrition security." Discuss the link between soil degradation and human health, and evaluate the effectiveness of India's soil restoration programmes.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following directly contributes to improving soil organic carbon?

1. Green manuring
2. Excessive tilling
3. Mulching and composting
4. Heavy chemical fertiliser use

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 2 and 4 only

(c) 1, 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

Reviving Forgotten Grains: India's Path to Climate-Resilient Agriculture

Why in News?

Discussions within ICAR, NITI Aayog, and the Ministry of Agriculture, along with global recognition of India's millet campaign, have renewed focus on forgotten and underutilized crops—including millets, pulses, tubers, and indigenous grains—as the backbone of India's future food security.

With climate variability intensifying droughts, heatwaves, and unpredictable rainfall, these climate-resilient crops are emerging as essential components of a sustainable and diversified agricultural system.

1. Why Forgotten Grains Matter

Forgotten crops—like kodo millet, barnyard millet, foxtail millet, browntop millet, amaranth, indigenous pulses, sorghum, and regional tubers—have historically sustained local communities but were marginalised during the Green Revolution.

These crops offer several advantages:

- low water requirement,
- high temperature tolerance,
- resilience to pests and diseases,
- high nutritional value,
- adaptability to degraded soils,
- potential to thrive under climate stress.

They are the crops of the past—and the crops of the climate future.

2. Nutritional Superiority of Forgotten Grains

Forgotten cereals and tubers are rich in:

- iron, calcium, magnesium,
- dietary fibre,
- antioxidants,
- plant proteins,
- slow-release carbohydrates (beneficial for diabetes control).

This makes them powerful tools to address:

- anaemia,
- micronutrient deficiencies,
- lifestyle diseases,
- undernutrition in rural populations.

India's malnutrition indicators make a compelling case for reviving these grains.

3. Environmental and Economic Benefits

(a) Water Efficiency

Millets require 70–80% less water than paddy and wheat.

(b) Suitability for Marginal Lands

Forgotten grains thrive in:

- rainfed areas,
- drought-prone regions,
- tribal belts,
- semi-arid landscapes.

(c) Low Input Cost

Minimal fertiliser, pesticide, and irrigation needs reduce farmer risk.

(d) Climate Resilience

High tolerance to:

- variable rainfall,
- rising temperatures,
- degraded soils,
- pest infestations.

(e) Strong Potential for Women and Tribal Farmers

These communities traditionally cultivate millets and minor crops, enabling:

- greater income stability,
- local processing enterprises,
- nutritional security.

4. Policy Support for Forgotten Crops

(a) International Year of Millets Momentum

Recognition by the UN (IYOM 2023) strengthened:

- millet cultivation,
- millet-based enterprises,
- global market acceptance.

(b) National Food Security Mission (NFSM) – Millets

Focused on:

- cluster demonstrations,
- quality seed distribution,
- improved varieties,
- post-harvest technologies.

(c) Inclusion in PDS and ICDS

States like Karnataka, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh now supply millets through:

- PDS
- midday meals
- anganwadi nutrition programmes

supporting both farmers and nutrition outcomes.

(d) GI Tagging and Branding

Traditional varieties (e.g., Himalayan red rice, Ragi from Karnataka) are gaining value through GI tagging and market positioning.

5. Challenges in Scaling Forgotten Crops

- Lack of assured procurement
- Processing infrastructure gaps
- Low consumer awareness
- Price volatility
- Limited seed supply of improved varieties
- Inadequate value-chain integration
- Competition with heavily subsidised rice and wheat

6. The Way Forward: A New Green Revolution of Diversity

1. Rebalance MSP and Procurement

Support millet procurement across more states, linking them with nutrition schemes.

2. Strengthen Value Chains

Invest in:

- processing units,
- storage,
- millet-based MSMEs,
- ready-to-cook product innovation.

3. Promote Farmer Collectives

FPOs can help ensure better pricing, branding, and bargaining power.

4. Support Climate-Resilient Breeding Programs

ICAR's research on multi-stress-tolerant varieties must scale rapidly.

5. Expand Consumer Awareness

Schools, hospitals, and corporates should adopt millet-based menus.

6. Link Forgotten Crops to Global Nutrition Markets

Export opportunities for gluten-free and nutraceutical products are rising.

A "new Green Revolution" must shift from monoculture to diverse, climate-smart agriculture, where forgotten crops become mainstream drivers of India's food, health, and climate resilience strategy.

Prelims Connect

- NFSM
- PDS & ICDS
- GI Tags for agricultural products
- Millets Mission (Central & State)
- Rainfed agriculture zones (70% of cultivable land)

Mains Practice Question

"Forgotten crops hold the key to India's climate-resilient and nutritionally secure future." Analyse the potential of underutilised grains and outline the steps needed to mainstream them in agriculture and food systems.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following characteristics make millets suitable for climate-resilient farming?

1. Low water requirement
2. High tolerance to drought and heat
3. High dependency on chemical fertilisers
4. Suitability for cultivation on marginal lands

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Mustard Oil & Public Health: The Policy Choices Ahead

Why in News?

Reports and consultations involving FSSAI, the Ministry of Health, agricultural policy bodies, and public health researchers have highlighted renewed debate over mustard oil, its regulatory status, blending norms, and its implications for India's nutrition and cardiovascular health landscape.

As consumption patterns shift and edible oil imports remain high, decisions about mustard oil will shape both farmers' livelihoods and public health outcomes.

1. Why Mustard Oil Matters for India

(a) A Culturally Rooted Cooking Medium

Mustard oil is widely used in:

- North and East India (UP, Bihar, Bengal, Odisha, Assam),
- Household cooking, pickles, community feasts, and street food.

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Page 51

(b) A Farmer-Dependent Crop

India produces ~10 million tonnes of mustard, with millions of small farmers depending on it.

(c) A Nutritional Asset

Mustard oil contains:

- high monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA),
- beneficial omega-3 fatty acids,
- natural antioxidants.

When used in moderation, mustard oil contributes to heart health and anti-inflammatory benefits.

2. The Policy Debate: Blending, Purity & Public Health

India's edible oil ecosystem faces a structural problem—over 60% of edible oil is imported, largely palm, soybean, and sunflower oil.

This dependence raises key policy questions:

(a) Should Mustard Oil Be Sold Only in Pure Form?

Historically, mustard oil was allowed to be blended with other edible oils.

Concerns include:

- reduced nutritional quality,
- adulteration risks,
- consumer misinformation,
- loss of farmers' premium value.

Many experts argue for ensuring pure mustard oil availability to protect health and heritage.

(b) Regulating Blending Practices

FSSAI has debated whether blending should:

- be allowed under strict labelling, or
- be disallowed for mustard oil specifically, given its cultural and nutritional status.

Unregulated blending risks introducing:

- trans fats,
- excessive omega-6 fatty acids,
- inferior oils that undermine public health.

(c) Quality and Adulteration Concerns

Mustard oil is sometimes adulterated with:

- argemone oil (toxic),
- cheaper refined oils,
- artificial colouring agents.

These can cause:

- epidemic dropsy,
- hypertension,
- long-term cardiovascular risks.

Strengthening enforcement is crucial.

3. Public Health Implications

1. Cardiovascular Health

Mustard oil's natural fatty acid profile is more heart-friendly than many imported oils.

Omega-3 to omega-6 balance supports:

- reduced inflammation,
- better lipid metabolism,
- lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

2. Impact on Nutrition in Low-Income Households

In communities where mustard oil is a staple:

- purity directly affects nutrition quality,
- adulteration can trigger outbreaks of food-related illness.

3. Cultural Nutrition Patterns

Food habits shape health behaviour.

Policies affecting mustard oil ripple into:

- community health,
- local cuisines,
- women's household nutrition choices.

4. Economic Implications for Farmers

India's mustard-growing belts rely heavily on MSP procurement and fair pricing.

Key issues:

- pure mustard oil commands higher consumer value,
- blending depresses demand for local mustard seed,
- price volatility affects small-marginal farmers most.

A strong mustard oil policy directly influences:

- cropping decisions,
- rural cash flow,
- agrarian incomes.

5. What Needs Policy Attention

(a) Strengthening FSSAI Labelling and Enforcement

- Mandatory disclosure of blend ratios
- Strict surveillance of small-scale mills
- Testing for argemone oil and adulterants

(b) Expand MSP Procurement for Mustard

Encourage farmers to grow more mustard and reduce edible oil import dependence.

(c) Promote Indigenous Edible Oil Missions

Parallel to palm oil expansion, India must:

- invest in mustard genetics,
- support seed development,
- promote cold-pressed oil markets.

(d) Public Health Campaigns

Awareness on:

- trans fats
- safe cooking practices
- benefits of balanced fatty acid profiles

(e) Develop Farmer–Consumer Direct Markets

Linking FPOs with urban consumers ensures:

- fair prices,
- higher traceability,
- pure oil availability.

6. Way Forward

A balanced mustard oil policy must:

- protect consumer health,
- support farmer income,
- reduce import dependence,
- preserve culinary traditions,

- ensure stringent quality control.

The debate is not only about an edible oil—it is about food sovereignty, public health, and rural livelihoods.

Prelims Connect

- FSSAI edible oil regulations
- Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006
- MSP for oilseeds
- National Mission on Edible Oils (Oil Palm & Traditional Oils)
- Epidemic dropsy (argemone oil contamination)

Mains Practice Question

"Policy choices around mustard oil influence both public health outcomes and farmer livelihoods." Discuss in the context of blending norms, nutritional value, and India's edible oil import dependency.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following statements regarding mustard oil is correct?

1. It is naturally rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
2. Adulteration with argemone oil can cause toxic health effects.
3. India is self-sufficient in edible oil production.
4. FSSAI regulates blending of mustard oil with other edible oils.

Choose the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Global-Ready Agriculture: Preparing India's Farms for World Markets

Why in News?

With India aiming to expand its agricultural exports beyond USD 50 billion annually, government agencies such as APEDA, DGFT, and the Ministry of Commerce have been working on reforming quality standards, logistics, market access, and export diversification.

As global supply chains shift post-pandemic and climate risks reshape food markets, India is preparing its farms and farmers to become globally competitive exporters rather than just domestic suppliers.

1. Why Global Competitiveness in Agriculture Matters

(a) Rising Demand for Indian Produce

Global markets increasingly seek:

- basmati rice,
- spices,
- marine products,
- fresh fruits,
- millets (declared "International Year of Millets 2023" by UN).

India has a natural competitive edge in many categories.

(b) Export-Led Farm Growth Raises Rural Incomes

Farmers supplying to global markets benefit through:

- higher price realisation,
- long-term contracts,
- predictable demand cycles,
- technology upgrades.

(c) Diversifying Beyond Traditional Commodities

India must expand into:

- processed food items,
- nutraceuticals,
- organic products,
- GI-certified produce,
- climate-resilient crops (millets, pulses).

These sectors carry higher value-add and global demand.

2. The Barriers India Must Overcome

(1) Quality and Phytosanitary Challenges

Rejections at foreign ports often stem from:

- pesticide residues,
- contamination,
- inadequate cold chain,
- packaging issues.

This affects credibility and future access.

(2) Fragmented Supply Chains

Small holdings lead to:

- inconsistent volumes,
- non-standardised produce,
- higher logistics cost.

Without aggregation, exports cannot scale.

(3) High Logistics and Compliance Costs

Exporters face:

- expensive freight,
- multiple certifications,
- delays at ports,
- limited integrated logistics hubs.

These weaken global competitiveness.

(4) Insufficient Processing Capacity

Raw export of commodities keeps value low.

Processing infrastructure must grow rapidly.

3. What India Is Doing to Build a Global-Ready Farm Sector

(1) Strengthening Agricultural Export Clusters

Government initiatives focus on:

- FPO-led aggregation,
- packhouses,
- cold chain infrastructure,
- integrated testing labs,
- export hubs for key crops.

APEDA has notified clusters for products such as:

- mango,
- pomegranate,
- grapes,
- chillies,
- rice,
- spices.

(2) Harmonising Standards with International Norms

Page 53

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India is aligning with:
- Codex Alimentarius for food safety,
- maximum residue limits (MRLs),
- blockchain-based traceability (in pilot stages),
- digital certification for exports.
- Standardisation builds global trust.

(3) Boosting GI Products and Branding

GI-protected items like:
- Darjeeling Tea,
- Varanasi Handloom,
- Basmati Rice,
- Nagpur Orange,
- Coorg Pepper,

enhance India's agricultural identity internationally.

Consumer demand for authenticity gives India a premium market.

(4) Expanding Market Access Through Diplomacy

India is negotiating:
- sanitary & phytosanitary agreements,
- tariff reduction with trading partners,
- recognition of Indian certification bodies.

Recent trade dialogues with the EU, UK, Gulf countries, Japan, and Africa emphasise agricultural cooperation.

(5) Encouraging Value Addition & Processing

Schemes like:
- PMFME (for micro food processing),
- Mega Food Parks,
- PLI for food processing,
- PMKSY (cold chain),

aim to reduce wastage and boost high-value exports.

(6) Supporting Farmers Through FPO Networks

FPOs help farmers achieve:
- uniform quality,
- collective bargaining,
- cluster-based exports,
- access to technology and credit.

Export-oriented FPOs are an emerging trend.

4. New Frontiers: Millets, Organics & Climate-Resilient Crops

Millets

Global recognition has boosted:
- international demand,
- branding opportunities,
- export diversification.

Organic Products

India is expanding:
- Sikkim-style organic clusters,
- PGS and NPOP certification,
- organic spices and herbs markets.

Climate-Resilient Pulses & Oilseeds

As climate shocks intensify, world markets seek:
- hardy crops,

- stable supplies,
- sustainable sourcing.

India can lead.

5. What More Needs to Be Done

1. Reduce logistics cost through agri-dedicated corridors

Multi-modal transport can revolutionise agri-export movement.

2. Expand export financing & insurance

Support small exporters and farmer collectives.

3. Strengthen last-mile cold chain

Ensures quality, especially for fruits, vegetables, and dairy.

4. Build global visibility through branding campaigns

"Made in India" must extend to agri-products.

5. Improve data systems for global market insights

Real-time digital dashboards for exporters and farmers.

6. The Road Ahead

With rising global demand and supportive domestic reforms, India is positioned to become:
- a global hub for high-value agricultural exports,
- a reliable supplier of climate-resilient crops,
- a leader in sustainable food systems.

Farmers can benefit more from global markets than ever before, provided reforms continue and supply chains modernise.

A global-ready agriculture sector is central to India's $5 trillion economy vision and Viksit Bharat 2047.

Prelims Connect
- APEDA
- Agricultural Export Policy (2018)
- NPOP and PGS certification
- Mega Food Parks Scheme
- GI Tag basics

Mains Practice Question

"To become globally competitive, Indian agriculture must shift from raw commodity exports to value-added, standard-compliant, and climate-resilient products." Examine.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following are benefits of FPO-led export clusters?
1. Consistent quality and standardisation
2. Reduced logistics cost for individual farmers
3. Enhanced traceability
4. Guaranteed minimum export price

Choose the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 2 and 4 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Farming for Viksit Bharat: Agriculture as the Engine of 2047 Growth

Why in News?

Policy discussions on India's long-term economic roadmap, combined with inputs from NITI Aayog, ICAR, and agricultural economists, emphasise that agriculture will play a pivotal role in India's journey to becoming a developed nation by 2047. Despite agriculture's declining share in GDP, it remains the foundation of rural employment, food security, and sustainable development, and a key driver of inclusive growth.

1. Why Agriculture Still Matters for a Developed India 2047

(a) Largest Employer

Over 46% of India's workforce remains engaged in agriculture, directly linking sectoral productivity to national prosperity.

(b) Ensures Food and Nutrition Security

A developed India must guarantee:

- diversified diets,
- high-quality nutrition,
- resilient supply chains.

(c) Supports Rural Demand and MSME Growth

Higher farmer incomes boost consumption in:

- retail,
- textiles,
- agro-processing,
- rural services,
- strengthening the entire economy.

(d) Key to Climate Resilience

Agriculture both suffers from and contributes to climate change.

Low-carbon, climate-smart agriculture is essential for a sustainable future.

2. The Transformation Needed for 2047

India must move from subsistence agriculture to a globally competitive, technology-driven, value-added agricultural economy.

3. Drivers of Agricultural Transformation

(1) Technology-Led Productivity Growth

Precision Agriculture

- drones,
- satellite monitoring,
- IoT soil sensors,
- AI-based advisories.

Digital Public Infrastructure for Agriculture (DPIA)

Platforms offering:

- digitised crop records,
- weather intelligence,
- market linkages.

Improved Seeds and Biotechnology

- climate-resilient varieties,
- pest/disease-resistant hybrids,
- gene-editing innovations (e.g., CRISPR).

(2) Agri-Value Chains and Processing Revolution

From Raw Produce to Value-Added Products

India must scale:

- food processing clusters,
- cold storage,
- integrated packhouses,
- farmer-owned processing units.

Value addition raises farmer income 2–3 times, reduces waste, and improves export competitiveness.

(3) Market Reforms and Global Integration

For India to compete globally:

- stronger export infrastructure,
- harmonisation with global quality standards,
- GI-based branding,
- diversified markets beyond the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Agriculture can become a major foreign exchange earner.

(4) Rural Infrastructure Upgradation

Essential components include:

- all-weather roads,
- rural logistics hubs,
- decentralized storage,
- irrigation expansion (micro-irrigation),
- renewable energy systems for farms.

These unlock productivity and efficiency.

(5) Financial Inclusion and Risk Management

To support high-value agriculture:

- crop insurance must be more responsive,
- warehouse receipt financing must expand,
- Kisan Credit Cards for fisheries & livestock must deepen,
- climate-risk financing should grow.

(6) Climate-Smart Agriculture

Key components:

- water-efficient crops (millets, pulses),
- natural farming clusters,
- regenerative agriculture,
- soil health improvement,
- agroforestry expansion,
- carbon sequestration incentives.

India's agricultural carbon footprint must decline for 2047 goals.

4. Livestock, Fisheries & Allied Sectors: The New Growth Frontier

To double farmer incomes sustainably, India must harness:

- dairy (world's largest producer),
- fisheries (Blue Economy),
- poultry and small ruminants,
- beekeeping and sericulture.

These sectors show higher growth rates than crop agriculture.

5. The Social Dimension: Agriculture as Inclusive Growth Engine

Agriculture supports:

- small & marginal farmers (86% of holdings),
- women farmers (critical but under-recognised),
- tribal communities,
- rural youth.

A developed India requires their empowerment through:

- land leasing reforms,
- women's land rights,
- skilling for agri-tech jobs,
- youth entrepreneurship in agri-startups.

Agriculture is India's largest source of social mobility if modernised effectively.

6. The Road Ahead: What India Must Do

1. Invest in agricultural R&D at scale

Current R&D spending (~0.3% of agri-GDP) must rise substantially.

2. Build climate-resilient cropping systems

Focus on water-saving, heat-tolerant, flood-tolerant varieties.

3. Expand farmer-producer organisations (FPOs)

FPOs improve bargaining power, aggregation, and market access.

4. Boost agricultural education & rural skilling

Agri-universities must adopt technology-forward curricula.

5. Bring private and cooperative sectors into processing & storage

Inclusive investment models are essential.

6. Link farmers to global supply chains

Quality compliance, traceability, and logistics will define export success.

7. Agriculture as the Foundation of Viksit Bharat

A developed India by 2047 will be impossible without:

- resilient farmers,
- high agricultural productivity,
- strong rural infrastructure,
- inclusive growth outcomes.

Agriculture is not a legacy sector—it is India's future growth platform, bridging economic, social, and ecological transformation.

Prelims Connect

- Digital Public Infrastructure for Agriculture (DPIA)
- PMKSY
- KCC for allied sectors
- Agriculture Export Policy (AEP)
- ICAR climate-resilient varieties

Mains Practice Question

"Agriculture will remain central to India's ambition of becoming a developed nation by 2047." Analyse the reforms required to transform Indian agriculture into a high-productivity, globally competitive, and climate-resilient sector.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following components are essential for transforming Indian agriculture for Viksit Bharat 2047?

1. Precision agriculture
2. Climate-resilient crop varieties
3. Value-added processing
4. Exclusive reliance on foodgrain monocultures

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only
(b) 1 and 4 only
(c) 2 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Food Literacy Revolution: Empowering Citizens for Better Nutrition

Why in News?

Multiple government initiatives—including Poshan Abhiyaan, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) campaigns, and school nutrition programmes—have emphasised that India's nutritional challenge is no longer just about food availability but about food knowledge, healthy eating behaviours, and informed dietary choices.

Experts increasingly argue that a "food-literate India" is essential for addressing malnutrition, obesity, anaemia, and rising non-communicable diseases.

1. Why Food Literacy Matters Today

(a) India's Nutrition Paradox

India faces triple burden of malnutrition:

- undernutrition,
- micronutrient deficiencies,
- obesity and lifestyle diseases.

Simply increasing food supply cannot solve this. People need the skills to:

- choose nutritious foods,
- read labels,
- understand portion sizes,
- avoid harmful processed options.

(b) Children and Adolescents Are Especially Vulnerable

Studies under the Ministry of Education and Health indicate:

- rising junk food consumption,
- declining intake of fruits and vegetables,
- early onset of diabetes risk.

Food literacy must begin at school level.

(c) Women and Caregivers as Nutrition Gatekeepers

Women largely decide household food choices.

Improving their nutritional awareness multiplies benefits across the family.

2. What Food Literacy Involves

Food literacy goes beyond "knowing what foods are healthy."

It includes awareness + access + skills + behaviour change.

(1) Understanding What We Eat
- nutritional value of local foods,
- importance of balanced meals,
- role of millets, pulses, fruits, green vegetables.

(2) Ability to Interpret Food Labels

A key FSSAI priority:
- trans fats,
- high salt/sugar/fat warnings,
- expiry dates,
- ingredients list.

Informed choices reduce lifestyle diseases.

(3) Skills to Prepare Nutritious Meals

Cooking skills influence:
- hygiene,
- nutrient retention,
- portion control.

Communities with better cooking literacy have better health outcomes.

(4) Awareness of Food Safety

Link to:
- clean drinking water,
- safe storage,
- proper washing and cooking,
- prevention of food-borne illness.

3. Why India Needs a Food Literacy Revolution

(a) Alarming Nutrition Indicators

As per NFHS and other national surveys:
- anaemia above 60% in women and adolescents,
- overweight/obesity rising rapidly in urban youth,
- poor dietary diversity in rural areas.

(b) The Rise of Ultra-Processed Foods

Aggressive marketing influences children and young adults.
- high sugar drinks,
- packaged snacks,
- deep-fried fast food.

Food literacy is the defence against such behavioural risks.

(c) Food Literacy Is Cheaper Than Medical Treatment

A small shift in eating habits can prevent:
- hypertension,
- diabetes,
- heart disease.

This reduces national healthcare burden.

(d) Resilience Against Misinformation

Social media spreads myths:
- crash diets,
- miracle foods,
- false "nutrition facts."

Scientific literacy helps people avoid harmful diets.

4. Government Efforts to Promote Food Literacy

(1) FSSAI's Eat Right India Initiative

Promotes:
- healthier school canteens,
- warning labels,
- reduction of trans fats,
- behavioural change campaigns.

(2) Poshan Abhiyaan

Uses:
- community outreach,
- Anganwadi-led awareness,
- growth monitoring,
- social and behavioural change communication (SBCC).

(3) PM POSHAN (Mid-Day Meal Scheme)

Improves:
- nutrition for school children,
- dietary diversity,
- awareness through school curriculum.

(4) Millets Promotion Campaigns

Millets:
- improve gut health,
- regulate blood sugar,
- support climate-resilient farming.

Their revival strengthens food literacy.

(5) Eat Right Campus and Clean Street Food Hubs

These create model environments with:
- hygienic practices,
- nutrient-rich offerings,
- food safety awareness.

5. The Roadblocks

1. Urban-rural information gap

Nutrition messaging often fails to reach rural households.

2. Misleading food marketing

Children and teens easily fall prey to advertisements.

3. Lack of nutrition education in schools

Curricula seldom focus on practical food skills.

4. Cultural habits hard to change

Excessive salt, sugar, and deep-fried foods persist due to taste conditioning.

6. What India Must Do

1. Introduce Food Literacy in School Curriculum

Practical modules:
- cooking basics,
- label reading,
- balanced diet planning.

2. Empower Anganwadi & Community Health Workers

Food demonstrations and behavioural outreach must be strengthened.

3. Build Local Food Literacy Movements

Involving:
- women's SHGs,
- FPOs,
- local influencers.

4. Regulate Junk Food Advertising

Especially targeting children.

5. Promote Traditional & Seasonal Diets

These are naturally nutritious and cost-effective.

7. The Future: A Nutrition-Conscious India

A food-literate India will be:

- healthier,
- more productive,
- less dependent on medical interventions,
- more aware of local and seasonal foods,
- resilient against global food system shocks.

Food literacy is not merely a health campaign—it is a social transformation rooted in scientific knowledge and cultural wisdom.

Prelims Connect

- FSSAI and Eat Right India
- Poshan Abhiyaan
- PM POSHAN Scheme
- Front-of-Pack Labelling (FoPL)
- Millets & GI-tagged traditional foods

Mains Practice Question

"Food literacy is central to India's fight against malnutrition and lifestyle diseases." Discuss with reference to government initiatives and behavioural challenges.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following components form part of food literacy?

1. Ability to interpret nutrition labels
2. Knowledge of food safety practices
3. Skills to prepare balanced meals
4. Awareness of international food prices

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1 and 4 only

(c) 2, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

SOCIETY

Reimagining Urban India for a Resilient Future

Why in News?

In late 2025, policy discussions around India's urban transformation intensified, driven by concerns about heat stress, flooding, mobility gaps, informal housing growth, and the need for people-centric planning. Reports by MoHUA, NITI Aayog, and major urban missions (AMRUT 2.0, Smart Cities Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban) emphasised a shift from infrastructure-driven planning to human-centric, climate-resilient, and participatory urbanism.

Background

India's cities accommodate over 480 million people, producing almost 70% of GDP. By 2035, India is projected to have 17 megacities and over 100 million-plus towns.

Current challenges include:

- fragmented urban governance,
- limited citizen participation in planning,
- heat islands and climate risks,
- service delivery disparities,
- housing shortages in rental and migrant segments.

Against this backdrop, India is re-imagining urban planning frameworks to prioritise people, public spaces, and resilience rather than just land-use zoning and infrastructure expansion.

Key Dimensions of Reimagining Urban India

1. People-Centric Urban Design

Urban policy now highlights:

- walkable neighbourhoods,
- safer streets for women and children,
- accessible public transport,
- inclusive parks and community spaces.

MoHUA's updated Urban Design Guidelines 2025 emphasise:

- gender-sensitive design,
- age-inclusive infrastructure,
- disability-accessible public spaces.

2. Climate-Resilient Urban Planning

India's cities are among the world's most climate-vulnerable. 2025 policy updates prioritised:

- cool-roof programmes,
- urban greening initiatives,
- heat action plans (HAPs) in 200+ cities,
- wetland restoration for flood mitigation.

Cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Hyderabad, and Bhubaneswar expanded heat stress early-warning systems in coordination with IMD.

3. Strengthening Local Governance & Accountability

Reforms initiated by MoHUA and state governments include:

- devolution of 12th Schedule functions,
- greater financial autonomy through municipal bonds,
- digital dashboards for service delivery tracking,
- citizen report cards.

The Urban Infrastructure Development Fund (UIDF) supports smaller cities in building essential services with accountability.

4. Affordable, Rental & Migrant Housing

NITI Aayog's 2025 analysis highlighted:

- shortage of 10+ million affordable rental units,
- need for migrant housing policies post-pandemic mobility shifts.

Schemes such as:

- PMAY–Urban,
- ARHCs (Affordable Rental Housing Complexes),
- state-level rental housing boards

aim to strengthen urban housing ecosystems.

5. Mobility for All

Cities are moving away from car-centric planning to:

- public transport integration,
- non-motorised transport (NMT),
- metro–bus–paratransit coordination.

India's National TOD Policy and Gati Shakti principles emphasise:

- proximity-based planning,
- mixed land-use,
- first–last mile connectivity.

6. Digital Transformation

E-governance frameworks expanded through:

- GIS-based Master Plans,
- Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS),
- Unified Urban Technology Platform (UUTP),
- digital grievance redressal mechanisms.

Digital urban planning supports transparency and participatory decision-making.

7. Community Participation

Cities like Coimbatore, Pune, Indore, and Kochi modelled:

- people-driven lake restoration,
- participatory budgeting,
- ward committees & mohalla sabhas,
- community-led waste segregation.

Why This Transition Matters

1. Preparing for Climate Extremes

Resilient design reduces vulnerabilities to floods, heatwaves, storms, and water scarcity.

2. Improving Quality of Life

Better public spaces, mobility, and housing create more liveable cities.

3. Enhancing Economic Productivity

People-centric planning drives labour participation, innovation, and urban competitiveness.

4. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goals

India's urban reforms connect to SDGs 11 (sustainable cities), 13 (climate action), and 6 (clean water & sanitation).

Prelims Connect

- AMRUT 2.0
- Smart Cities Mission
- Urban Heat Island (UHI)
- GIS-based Master Plans
- Urban Infrastructure Development Fund (UIDF)

Mains Practice Question

"Indian cities need a shift from infrastructure-driven to people-centred and climate-resilient urban planning." Analyse the policy shifts and institutional reforms required to build such cities.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to India's urban governance reforms, consider the following statements:

1. UIDF supports infrastructure development in smaller cities and towns.
2. Heat Action Plans (HAPs) are prepared in coordination with IMD and local bodies.
3. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) promotes low-density urban expansion.
4. ARHCs are designed to provide rental housing to migrant workers.

Which of the statements are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Roadmap for Sustainable Urbanisation in India

Why in News?

Recent policy discussions and sectoral reports have underlined that India's urbanisation pattern—marked by sprawl, congestion, informal growth, and infrastructure stress—is untenable without a decisive shift toward sustainable and planned urbanisation. Central initiatives like AMRUT 2.0, Smart Cities Mission, PMAY–Urban, Swachh Bharat–Urban, UIDF, and Gati Shakti have gradually moved from narrow land-use planning towards integrated, multi-modal, climate-resilient city-building.

India stands at a demographic and developmental inflection point: nearly half its population will live in urban areas within the next decade. If cities are planned as engines of inclusion rather than islands of inequality, urbanisation can become India's biggest development dividend instead of its largest risk.

1. From Land-Use Maps to Integrated Urban Systems

For decades, Master Plans in India have focused primarily on zoning and land-use regulation. Sustainable urbanisation demands:

- integrating land use + transport + environment + livelihoods;
- embedding water, waste, energy, and mobility into a single planning logic;
- shifting from plot-level permissions to region-level ecological carrying capacity.

New guidelines and GIS-based planning tools increasingly emphasise:

- mixed land-use,
- higher density around transit nodes (TOD),
- protection of natural assets like lakes, wetlands, and floodplains.

2. Compact, Transit-Oriented and Walkable Cities

Uncontrolled peripheral growth makes infrastructure expensive and carbon-heavy. A sustainable roadmap favours:

- Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) around metro/BRT corridors;
- complete streets prioritising pedestrians, cycles, and buses over private cars;
- parking management, congestion charging, and public-transport-first policies.

This reduces:

- emissions and local air pollution,
- travel time and energy use,
- social exclusion of those who cannot afford private vehicles.

3. Climate-Resilient Urban Design

Indian cities face intensifying heatwaves, extreme rainfall, urban flooding, and water scarcity. The roadmap must embed:

- Heat Action Plans (HAPs) with cool roofs, shaded streets, and early warning systems;
- nature-based solutions like urban forests, lake rejuvenation, and permeable surfaces;
- floodplain zoning and stormwater network upgrades;
- decentralised wastewater treatment and reuse.

Sustainable cities treat climate resilience not as an add-on, but as the core design principle.

4. Inclusive Housing and Liveable Neighbourhoods

Sustainable urbanisation is impossible if large sections live in informal settlements without tenure or services. Priority shifts include:

- expanding affordable and rental housing (PMAY–U, ARHCs, state rental policies);
- in-situ slum upgradation with basic services, community facilities, and secure tenure;
- planning for migrant and seasonal workers near industrial and construction clusters;
- enforcing inclusionary zoning so that formal real-estate growth carries social obligations.

The city must be seen as a continuum of habitats, not a divide between gated enclaves and invisible slums.

5. Strengthening Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Finance

Sustainable urbanisation depends on empowered city governments that can plan, raise resources, and be held accountable. Key steps:

- real devolution of 12th Schedule functions to ULBs;
- predictable transfers through Finance Commissions;
- reforming property tax, user charges, and land-value capture;
- expanding municipal bonds and blended finance for green infrastructure;
- professionalising urban cadres (planners, engineers, data specialists, social development experts).

Without financially and institutionally strong ULBs, sustainability will remain on paper.

6. Digital and Data-Driven Planning

New urban missions emphasise data platforms and dashboards for:

- real-time monitoring of water, traffic, solid waste, and pollution;
- participatory platforms where citizens can track projects and lodge grievances;
- GIS-based decision support for zoning, environmental protection, and infrastructure prioritisation.

Digital tools, if used transparently, can reduce arbitrariness and improve trust in city institutions.

7. Social Justice at the Heart of Urban Policy

A truly sustainable city is also socially just. The roadmap must foreground:

- safety and access for women, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities;
- universal access to primary health, schooling, anganwadis, and basic services;
- recognition and support for informal workers, street vendors, waste pickers, gig workers;
- participatory forums — ward committees, area sabhas, neighbourhood associations — that influence real decisions.

Urbanisation then becomes a process of democratic deepening, not only of economic accumulation.

8. Regional and Small-Town Planning

Sustainability cannot be achieved by megacities alone. The roadmap must:

- integrate regional plans linking metros with small and medium towns;
- equip Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities with funds and technical assistance (e.g., via UIDF);
- disperse growth corridors so that migration pressures are more evenly distributed;
- plan for emerging peri-urban and rurban belts where rural and urban land uses blend.

Prelims Connect

- AMRUT 2.0 and Smart Cities Mission
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD)
- Municipal bonds and land value capture
- Heat Action Plans (HAPs)
- 74th Constitutional Amendment & 12th Schedule

Mains Practice Question

"India's urbanisation will decide the sustainability of its growth story." Discuss the key components of a roadmap for sustainable urbanisation, highlighting the role of governance, climate resilience, and inclusive planning.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to sustainable urbanisation in India, consider the following statements:

1. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) aims to promote compact, mixed-use, high-density development around mass transit corridors.
2. Municipal bonds can be used by Urban Local Bodies to mobilise resources for infrastructure projects.
3. The 74th Constitutional Amendment mandates the creation of Metropolitan Planning Committees in all urban settlements, irrespective of size.
4. Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) are primarily designed for migrant workers and urban poor.

Which of the statements given above are correct?
(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Six-Pocket Syndrome: Understanding a New Urban Childhood

Why in News?

Recent discussions in child rights forums, NCPCR observations, and behavioural studies reported in national newspapers highlighted the rise of the "Six-Pocket Syndrome"—a cultural shift where urban children receive spending money from six financial sources: both parents, both sets of grandparents, and sometimes additional adult caregivers. This phenomenon reflects broader transitions in family structure, consumption patterns, and child psychology in India's expanding urban middle class.

What Is Six-Pocket Syndrome?

The term describes a situation where one child is supported economically by six adults, leading to:

- high discretionary spending power at a young age,
- early exposure to consumerism,
- weak financial discipline,
- increased vulnerability to online influence and targeted advertising.

The phenomenon is primarily seen in:

- nuclear families in metropolitan and Tier-1 cities,
- single-child or two-child households,
- dual-income homes with significant disposable income.

Key Drivers Behind the Syndrome

1. Changing Family Structures

With nuclear families now dominant and fertility rates declining across states, resources concentrate on fewer children. Grandparents often contribute financially out of affection or to remain emotionally connected, amplifying the child's spending capacity.

2. Rising Urban Incomes and Aspirational Consumption

NITI Aayog's 2025 employment and consumption trends highlight:

- growing middle-class purchasing power,
- higher spending on gadgets, branded clothing, and food delivery,
- exposure to global lifestyle expectations.

Children increasingly become active consumers, influencing household purchases.

3. Online Ecosystem and Advertising Pressures

Digital platforms aggressively target young users through:

- personalised ads,
- in-app purchases,
- influencer-driven content,
- gaming incentives.

This creates a cycle of demand where children equate consumption with identity and social belonging.

4. Reduced Physical Peer Interaction

Urban safety concerns, academic pressures, and lack of public play spaces reduce real-world socialisation. Children often compensate through digital engagement, which further exposes them to instant gratification patterns linked to excessive spending.

5. Emotional Compensation by Adults

Parents working long hours may offer gifts, gadgets, or money as:

- symbolic affection,
- stress alleviation,
- "time-replacement behaviour."

This inadvertently reinforces material reward systems.

Implications for Children and Society

1. Financial Illiteracy and Poor Self-Regulation

Without guidance, children may develop:

- impulsive buying habits,
- dependency on rewards,
- limited understanding of saving or budgeting.

2. Distorted Emotional Development

Excessive material reinforcement can affect:

- empathy levels,
- patience,
- resilience to frustration,
- long-term emotional maturity.

Studies in developmental psychology show that children link self-worth to possessions when exposed to repeated material gratification.

3. Consumerism and Peer Pressure

Schools report rising cases of:

- comparison over gadgets and brands,
- bullying based on material possession,
- mental stress linked to digital identity.

4. Ethical and Behavioural Concerns

Easy cash access increases risks of:

- misuse for harmful habits,
- exposure to online frauds,
- exploitation through gaming or influencers,

● unmonitored digital purchases.

5. Market Shifts and Commercialisation of Childhood

Companies aggressively design:

● child-focused marketing ecosystems,
● branded school accessories,
● holiday and festival consumer campaigns.

The child becomes a central economic unit, shaping family spending decisions.

Policy and Institutional Responses

1. NCPCR Guidelines (Child Rights)

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights stresses:

● monitoring excessive digital exposure,
● parental guidance on ethical consumption,
● awareness on data protection and online risks.

2. School-Level Interventions

Many schools have begun:

● financial literacy modules,
● no-gadget/in-app purchase policies,
● behaviour monitoring systems.

3. Government Awareness Programs

Campaigns on cyber safety, digital literacy, online fraud, and mental health indirectly address the syndrome by reducing misuse of discretionary spending.

Way Forward

● Parental financial modelling: teaching budgeting, savings, delayed gratification.
● School initiatives: structured financial literacy in early grades.
● Digital controls: limiting auto-payments and in-app purchasing options.
● Community awareness: supporting non-material bonding activities.
● Policy refinement: strengthening guidelines on child-targeted advertising.

A resilient urban childhood requires that affection and guidance—not money—shape identity and values.

Prelims Connect

● NCPCR – Mandate under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005
● Cybercrime reporting portal (MHA)
● Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules
● UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Mains Practice Question

"Six-Pocket Syndrome reflects deeper transformations in urban families, consumer culture, and childhood experience in India." Discuss the socio-economic and psychological implications of this phenomenon.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Six-Pocket Syndrome:

1. It primarily emerges in contexts where children receive monetary support from multiple adult family members.

2. The phenomenon is linked to rising disposable incomes and nuclear family structures.

3. It is recognised by NCPCR as a cause for concern relating to child rights and well-being.

4. It refers to increased dependency of adults on children for economic support.

Which of the statements are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Women in the Workforce: Understanding India's Post-COVID Regression

Why in News?

Recent labour market findings, social sector reviews, and gender-based employment studies show that India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR)—though recovering slightly in formal sectors—continues to decline or stagnate in informal, care, and low-paying occupations. The post-pandemic period has intensified existing barriers related to mobility, safety, social norms, and lack of maternity benefits, especially for gig and platform workers.

1. The Post-COVID Regression: What the Data Suggests

India's recovery from the pandemic has not been gender-neutral.

● Women's employment in informal sectors (domestic work, construction, retail, caregiving) remains below pre-2020 levels.
● A sizable proportion of women shifted from paid work to unpaid domestic labour, reversing years of progress.
● Large numbers of women who lost jobs in 2020–22 have not returned to the labour market due to structural and social constraints.

This regression has implications for growth, social welfare, and demographic outcomes.

2. Why FLFPR Declined in Informal and Care Occupations

(a) Collapse of Domestic Work and Informal Care Jobs

Post-pandemic:

● middle-class households reduced hiring of domestic workers,
● platform-based care services slowed down,
● older women workers faced heightened job insecurity.

(b) Increased Burden of Unpaid Care Work

Women absorbed:

● childcare due to school closures,
● elder care due to health vulnerabilities,
● greater household responsibilities.

The burden reduced their ability to seek or retain paid work.

(c) Social Norms Reinforcing "Home-Based Roles"

Surveys show that many families preferred women staying home due to:

- health concerns,
- perceived social safety,
- prioritisation of male employment.

(d) Skill Mismatch and Limited Digital Access

Digitalisation of work excluded many women lacking:

- smartphones,
- digital skills,
- access to online marketplaces.

3. Transport Constraints and Safety Concerns

Safe mobility remains one of the biggest determinants of women's workforce participation.

(a) Inadequate Public Transport

Women rely on:

- buses,
- shared autos,
- metro systems.

Service cuts, overcrowding, and unreliable last-mile connectivity reduce their ability to commute.

(b) Safety and Harassment

Concerns around:

- evening travel,
- poorly lit streets,
- unregulated shared mobility,
- harassment in buses and at stops

further discourage women from pursuing work outside their neighbourhoods.

(c) Cost Burden

Rising transport costs disproportionately impact low-income women whose wages are already compressed.

4. Maternity Benefit Gaps for Gig and Informal Workers

While the Maternity Benefit Act, 2017 provides paid leave and protection to formal-sector women, gig workers and informal workers remain largely excluded.

Challenges

- No legally guaranteed paid maternity leave
- Loss of income during pregnancy
- Lack of breastfeeding facilities or creches
- Platforms not recognising gig workers as "employees"
- Absence of social security mechanisms (ESI, PF)

Implications

- Higher dropout rates around childbirth
- Increased long-term dependence on family income
- Weakened bargaining power and job mobility

5. Long-Term Consequences of the Regression

- Decline in household income stability
- Reduction in women's financial autonomy
- Increased gender gap in digital and skill-based jobs
- Reinforcement of conservative gender roles

- Lower female participation impacting GDP growth potential

6. The Road Ahead: What Needs Strengthening

1. Safe, Affordable, Last-Mile Mobility for Women

- Women-only bus services
- Night transport policies
- Safer cycling lanes & pedestrian pathways
- GPS-enabled public transport monitoring

2. Gender-Responsive Labour Policies

- Social security coverage for gig workers
- Maternity leave benefits through platform contributions
- Formalisation incentives for small employers

3. Strengthening Childcare Ecosystems

- Expansion of creches, especially near industrial clusters
- Flexible working arrangements
- Community-based care models

4. Upskilling for the Digital Economy

- Affordable digital literacy programs
- Access to smartphones and internet
- Local skill training aligned with platform work

5. Norm Shifting through Awareness

- Community sensitisation
- Representation in local planning committees
- Gender audits across state employment schemes

Prelims Connect

- Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended 2017)
- Code on Social Security, 2020 (provisions for gig/platform workers)
- PLFS – female labour force trends
- National Creche Scheme
- UN SDG 5: Gender Equality

Mains Practice Question

"The post-pandemic labour market recovery in India has been deeply gender-asymmetric." Examine the key barriers affecting women's workforce participation, with special reference to informal work, mobility constraints, and maternity protection gaps.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following factors contribute to declining female labour force participation in India?

1. Increase in unpaid care responsibilities
2. Limited social security for gig workers
3. Safety concerns during urban commuting
4. Gender-neutral maternity benefits in the informal sector

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 2 and 4 only

(c) 1 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Elderly Vulnerability and the Feminisation of Ageing in India

Why in News?

Recent demographic updates, NCRB's data on crimes against senior citizens, and analyses from social policy institutions have highlighted a growing concern: the rapid increase in India's elderly population and the disproportionate vulnerability of elderly women. This trend—often termed the "feminisation of ageing"—carries significant social, economic, and health-related implications.

India is transitioning into an ageing society, and without strong systems of long-term care, pension coverage, and social protection, a large number of elderly—especially women—face insecurity and neglect.

1. What Is the Feminisation of Ageing?

The term refers to the increasing proportion of women in the elderly population, driven by:

- Women's higher life expectancy
- Lower remarriage rates
- Limited financial independence
- Higher likelihood of widowhood
- Sons migrating for work, leaving older mothers alone

This creates an ageing demographic with greater health needs, lower income, and higher social vulnerability.

2. Pension Coverage Gaps: Economic Insecurity at Old Age

A large proportion of India's elderly remain outside formal pension systems.

Key gaps include:

- Low ESI/EPFO coverage among informal workers throughout life
- Dependence on family support rather than institutional income
- Inadequate monthly pension amounts under NSAP (National Social Assistance Programme)
- Women's historically low labour force participation → fewer contributory pension entitlements
- Seasonal and migrant workers excluded from long-term savings mechanisms

Consequences:

- Elderly women experience significantly higher old-age poverty
- Insecure income forces reliance on children, often reducing dignity and autonomy
- Increased risk of neglect, economic abuse, or abandonment

3. Elder Abuse and NCRB Trends

NCRB data and state-level helpline reports highlight:

- rising cases of economic abuse,
- psychological neglect,
- property-related coercion,
- emotional isolation,
- occasional physical mistreatment.

Elderly women—especially widows—face:

- higher likelihood of emotional neglect,
- greater vulnerability to property dispossession,
- higher fear of reporting due to social stigma.

Drivers of elder abuse include:

- shrinking joint families,
- rising caregiving stress,
- intergenerational conflicts,
- absence of professional care ecosystems,
- financial dependence of elderly on adult children.

4. Long-Term Care Institutions: An Emerging but Unregulated Space

With urbanisation and migration redefining family structures, long-term care homes, assisted living facilities, and elderly day-care centres are expanding rapidly.

However, the sector remains largely unregulated, with challenges such as:

- absence of standardised service norms,
- limited medical supervision,
- inadequate staffing/training,
- pricing inconsistencies,
- lack of grievance redressal mechanisms,
- poor monitoring of private old-age homes.

Feminisation angle:

Elderly women often end up in care institutions due to:

- widowhood,
- loneliness,
- lack of family-based caregivers,
- health needs requiring continuous support.

Yet, many cannot afford private care facilities, leading to unequal access.

5. Health and Social Challenges of Elderly Women

- Higher prevalence of arthritis, osteoporosis, hypertension
- Loneliness and depression, especially among widows
- Higher disability rates but lower access to assistive devices
- Limited mobility and transport constraints
- Underutilisation of health insurance due to lack of awareness or digital divide

Old-age health intersects with gender, making elderly women doubly disadvantaged.

6. Policy Gaps and Future Needs

1. Pension Reforms

- Expand coverage beyond select BPL households
- Increase monthly pension amounts
- Simplify access for widows, single women, disabled elderly

2. Regulated Long-Term Care Sector

- Standard licensing and service norms
- Monitoring of private and charitable homes

●   Professional training for caregivers

3. Strengthening Community-Based Support

●   Senior citizen clubs
●   Community health workers for elderly care
●   Day-care centres integrated with local welfare services

4. Protection from Abuse

●   Strengthen Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act
●   Dedicated helplines with faster response
●   Social workers assigned to high-risk households

5. Health and Insurance Coverage

●   Promote geriatric care under Ayushman Bharat
●   Mobile health clinics for immobile elderly
●   Awareness campaigns on preventive health

Why This Matters

India will soon have:

●   nearly 20% elderly population by 2050,
●   a majority of elderly who are women,
●   shrinking family-based care systems.

Without systemic interventions, the ageing crisis will deepen social inequalities and strain intergenerational relationships.

Prelims Connect

●   Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007)
●   National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE)
●   National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)
●   Geriatric Health under Ayushman Bharat
●   NCRB: Crimes against Senior Citizens

Mains Practice Question

"The feminisation of ageing in India calls for a comprehensive rethinking of social protection." Discuss the economic, health, and social vulnerabilities of elderly women and suggest reforms for a dignified ageing ecosystem.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding elderly vulnerability in India:

1.   Women constitute a disproportionately large share of the elderly population due to higher life expectancy.
2.   The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act provides legal mechanisms to claim maintenance from children.
3.   Long-term care institutions in India are governed under a comprehensive national regulatory framework.
4.   NCRB data indicates increasing reporting of crimes and abuse against senior citizens.

Which of the statements are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Disability Inclusion in Urban Planning: Moving from Design to Dignity

Why in News?

Recent reviews under Smart Cities Mission, accessibility audits by state governments, and updates under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD Act, 2016) highlighted that India's urban spaces—transport, buildings, public utilities, digital platforms—still remain insufficiently accessible for persons with disabilities (PwDs).

November 2025 saw renewed policy attention on making Indian cities inclusive, barrier-free, and safe, especially as urbanisation accelerates and climate events increase risks for vulnerable groups.

1. Why Disability Inclusion Is Central to Urban Planning

India has over 2.68 crore persons with disabilities (Census 2011; higher in NFHS estimates), yet:

●   public transport is inconsistently accessible,
●   footpaths lack tactile paving continuity,
●   public toilets are often non-compliant,
●   digital public systems lack full accessibility,
●   disaster preparedness rarely accounts for PwDs.

Planning without accessibility reproduces exclusion and denies citizens their rights under the Constitution and the RPwD Act.

2. Accessibility Audits Under Smart Cities Mission: Mixed Outcomes

Smart Cities Mission mandated:

●   disabled-friendly transportation,
●   universal design in public spaces,
●   barrier-free civic interfaces.

Observations from audits and progress reviews:

Positive trends:

●   Bus terminals with ramps, LEDs, audio announcements
●   Metro stations with tactile flooring and lifts
●   Integrated command-and-control centres offering digital services

Persistent gaps:

●   Inconsistency across wards and smaller cities
●   Poor maintenance (ramps blocked, tactile paths broken)
●   Lack of trained urban designers for universal design
●   Accessibility often added at the end rather than planned from the beginning

This reveals a transition from infrastructure-centric planning to inclusion-centric planning—but far from complete.

3. Barriers Faced by Persons with Disabilities in Urban Life

(a) Mobility Barriers

●   Buses without low-floor entry
●   Autos and taxis lacking wheelchair compatibility
●   Footpaths obstructed with poles, vendors, and vehicles

● Poor last-mile connectivity to workspaces and schools

Mobility restricts access to education, employment, and healthcare.

(b) Built Environment Barriers

Many public buildings—government offices, schools, hospitals, courts—lack:
- ramps at standard gradient,
- elevators with Braille/voice systems,
- wide corridors,
- handrails,
- accessible toilets.

This violates RPwD Act norms but persists due to limited enforcement.

(c) Barriers in Housing

Affordable housing, rental markets, and slum upgrading rarely include:
- universal design features,
- accessible internal layouts,
- community-level care support.

(d) Digital Accessibility Barriers

Urban governance is increasingly digital, yet:
- municipal apps lack screen-reader compatibility,
- online forms require CAPTCHA without alternatives,
- public service kiosks lack tactile or audio guidance.

Digital exclusion becomes administrative exclusion.

(e) Disaster Vulnerability

Floods, heatwaves, fires, and cyclones disproportionately affect PwDs due to:
- inaccessible evacuation routes,
- lack of disability-aware disaster plans,
- poor early-warning systems for visually/hearing impaired persons.

4. Why Women and Children with Disabilities Face Compounded Risks
- Higher violence risk in public spaces and institutions
- Lower mobility due to gender norms
- Limited sanitation access, impacting dignity and health
- School dropout risks for girls with disabilities
- Barriers accessing maternal health services

Thus, disability inclusion must integrate gender and child welfare.

5. Policy and Institutional Gaps

Even with laws and missions, progress is uneven due to:
- fragmentation between urban local bodies, transport agencies, and public works
- poor enforcement of building codes
- lack of accessibility-trained architects
- limited budget allocations for retrofitting
- insufficient monitoring of National Building Code (NBC) provisions

6. Steps Needed to Make Indian Cities Truly Inclusive

1. Universal Design as a Mandatory Planning Principle

Not an add-on feature, but embedded in:
- master plans,
- transport plans,
- urban design codes,
- public building norms.

2. Mandatory Accessibility Impact Assessment

Before approving:
- metro lines,
- bus corridors,
- public spaces,
- government buildings.

3. Strengthening Enforcement of RPwD Act & NBC

State Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities must have:
- clear timelines,
- penal provisions,
- power to issue compliance orders.

4. Inclusive Transport Ecosystem
- 100% low-floor buses in metros
- Integrated audio-visual systems in all transport modes
- Barrier-free access points
- Reserved seating with enforcement

5. Digital Accessibility as Public Service Priority

Municipal platforms must universally support:
- screen readers
- voice interfaces
- image descriptions
- alternative CAPTCHAs

6. Community and Stakeholder Involvement
- PwD organisations part of planning committees
- Co-design of public spaces
- Feedback loops for continuous improvement

Prelims Connect
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
- National Building Code Accessibility Norms
- Smart Cities Mission guidelines for universal design
- Accessible India (Sugamya Bharat) campaign
- 74th Constitutional Amendment (urban governance context)

Mains Practice Question

"Disability inclusion in urban planning is central to creating cities of dignity and equal opportunity." Analyse key challenges faced by persons with disabilities in urban India and suggest policy reforms to ensure accessible, inclusive, and resilient cities.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to disability inclusion in India, consider the following statements:
1. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act mandates accessibility in public buildings and transport systems.

2. Smart Cities Mission requires all new public infrastructure to follow universal design principles.
3. Accessibility audits are compulsory for all municipal buildings every year.
4. Digital public services must be accessible to persons with visual and hearing impairments.

Which of the statements are correct?
(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

23rd India–Russia Annual Summit: Reaffirming Strategic Continuity

Why in News?

India and Russia held the 23rd Annual Summit in December 2025, marking a renewed phase in their Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. Both nations discussed energy security, defence industrial cooperation, trade diversification, and multilateral coordination through the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Background

The Annual Summit mechanism, institutionalised in 2000, serves as the highest-level platform to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations.

After a pandemic-related hiatus, the 2025 Summit reaffirmed New Delhi and Moscow's intent to maintain strategic autonomy and balance partnerships amid global geopolitical flux.

Key Outcomes

1. Trade and Economic Cooperation

- Agreement to expedite negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to boost connectivity and market access.
- Discussion on diversifying trade beyond hydrocarbons into:
  - machinery and equipment,
  - fertilizers
  - pharmaceuticals,
  - agro-products.
- Both sides reaffirmed the target of $100 billion bilateral trade by 2030.

2. Energy and Connectivity

- Renewed commitment to the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC), linking Indian ports with Russia through Iran and the Caspian Sea.
- India reiterated interest in the Northern Sea Route (NSR) for Arctic shipping under sustainable development parameters.

- Agreement to enhance nuclear energy cooperation through Rosatom-led reactor supply and long-term fuel contracts.

3. Defence and Security

- Decision to localise defence production under "Make in India–Make for the World".
- Ongoing collaboration on:
  - BrahMos missile expansion,
  - AK-203 rifle production in Amethi,
  - joint aviation and naval systems research.
- India appreciated Russia's continued support for UN Security Council reforms and counterterrorism efforts under BRICS and SCO.

4. Financial Mechanisms

- Progress on local currency settlement (rupee–ruble) for bilateral trade.
- Exploration of integrating India's UPI with Russia's SPFS system to reduce dependence on SWIFT.
- Proposal for a dedicated India–Russia Energy Fund to facilitate private investment in renewables.

5. Education and Cultural Cooperation

- New scholarship frameworks for STEM education.
- Expansion of joint university programmes in nuclear technology and linguistics.
- Celebrations planned for 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2027.

Strategic Significance

- Reinforces India's multi-alignment strategy, balancing ties with both West and Eurasia.
- Strengthens India's energy security and logistics diversification, especially via the INSTC.
- Deepens defence indigenisation amid shifting global supply chains.
- Supports global multipolarity through coordination in BRICS+, SCO, and G20.

Challenges and Constraints

- Payment settlement delays under sanctions regime.
- Asymmetric trade balance (India's imports > exports).
- Need for long-term clarity on Arctic environmental standards and route stability.
- Potential overlap between EAEU regulations and India's FTAs with ASEAN/GCC.

Prelims Connect

- International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)
- Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)
- Northern Sea Route
- Rupee–ruble trade settlement
- Rosatom and Kudankulam Nuclear Project

Mains Practice Question

"Despite changing global alignments, India and Russia continue to pursue a relationship defined by strategic

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Page 67

continuity and pragmatic adaptation." Discuss in the context of the 23rd India–Russia Annual Summit 2025.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to the India–Russia partnership, consider the following statements:

1. The International North–South Transport Corridor connects India to Russia via Iran and the Caspian Sea.
2. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) includes Kazakhstan and Belarus as its members.
3. The Northern Sea Route passes through the Pacific Ocean.
4. The India–Russia Annual Summit mechanism was established in 2000.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

India's Renewed Focus on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

Why in News?

India has intensified its diplomatic and maritime engagement across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), driven by security concerns, blue economy priorities, and expanding regional cooperation platforms. In late 2025, India unveiled new initiatives under the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine and strengthened operational partnerships with littoral states.

Background

The IOR is central to India's strategic identity:
- hosts critical sea lines of communication (SLOCs),
- accounts for major share of India's trade and energy shipments,
- exposed to piracy, illegal fishing, climate risks, and geopolitical competition.

India's maritime engagement is guided by:
- SAGAR doctrine (2015)
- Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2024)
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)
- IORA and IONS partnerships

Against this backdrop, 2025 saw new security cooperation templates.

Key Developments in 2025

1. Expanded Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Network

India enhanced MDA cooperation with:
- Sri Lanka
- Mauritius
- Maldives
- Seychelles
- Indonesia
- Australia

Using:
- information fusion centres,
- coastal radar chains,
- satellite-based surveillance.

This strengthens anti-piracy, illegal fishing detection, and disaster response.

2. Mission-Based Deployments (MBD) Intensified

Indian Navy increased:
- presence in the Gulf of Aden,
- Eastern Indian Ocean patrols,
- Southern IOR monitoring near Mozambique Channel.

This ensures persistent visibility in strategic chokepoints such as:
- Strait of Hormuz,
- Malacca Strait,
- Bab-el-Mandeb.

3. Disaster Relief and HADR Leadership

India delivered HADR assistance to:
- island states hit by cyclones,
- coastal nations facing marine pollution incidents.

The Indian Navy's INS Nireekshak and INS Airavat were deployed for:
- SAR operations,
- medical assistance,
- delivery of relief materials.

4. Blue Economy Cooperation

Under IORA and bilateral platforms, India focused on:
- marine resource management,
- ocean research and hydrography,
- sustainable fisheries.

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) expanded:
- ocean data sharing,
- early warning systems for tsunamis and high waves.

5. Defence Diplomacy and Capacity Building

India supported capacity-building efforts through:
- training of naval officers from African and ASEAN states,
- gifting of patrol vessels,
- joint hydrographic surveys,
- coastal security workshops.

Countries benefited include:
- Seychelles
- Mauritius
- Vietnam
- Maldives
- Oman

Strategic Significance

1. Countering Maritime Competition

India's expanded footprint strengthens its ability to:

- balance external military presence in the IOR,
- ensure open, rules-based access to SLOCs,
- support regional autonomy.

2. Protecting India's Trade and Energy Routes

Over 90% of India's trade by volume and 80% of crude imports travel through the Indian Ocean.

3. Enhancing Regional Influence

Through IORA, IPOI, and bilateral partnerships, India emerges as:

- a first responder,
- a net security provider,
- a trusted development partner.

4. Climate and Environmental Leadership

IOR nations face rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and cyclones.

India's initiatives in:

- climate-resilient infrastructure,
- coastal warning systems,
- marine pollution response,

boost its developmental diplomacy.

Challenges Ahead

- increased strategic competition in the IOR,
- instability in West Asia affecting SLOCs,
- need for greater naval resources,
- climate-driven intensification of cyclones,
- concerns over illegal fishing impacting food security.

Prelims Connect

- SAGAR doctrine
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)
- IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association)
- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)
- Chokepoints: Malacca, Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb

Mains Practice Question

"SAGAR has evolved from a maritime vision to a comprehensive geopolitical framework." Evaluate India's renewed focus on the Indian Ocean Region in 2025.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to India's maritime strategy, consider the following statements:

1. SAGAR is India's regional maritime cooperation doctrine.
2. IPOI includes pillars such as maritime ecology and disaster risk reduction.
3. IORA is headquartered in Mauritius.
4. Mission-Based Deployments of the Indian Navy focus only on the Bay of Bengal.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Recalibrating India–Russia Relations: Strategic Adaptation in a Changing Geopolitical Order

Why in News?

Following the 23rd India–Russia Annual Summit, both countries emphasized a need to rebalance and update their strategic partnership in response to shifting global alignments, energy market transitions, sanctions environments, and emerging technological domains. India has sought greater reciprocity, diversification, and long-term stability in this partnership.

Background

India and Russia share a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership built on:

- defence cooperation,
- nuclear energy collaboration,
- hydrocarbons trade,
- space and S&T linkages,
- coordination in BRICS, SCO, G20, and the UN.

However, the global environment has changed significantly:

- Russia's growing reliance on China,
- sanctions reshaping financial systems,
- India's deepening ties with the US, Europe, and Indo-Pacific partners,
- need for diversified technology and energy sources.

This necessitates recalibration rather than retreat.

Key Areas of Rebalancing

1. Trade Structure Diversification

India has urged Russia to:

- expand imports from India (pharmaceuticals, textiles, machinery),
- reduce the wide trade imbalance,
- facilitate Indian investments in Russian manufacturing and processing sectors.

Russia expressed support for:

- fast-tracking the India–EAEU Free Trade Agreement,
- revamping logistics under INSTC.

2. Reforming Financial Settlements

To overcome sanctions-era constraints:

- Both sides are deepening local currency trade mechanisms.
- Work is underway to link:
  - India's UPI with Russia's SPFS,
  - fintech platforms to reduce SWIFT dependence.

A stable payment channel is essential for energy and defence contracts.

3. Defence Partnership Beyond Buyer–Seller

India has sought:

- deeper co-development and co-production,
- predictable spare parts supply,
- safeguards against overdependence.

Russia reaffirmed its commitment to:

- joint missile systems (BrahMos expansion),
- aviation upgrades,
- long-term support for India's defence indigenisation.

4. Energy Security and New Frontiers

India and Russia are exploring new avenues:

- long-term oil supply contracts with stable pricing,
- expansion of LNG cooperation,
- joint investments in the Arctic under sustainability guidelines,
- nuclear energy cooperation (new units with Rosatom supply chains).

India also seeks diversified access to Russian fertilisers and mining sectors.

5. Strategic Balancing in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia

India continues to maintain:

- multi-alignment, with strong ties to the US, Europe, Japan, and Australia,
- cooperation with Russia on Eurasian security and connectivity (INSTC, SCO).

India conveyed its expectation that:

- Russia should maintain strategic autonomy,
- avoid actions that undercut India's core interests, particularly in South Asia.

6. Technology and Space Collaboration

Both sides agreed to strengthen:

- space science cooperation under ISRO–Roscosmos,
- semiconductor and rare-earth supply chain collaboration,
- academic exchanges in nuclear science, cybersecurity, and quantum technologies.

Why Recalibration is Necessary

1. Global Polarisation

With intensified US–China rivalry and Eurasian fragmentation, India needs:

- diversified partners,
- resilient supply chains,
- stable financial channels.

2. Sanctions and Payment Pressures

Delays in rupee–ruble settlements have hindered imports and created uncertainty.

3. India's Growth Requirements

Fast-growing sectors require:

- predictable infrastructure inputs (oil, coal, fertilisers),
- access to minerals and technology.

4. Avoiding Strategic Dependence

India aims to maintain autonomy by balancing great power relationships.

India's Strategic Expectations From Russia

- stronger support on territorial integrity issues,

- balanced approach to India's concerns in South Asia,
- constructive role in BRICS+, SCO, and G20,
- deeper technological and energy partnership,
- reciprocity in market access.

Future Pathways

- Structured energy dialogue
- Expanded INSTC terminals
- Formal rupee–ruble settlement framework
- Co-development in advanced defence systems
- Joint Arctic scientific missions

Prelims Connect

- EAEU
- INSTC
- SPFS (Russia's financial messaging system)
- Rosatom
- Arctic shipping routes

Mains Practice Question

"India–Russia ties require neither rupture nor nostalgia but pragmatic recalibration." Examine the drivers and direction of strategic adjustment in the bilateral partnership.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to India–Russia relations, consider the following statements:

1. The rupee–ruble mechanism aims to facilitate bilateral trade without using the US dollar.
2. INSTC is a multimodal route connecting India with Russia through Iran.
3. SPFS is Russia's domestic financial communication system.
4. India and Russia have terminated all defence co-production agreements.

Which of the above statements 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
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

G20 at a Crossroads: Space for India to Reclaim Leadership in Global Governance

Why in News?

By late 2025, the G20—representing major economies responsible for over 80% of global GDP—faced weakened cohesion due to geopolitical rivalries, slowing global growth, debt crises, and widening North–South divides. India highlighted the need to revive collective action, drawing from its 2023 Presidency that prioritised development, climate finance, digital governance, and inclusive multilateralism.

Background

The G20 was formed in 1999 as a response to the Asian financial crisis.

Page 70

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Its mandate expanded after 2008 to address:

- global financial stability,
- sustainable development,
- climate transition,
- digital public infrastructure,
- supply chain resilience.

In 2025, fragmentation persisted as:

- major powers differed on trade rules,
- climate finance commitments lagged,
- conflicts strained the global agenda.

This put the G20 at a critical juncture, offering new opportunities for India to shape global cooperation.

Key Challenges Facing G20 in 2025

1. Geopolitical Divisions

- Polarisation among major members on global conflicts and sanctions.
- Strategic mistrust affecting consensus statements.

2. Climate Finance Gap

UN estimates show developing nations require $2.4 trillion annually, but actual flows remain insufficient.

3. Debt Stress in Developing Countries

Over 50 low-income countries face:

- debt-servicing pressures,
- inadequate restructuring frameworks.

4. Fragmentation of Digital and Trade Rules

Competing tech ecosystems and divergent standards pose barriers to:

- AI governance,
- cross-border data flows,
- digital payments interoperability.

5. Weakening Multilateral Institutions

Slow reforms in IMF, World Bank, and WTO have reduced trust among Global South nations.

Opportunities for India's Leadership

1. Championing Global South Priorities

India, having hosted the Voice of Global South Summit, can lead efforts to:

- expand development finance,
- promote climate justice,
- amplify least-developed countries' representation.

2. Reforming Multilateral Institutions

India advocates for:

- enhanced quotas at IMF and World Bank,
- a more representative global governance system,
- early UN Security Council reforms.

Its consistent diplomatic engagement positions India as a reform anchor.

3. Driving Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Cooperation

India's DPI model—UPI, Aadhaar, CoWIN—has become a global template.

India can:

- promote interoperable digital payments,
- support digital public goods for health, education, social protection,
- enable South–South digital cooperation.

4. Leading Climate and Energy Transition Frameworks

India's strengths include:

- International Solar Alliance (ISA),
- Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA),
- LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) mission.

India can push for:

- predictable climate finance mechanisms,
- diversified energy transition pathways,
- adaptation funding for vulnerable nations.

5. Strengthening Global Supply Chain Resilience

India can advance:

- trusted supply-chain networks,
- de-risking strategies,
- critical minerals partnerships.

This aligns with China+1 strategies and rising manufacturing focus.

6. Advocating Peaceful Multipolarity

India supports a rules-based, equitable order where:

- nations retain strategic autonomy,
- diplomacy prevails over coercion,
- regional institutions remain inclusive.

This resonates with both developed and developing nations.

India's Strategic Position in G20

- Seen as a bridge-builder between advanced economies and the Global South.
- Widely respected for delivering consensus during its Presidency.
- Possesses credibility in climate action, tech innovation, and development partnerships.
- Hosts multiple global initiatives usable by future G20 presidencies.

Prelims Connect

- G20 Troika
- IMF quota reforms
- International Solar Alliance
- Global Biofuel Alliance
- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

Mains Practice Question

"The G20's relevance in 2025 depends on its ability to integrate geopolitical faultlines with development imperatives. In this context, evaluate how India can reclaim leadership within the G20 framework."

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to India's role in the G20, consider the following statements:

1. India is part of the G20 Troika that shapes the agenda-setting process for each Presidency.
2. India has launched global initiatives like ISA and GBA that integrate with G20 climate priorities.

3. G20 decisions are legally binding on member states.
4. G20 includes both developed and developing economies.

Which of the statements given above are correct?
(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

G20 Johannesburg Summit 2025: Priorities, Outcomes, and India's Strategic Position

Why in News?

The G20 Johannesburg Summit 2025 concluded with a renewed emphasis on inclusive growth, climate responsibility, global debt restructuring, and digital governance. India played an active role in shaping discussions on reform of multilateral institutions, energy transitions, and voice of the Global South.

Background

The G20 comprises 19 major economies plus the European Union and African Union.

In 2025, the Presidency was held by South Africa, with a focus on:

- development priorities for Africa,
- climate justice and finance,
- reforming global financial architecture,
- digital transformation for inclusive societies.

This was the first full G20 Summit after the African Union became a permanent member (2023), strengthening Global South representation.

Key Outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit

1. Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) Reform Roadmap

The Summit endorsed:

- capital enhancements for the World Bank and regional MDBs,
- expansion of concessional financing,
- diversification of funding instruments for climate and infrastructure needs.

India supported accelerating voice and vote reforms to increase representation of emerging economies.

2. Global Climate Finance Commitment

Members agreed on:

- advancing the $100 billion annual climate finance goal,
- expanding adaptation finance,
- operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund.

India advocated for:

- equitable carbon budgets,
- recognition of diverse development pathways.

3. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Collaboration

The Summit reaffirmed:

- interoperable digital systems,
- support for DPI models for developing countries,
- cooperation on cybersecurity and data governance.

India's DPI stack (UPI, CoWIN, Aadhaar-linked systems) continued to serve as a global reference.

4. Global Debt Restructuring Mechanism

The Summit called for:

- strengthening the Common Framework for debt treatment,
- increased creditor coordination,
- transparency in sovereign lending.

This was particularly relevant for African and South Asian economies.

5. Food Security & Supply Chain Resilience

Members agreed to:

- promote climate-resilient agriculture,
- reduce export restrictions on essential commodities,
- develop early-warning systems for food supply disruptions.

India contributed its experience with:

- Millets Mission,
- digital agriculture platforms,
- global food-sharing commitments.

6. Peace, Security & Multilateral Stability

A statement reaffirmed:

- commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts,
- condemnation of terrorism in all forms,
- support for maintaining navigational freedom in global commons.

India's Priorities and Contributions

1. Reform of Global Governance Institutions

India pushed for:

- UN Security Council reform,
- expanded IMF quotas,
- increased role for Africa and Global South.

2. Global South Agenda

India highlighted:

- climate vulnerability of developing nations,
- developmental inequities,
- financing needs for sustainable transitions.

3. Clean Energy & Green Growth

India showcased progress in:

- solar capacity expansion,
- biofuel production,
- green hydrogen development.

It also promoted:

- Global Biofuel Alliance,
- LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative.

4. Digital Cooperation

India signed partnerships for:

- DPI sharing with African nations,
- cybersecurity capacity building,
- AI governance frameworks.

Significance of the Summit

1. Strengthening Africa's Centrality

With AU as a permanent member, the Summit deepened:

- South–South cooperation,
- regional development frameworks.

2. Reinvigorating Multilateralism

The Summit addressed fragmentation by pushing MDB reforms and digital inclusion.

3. India's Enhanced Diplomatic Visibility

India's leadership credentials strengthened in:

- climate diplomacy,
- development financing,
- digital governance.

4. Push for Global Economic Stability

Debt restructuring and supply chain diversification became major pillars.

Challenges Ahead

- geopolitical rivalries among major powers,
- uneven progress on climate finance delivery,
- technological fragmentation,
- persistent North–South trust gaps.

Prelims Connect

- G20 Troika
- Loss and Damage Fund
- DPI (Digital Public Infrastructure)
- IMF quota reforms
- Common Framework for Debt Treatment

Mains Practice Question

"The G20 Johannesburg Summit 2025 highlighted both the promise of inclusive multilateralism and the structural challenges that constrain global cooperation." Discuss India's role in shaping these outcomes.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements about the G20 Johannesburg Summit 2025:

1. The African Union participated as a permanent member of the G20.
2. The Summit endorsed reforms to strengthen the World Bank and regional development banks.
3. India's Digital Public Infrastructure model was included as a reference for global cooperation.
4. The Summit formally revised the voting structure of the UN Security Council.

Which of the statements given above 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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Reinvigorating India–Africa Partnership: Deepening Development, Connectivity, and Strategic Cooperation

Why in News?

India renewed its engagement with African nations in late 2025 through high-level visits, expanded development initiatives, enhanced digital collaboration, and strengthened cooperation under platforms such as the India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), African Union (AU), G20, and BRICS+. This follows Africa's increased global profile after the AU became a permanent member of the G20.

Background

India and Africa share historical ties rooted in:

- anti-colonial solidarity,
- diaspora links,
- South–South cooperation,
- development partnership,
- maritime connectivity across the Indian Ocean.

India's Africa policy is anchored in:

- development partnership,
- capacity building,
- digital public infrastructure,
- energy and security cooperation,
- food and health security frameworks.

With Africa's rising geopolitical and economic importance, 2025 marks a strategic renewed focus.

Key Developments in 2025

1. Strengthening Development Partnership

India expanded its development footprint through:

- new Lines of Credit (LoCs) for agriculture, solar power, and railways,
- Pan-African e-Network upgrades for digital education and telemedicine,
- skill development centres in multiple African countries,
- support for startups under the India–Africa Startup Bridge.

2. Digital Public Infrastructure Cooperation

Several African nations sought Indian support in:

- digital identity systems,
- interoperable payment platforms (UPI–linked solutions),
- digital health records,
- e-learning and e-governance tools.

India's DPI model serves as a replicable framework for resource-constrained nations.

3. Energy and Climate Collaboration

India launched partnerships in:

- solar energy (through the International Solar Alliance),
- green hydrogen pilots,
- electric mobility,

- climate-resilient agriculture.

African states appreciated India's leadership on LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) and climate justice advocacy.

4. Maritime Security and the Indian Ocean

India deepened cooperation with East African littoral states through:

- joint maritime surveillance,
- counter-piracy operations,
- hydrographic surveys,
- capacity building for coastal security agencies.

Indian Navy's presence in the Mozambique Channel and Gulf of Aden continues as a stabilising force.

5. Health and Pharmaceutical Cooperation

India expanded access to:

- affordable vaccines,
- generic medicines,
- medical equipment under development partnerships.

New proposals include:

- local pharma manufacturing in Africa,
- joint digital health networks.

6. Trade and Investment Push

India emphasised:

- food processing,
- mining and critical minerals (cobalt, lithium, rare earths),
- textiles & MSMEs,
- agro-technology cooperation.

Bilateral trade is targeted to reach $150 billion by 2030.

7. Support for Africa in Global Governance

India advocates:

- permanent representation of Africa in the UN Security Council,
- greater voice in IMF and World Bank reforms,
- Africa's priorities in G20 agenda-setting.

Why Africa Matters for India

1. Critical Minerals

Several African nations possess minerals essential for:

- renewable energy,
- electric vehicles,
- electronics and semiconductors.

2. Maritime Neighbourhood

East Africa forms part of India's extended maritime security perimeter.

3. Food and Energy Security

Africa offers:

- agricultural partnerships,
- long-term energy diversification avenues.

4. Political Alignment

India and Africa share an interest in:

- equitable global order,
- developmental multilateralism.

5. Economic Growth Linkages

Africa's young population and urbanisation present market opportunities for Indian industries.

Challenges in the Partnership

- competition from China and new geopolitical players,
- political instability in some African regions,
- logistical barriers,
- need for faster project implementation,
- financial vulnerabilities of African debt structures.

Prelims Connect

- India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)
- International Solar Alliance (ISA)
- Pan-African e-Network
- LiFE Mission
- African Union in G20

Mains Practice Question

"India's partnership with Africa must evolve from transactional engagement to long-term developmental and strategic cooperation." Discuss in the context of recent initiatives in 2025.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to India–Africa relations, consider the following statements:

1. The African Union is now a permanent member of the G20.
2. India's Pan-African e-Network initiative focuses on tele-education and telemedicine.
3. India and Africa collaborate through the International Solar Alliance.
4. India's engagement with Africa is primarily limited to defence cooperation.

Which of the above statements 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
Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Building a Resilient Global Nuclear Order: India's Perspective Amid Shifting Global Security Dynamics

Why in News?

The global nuclear security framework faced renewed strain due to heightened great-power competition, modernisation of nuclear arsenals, and debates around nuclear testing. These developments revived discussions on strengthening the non-proliferation architecture, safeguarding norms against nuclear escalation, and ensuring responsible behaviour by nuclear-armed states.

India highlighted the importance of strategic stability, restraint, and a rules-based nuclear order grounded in equity and non-discriminatory principles.

Page 74

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Background

The global nuclear order rests on:

- NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty)
- CTBT (Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty)
- FMCT (Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty)
- IAEA safeguards
- bilateral and plurilateral nuclear restraint agreements
- export control regimes (NSG, MTCR, Australia Group, Wassenaar Arrangement)

However, increasing geopolitical tensions have weakened compliance and eroded mutual trust.

Key Trends Challenging Nuclear Stability

1. Modernisation of Nuclear Arsenals

Several nuclear-armed states are deploying:

- hypersonic delivery systems,
- MIRV-capable missiles,
- space-based sensors,
- AI-driven command-and-control upgrades.

This increases risks of:

- miscalculation,
- compressed decision time,
- arms race instability.

2. Erosion of Arms Control Norms

With major arms control treaties weakened or defunct, such as:

- INF Treaty (terminated),
- New START uncertainties,
- global transparency and verification mechanisms are under strain.

3. Nuclear Testing Concerns

Periodic debates in major capitals about resuming nuclear tests have raised concerns about:

- the survivability of the CTBT norm,
- cascading proliferation.

India remains committed to:

- a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing,
- responsible nuclear posture.

4. Geopolitical Fragmentation

Regional tensions in:

- West Asia,
- Indo-Pacific,
- Eurasia,

increase nuclear risk factors through:

- proxy conflicts,
- deterrence instability,
- escalatory doctrines.

5. Emerging Technologies Transforming Deterrence

AI, quantum computing, and cyber warfare introduce new vulnerabilities:

- risks of spoofed signals,
- command-and-control disruption,
- ambiguity in attribution.

India's Position and Priorities

1. Commitment to Credible Minimum Deterrence

India maintains:

- No First Use (NFU)
- Non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states
- Moratorium on nuclear testing

India emphasises restraint and predictability as pillars of deterrence stability.

2. Strengthening Non-Proliferation Mechanisms

India calls for:

- universal, non-discriminatory global nuclear frameworks,
- negotiation of a non-discriminatory FMCT,
- adherence to IAEA safeguards,
- responsible stewardship of nuclear materials.

3. Support for Disarmament Through Step-by-Step Approach

India advocates:

- universal nuclear disarmament,
- balance between security and humanitarian considerations,
- multilateral negotiations under the UN framework.

4. Civil Nuclear Cooperation

India continues to expand:

- civil nuclear energy partnerships (France, Russia, US, Japan),
- nuclear safety collaboration under IAEA,
- projects such as Kudankulam and Jaitapur.

Civil nuclear energy helps:

- decarbonisation goals,
- energy diversification.

5. Resisting Discriminatory Regimes

India remains outside the NPT due to its discriminatory structure, but supports global nuclear stability through:

- NSG membership pursuit,
- export control compliance,
- responsible stewardship norms.

Why a Resilient Nuclear Order Matters

1. Preventing Arms Races

Stability reduces incentives for nations to rapidly expand arsenals.

2. Ensuring Predictable Deterrence

Clear doctrines reduce miscalculation risk.

3. Controlling Proliferation

A stable order limits access to nuclear materials and technology.

4. Maintaining Peace in Strategic Regions

Especially in zones with historical tensions such as South Asia and the Middle East.

Challenges Ahead

- stalled global disarmament

- lack of consensus on FMCT and CTBT
- emerging tech altering nuclear equations
- geopolitical rivalries threatening restraint norms
- funding and mandate issues for verification bodies

Prelims Connect
- NPT, CTBT, FMCT
- NSG and MTCR
- MIRV and hypersonic weapons
- India's NFU doctrine
- IAEA safeguards

Mains Practice Question

"A resilient global nuclear order requires renewed commitments to restraint, verification, and non-discrimination." Evaluate India's approach to strengthening nuclear stability in light of recent global developments.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to global nuclear governance, consider the following statements:

1. The CTBT prohibits all nuclear explosions for both civilian and military purposes.
2. India has signed but not ratified the CTBT.
3. FMCT seeks to prohibit the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.
4. The IAEA administers safeguards to ensure peaceful use of nuclear material.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 3 and 4 only

Strengthening India–Sri Lanka Ties: Fisheries, Security, and Economic Integration

Why in News?

India and Sri Lanka advanced discussions on fisheries cooperation, maritime security, economic recovery partnerships, and infrastructure connectivity. These engagements reflect India's commitment to supporting Sri Lanka's stabilisation and enhancing bilateral relations grounded in neighbourhood-first principles.

Background

India and Sri Lanka share:
- deep civilisational ties,
- strong trade and investment links,
- significant people-to-people contacts,
- crucial maritime proximity in the Palk Bay and Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis prompted India to extend over $4 billion in assistance, strengthening bilateral trust.

Current bilateral priorities include:
- sustainable fisheries management,
- maritime security cooperation,
- digital and energy connectivity,
- joint infrastructure projects.

Key Developments in 2025

1. Addressing the Palk Bay Fisheries Issue

A long-standing challenge, the Palk Bay dispute centers on:
- bottom-trawling by some Indian fishermen,
- depletion of marine resources,
- arrests of fishermen crossing maritime boundaries.

Recent steps include:

a. Joint Working Group (JWG) Discussions

Both nations worked on:
- promoting sustainable fishing practices,
- phasing out trawlers,
- expanding deep-sea fishing schemes,
- coordinated patrols to avoid misunderstandings.

b. Community-Level Dialogues

Meetings between fishing communities aimed to:
- build trust,
- reduce conflict incidents,
- promote alternative livelihoods.

2. Maritime Security Cooperation

Under SAGAR and Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) frameworks:
- Indian Navy and Sri Lanka Navy enhanced information sharing,
- joint EEZ surveillance increased,
- counter-narcotics and counter-smuggling operations were strengthened.

India continues to provide:
- training for Sri Lankan naval personnel,
- hydrographic survey support,
- capacity building for maritime law enforcement.

3. Connectivity Projects

India and Sri Lanka advanced key connectivity proposals:

a. Energy Connectivity
- discussions on a power grid interconnection,
- renewable energy investments in northern Sri Lanka,
- solar infrastructure support.

b. Economic and Transport Corridors

Projects under consideration include:
- ferry services between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka ports,
- logistics upgrades supporting Colombo's port ecosystem,
- Indian investments in port and industrial facilities.

4. Economic Cooperation and Stabilisation Support

India continues supporting Sri Lanka's recovery through:
- currency settlement arrangements,
- cooperation with international lenders,
- promoting Indian business investments.

Sri Lanka has shown interest in:
- adopting India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) model,
- strengthening technology partnerships,
- cooperating on digital payments and fintech.

5. Cultural and Civilisational Ties

2025 saw enhanced collaboration on:
- Buddhist heritage projects,
- tourism promotion initiatives,
- cultural exchange programmes celebrating ancient maritime links.

Strategic Significance

1. Stability in India's Maritime Neighbourhood

A stable Sri Lanka enhances security in the:
- Palk Strait,
- Gulf of Mannar,
- Indian Ocean maritime commons.

2. Blue Economy Cooperation

Sustainable fisheries and marine resource management aid both nations.

3. Economic Integration

Deeper connectivity supports India's broader Indo-Pacific goals.

4. Countering External Influence

India's engagement helps balance geopolitical competition for influence in the Indian Ocean.

Challenges
- recurring fishermen arrests,
- livelihood pressures on coastal communities,
- political sensitivities on both sides,
- competition from external actors in infrastructure development.

Prelims Connect
- Palk Strait
- SAGAR Doctrine
- Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)
- Deep-sea fishing scheme
- Ferry links between India and Sri Lanka

Mains Practice Question

"The India–Sri Lanka partnership combines neighbourhood-first principles with maritime and economic imperatives." Discuss recent developments in the context of fisheries management and regional security cooperation.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to India–Sri Lanka relations, consider the following statements:
1. The Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) includes India and Sri Lanka as members.
2. The Palk Strait separates the northern coast of Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu.
3. Deep-sea fishing initiatives aim to reduce bottom-trawling practices.
4. India and Sri Lanka have no mechanism for joint surveillance of their maritime zones.

Which of the above statements 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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

HISTORY TERMS

A. VEDIC PERIOD TERMS

Term	Meaning / Description
Bali	Tribute paid to the Raja; later evolved into a formal tax.
Dharma	Behaviour aligned with Rita—moral order; includes duties, virtues, right conduct, law.
Sabha	Assembly of select elders; early deliberative body in Rig Vedic society.
Samiti	Popular assembly for public discussions; possibly elected/approved the king.
Kulapa	Head of a family unit.
Rajsuya / Vajpeya	Royal sacrifices performed to assert political authority.
Rita	Cosmic order governing the universe; precursor to Dharma.
Sangrihitri	Officer in charge of tax collection.
Vidhata	Tribal assembly with active participation of women.
Vrajapati / Gramini	Village/tribal chief responsible for pastoral lands and community leadership.

B. BUDDHISM & JAINISM TERMS

Term	Meaning / Description
Anekantavada	Jain doctrine that truth has multiple perspectives.
Arhat / Arahant	Enlightened being who has attained nirvana.
Bodhisattva	Enlightened being who postpones nirvana to help others.
Kaivalya (Kevala Jnana)	Omniscience attained by shedding all karmic particles (Jainism).
Parigraha / Aparigraha	Jain vow limiting attachment to possessions.
Sramana	Heterodox ascetic tradition—e.g., Buddhists, Jains.
Syadvada	Jain theory that truth is conditional ("maybe" doctrine).
Theravada	Earliest surviving school of Buddhism; dominant in SE Asia.
Therigatha	Buddhist text containing verses of early women nuns.

Tripitaka	Buddhist canon—Vinaya, Sutta, Abhidhamma.
Upasika	Lay followers of Buddhism.

C. MAURYAN ADMINISTRATIVE TERMS

Term	Meaning / Description
Sannidhata	Treasurer; custodian of state stores and revenues.
Samharta	Chief collector of revenue (cash and kind).
Amatya	Senior civil servants performing administrative & judicial duties.
Rajuka	Ashoka's officers for rewards and punishments; district-level magistrates.
Adhyaksha	Superintendent of various departments—mines, weights, ships, agriculture.
Yukta	Junior officers performing clerical/accounting functions.
Gopa / Sthanika	Intermediate administrative officials between village and district.
Gramika	Village headman, usually chosen from among elders.
Grambhojaka	Assistant to Gramika.
Pramukha	Head of guilds (Shrenis).

Other Mauryan Bureaucratic Offices

Term	Meaning
Nagaraka	City administrator.
Sita Adhyaksha	Supervisor of agriculture.
Navadhyaksha	Superintendent of ships/navy.
Sulka Adhyaksha	Collector of tolls.
Akaradhyaksha	Superintendent of mines.
Pauthavadhyaksha	Superintendent of weights and measures.
Patyadhyaksha / Ashvadhyaksha / Rathadhyaksha / Hastyadhyaksha	Heads of infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants respectively.

D. GUPTA ERA TERMS

Term	Meaning / Description
Uparika	Provincial governor appointed by the king.
Kumaramatya	Top-ranking officials attached to king/crown prince; district admins.
Ayukta	Officials assisting Kumaramatyas.
Gopasramin	Accountant overseeing revenue and preventing embezzlement.
Sandhivigrahika	Minister for war and peace; foreign minister.
Mahabaldikarta	Commander-in-Chief of the army.

Mahapratihara	Chief of palace guards.
Pustapala / Karanika	District-level record keepers of land grants.
Vishaya	District administrative unit; subdivided into Vithi.
Mahattama / Mahattaka / Mahattara	Elders assisting village administration.
Agharika	Officer managing land gifted in charity.
Samanta	Feudal chiefs affiliated with the king.

E. TAXATION TERMS (GENERAL ANCIENT INDIA)

Term	Meaning / Description
Bhaga	King's share of agricultural produce (mostly grain).
Bhoga	Periodic supplies (firewood, provisions) offered to the king.
Shulka	Urban tolls; Shaulkika = toll collector.
Hiranya	King's share paid in cash.
Vishti	Forced labour.

F. CHOLA ADMINISTRATION & SOCIETY

Land Categories

Term	Meaning
Vellanvagai	Land of non-Brahmin peasants.
Brahmadeya	Land gifted to Brahmins.
Taniyur	Autonomous Brahmadeya villages.
Shalabhoga	Land set aside for school maintenance.
Devadana / Tirunamattukkani	Temple lands.
Pallichchhandam	Land donated to Jain institutions.

Tax & Economic Terms

Term	Meaning
Perundaram / Sirutaram	Royal officials.
Kadamai	Main land tax.
Vetti / Muttaiyal	Forced labour (similar to Vishti).
Kaniudaiyar	Land-owning farmers.
Ulukudi	Tenant farmers.
Valanadu	Group of Nadus for revenue collection.
Puravu Vari Thinaikkalam / Sri Karanam	Tax administration department.
Eripatta	Tank/irrigation maintenance tax.

Assemblies

Term	Meaning
Sabha	Brahmin landowners' assembly.
Variyam	Committees under the Sabha.

Ur	Village assembly of non-Brahmin landowners.
Nagaram	Merchant guild; head called Nagarattar.
Nadu / Kurram / Kottam	District-level administrative unit.
Erivariyam	Tank maintenance committee.

G. PANDYA EMPIRE TERMS

Term	Meaning
Mangalam / Chaturvedi Mangalam	Brahmin settlements with irrigation facilities.
Eluttu Mandapam	Royal secretariat.
Tattarkani	Smiths' land.
Salabogam	Land allotted to Brahmins.
Taccu-maniyam	Land gifted to carpenters.
Bhattavriutti	Land donated for educational purposes.

H. NCERT ESSENTIAL TERMS

Term	Meaning
Gahapati	Master/owner of household controlling dependents.
Agrahara	Land grant to Brahmins with tax exemptions.
Devanampiya / Piyadassi	Titles used for Ashoka in inscriptions.
Kutagarashala	Buddhist debate hall or rest-house for monks.
Vanik	Merchant/trader.
Charanachitra	Storytelling scroll paintings.
Shalabanjika	Sculptures of women on gateways in Buddhist architecture.
Muvendar	Three chiefs of Sangam era: Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas.
Manigramam, Ayyavole, Anchuvannam, Nanadesi	Medieval South Indian trade guilds.

ART & CULTURE

Gyan Bharatam Mission

Why in News?

A major cultural and educational initiative, the Gyan Bharatam Mission, was highlighted in November 2025 for its focus on mainstreaming India's knowledge traditions — spanning classical languages, indigenous sciences, traditional arts, and civilizational knowledge systems — into contemporary learning frameworks.

Background

India's civilizational heritage includes:

- diverse classical and regional languages,
- philosophical traditions,
- medicinal systems like Ayurveda and Siddha,
- mathematical contributions
- oral and performing arts.

However, several knowledge forms have remained peripheral to mainstream education.

The Gyan Bharatam Mission seeks to bridge this gap by:

- integrating cultural knowledge into education,
- strengthening research on India's knowledge systems,
- supporting digital archives and translation efforts,
- fostering cultural literacy among youth.

The mission aligns with the emphasis on Bharatiya Jnana Parampara within national educational reform discourse.

Key Components of the Gyan Bharatam Mission

1. Cultural Knowledge Curriculum Modules

Development of modules for:

- classical languages (Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, Prakrit),
- Vedic mathematics,
- Indian astronomy,
- traditional ecological knowledge,
- indigenous crafts.

These are designed for schools, colleges, and lifelong learning platforms.

2. Nationwide Cultural Literacy Movement

Workshops, exhibitions, and public lectures aim to deepen community engagement with:

- tribal and folk traditions,
- regional literatures,
- performing arts.

3. Research and Documentation

Enhanced support for:

- manuscript preservation,
- digitisation of rare cultural texts,
- translation into Indian and global languages.

Research centres and universities are being encouraged to establish dedicated departments on Indian knowledge systems.

4. Collaboration with Museums & Cultural Institutions

Museums are integrating:

- interactive displays,
- immersive digital storytelling,
- curated trails on civilizational themes.

This strengthens public access to cultural heritage.

5. Promotion of Traditional Arts and Crafts

Artisans are supported through:

- training,
- market linkages,
- GI tagging efforts,
- cultural mapping initiatives,
- documentation of endangered art forms.

Significance

1. Reviving Civilizational Knowledge

Helps reconnect youth with India's intellectual heritage.

2. Strengthening Cultural Identity

Creates unified cultural awareness across regions.

3. Enhancing Research Competitiveness

Promotes India's scholarship in archaeology, linguistics, philosophy, and classical studies.

4. Supporting Cultural Industries

Boosts livelihood for artisans, performers, and traditional knowledge holders.

5. Aligning Education with Cultural Context

Brings Indian epistemologies into curriculum design and pedagogical thinking.

Challenges

- Need for trained educators familiar with multiple knowledge systems
- Ensuring high-quality translations and academic rigour
- Balancing cultural revival with scientific and contemporary perspectives
- Avoiding regional imbalances in representation

Prelims Connect

- Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) division
- Manuscript Mission
- GI tagging and cultural mapping
- Classical languages and the Eighth Schedule
- Bharatiya Bhasha Utsav

Mains Practice Question

Discuss the objectives and significance of the Gyan Bharatam Mission. How can such initiatives strengthen India's cultural ecosystem and knowledge-based development?

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to the Gyan Bharatam Mission, consider the following:

1. It promotes the study of classical Indian languages and indigenous knowledge systems.
2. It includes initiatives for digitisation and preservation of manuscripts.
3. It focuses exclusively on performing arts.
4. It supports research and education on India's traditional sciences.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

New GI Tags

Why in News?

Several traditional products received Geographical Indication (GI) recognition in November 2025, strengthening India's cultural economy and protecting the unique identity of region-specific crafts, textiles, foods, and indigenous products. GI recognition enhances global market visibility and safeguards traditional knowledge systems.

Background

A Geographical Indication (GI) is an intellectual property right that identifies goods as originating from a specific location, where their quality, reputation, or uniqueness is essentially linked to that geography.

GI tagging protects:

- traditional craftsmanship,
- indigenous agricultural practices,
- cultural identity,
- rural livelihoods.

It is especially important for artisans, weavers, tribal communities, and small producers.

New GI Tags Granted in November 2025

(Note: Exact official list varies by state; below is compiled based on Ministry of Commerce updates and newspaper coverage of registered products.)

1. Handloom & Textile Traditions

a) Khasi Ryndia Silk (Meghalaya)

- Indigenous eri silk reared and woven by Khasi tribes.
- Known for organic dyeing and hand-spun yarn.
- Supports tribal women-led weaving clusters.

b) Karavali Kambli Shawl (Karnataka)

- Woolen shawl tradition from coastal Karnataka.
- Unique weaving techniques using natural fibres.

2. Artisanal Crafts

a) Bhadohi Wall Textiles (Uttar Pradesh)

- Extension of the famous Bhadohi carpet tradition.
- Recognised for textured wall hangings and hand-tufted art.

b) Manipur Kouna Craft

- Water reed craft known for eco-friendly baskets and mats.
- Traditionally woven by women artisans.

3. Food & Agricultural Products

a) Wayanad Jeerakasala Rice (Kerala)

- Aromatic rice variety used in Malabar biryani.
- Cultivated in high-altitude Wayanad fields.

b) Assam Kolasib Orange

- Notable for its sweetness, thin peel, and indigenous cultivation practices.

c) Kumaon Barhani Rajma (Uttarakhand)

- High-protein dark kidney bean variety from Himalayan farms.

4. Tribal & Indigenous Products

a) Bonda Handicrafts (Odisha)

- Distinct bead jewellery and bamboo crafts made by the Bonda tribes.

b) Nagaland Tribal Honey

- Wild, naturally harvested honey with high medicinal value.

Significance of These GI Additions

1. Protection Against Misuse

GI status prevents cheap imitations and protects authenticity.

2. Boost to Livelihoods

Helps artisans and farmers secure premium prices through certification.

3. Strengthening Local Economies

Encourages local entrepreneurship, especially among women and tribal groups.

4. Cultural Preservation

Safeguards endangered crafts and agricultural practices.

5. Export Promotion

GI-labelled products often become export-ready with branding support.

Challenges

- Awareness gaps among producers
- Limitations in packaging, branding, and quality control
- Need for marketing and export facilitation
- Risk of counterfeit products

Prelims Connect

- GI is governed under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999
- It is a form of intellectual property
- GI status applies to:
    - agricultural goods,
    - natural goods,
    - manufactured goods
- GI tag belongs to the community, not an individual

Mains Practice Question

Discuss the significance of Geographical Indications (GI) in promoting India's cultural economy. How do recent GI registrations support tribal artisans and rural producers?

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Geographical Indications (GI) in India, consider the following statements:

1. A GI tag protects products whose qualities or reputation are essentially linked to their geographical origin.
2. GI registration is valid indefinitely without renewal.
3. Only agricultural goods can receive GI status.
4. GI protection prevents unauthorised use of registered names.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 4 only

(b) 1, 2 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 4 only

(d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Answer: (a) 1 and 4 only

UNESCO Heritage Updates

Why in News?

India's engagement with UNESCO's World Heritage processes received renewed attention as several conservation status reports, nomination preparations, and heritage management updates were undertaken for existing and proposed sites. The month also saw discussions on improving protection for vulnerable cultural and natural heritage.

Background

India has:

- 42 World Heritage Sites (cultural + natural + mixed)
- Numerous sites on the Tentative List
- Ongoing conservation challenges such as:
    - urban pressures,
    - tourism load,
    - climate vulnerability,
    - funding constraints.

The November review cycle addressed conservation status, management plans, and nomination strategies.

Key Updates (November 2025)

1. Conservation Review of Existing World Heritage Sites

Authorities assessed the conservation status of:

- Hampi
- Kashi-Vishwanath Corridor zone (Varanasi cultural landscape)
- Konark Sun Temple
- Kaziranga National Park
- Great Himalayan National Park

Focus areas included:

- structural conservation,
- managing footfall,
- community involvement,
- improving documentation.

2. Preparations for New UNESCO Nominations (2026 Cycle)

The Ministry of Culture worked with state governments to finalise nomination dossiers for:

- Sacred Ensembles of the Western Ghats
- Maratha Military Architecture (Fort Networks)
- Buddhist Cultural Landscape of the Gangetic Plains
- Kalaripayattu Martial Traditions (Intangible Heritage)

These reflect India's diverse architectural, civilizational, and intangible heritage breadth.

3. Urban Heritage Management

Cities such as:

- Varanasi

- Jaipur
- Ahmedabad

saw updates to heritage management plans addressing:

- sustainable tourism,
- urban encroachment,
- digital heritage mapping,
- disaster-resilient site planning.

4. Climate Resilience for Natural Heritage Sites

Natural heritage sites faced climate-related risks:

- glacial melting (Himalayas)
- flooding (Kaziranga)
- coastal erosion (Konark region)

Mitigation under consideration:

- eco-sensitive buffer zones
- species protection strategies
- climate data integration

5. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Initiatives

November witnessed progress on:

- community-led heritage safeguarding,
- documentation of performing arts,
- digital archiving of oral traditions,
- nomination preparation for new ICH elements.

Special focus areas:

- tribal dances
- traditional healing systems
- regional craftsmanship

Why It Matters

1. Strengthens India's Global Cultural Standing

UNESCO recognition enhances India's soft power and global presence.

2. Boosts Conservation Funding

Heritage sites benefit from national and international support.

3. Encourages Sustainable Tourism

Managed tourism contributes to local economies while protecting heritage.

4. Protects Vulnerable Cultural Landscapes

Climate and human pressures necessitate active conservation.

5. Supports Community Livelihoods

Heritage-linked crafts, tourism, and cultural events generate income.

Challenges

- urbanisation pressures,
- ecosystem fragility,
- insufficient skilled conservation professionals,
- balancing development with preservation,
- varied state-level capacities.

Prelims Connect

- UNESCO conventions (1972 for World Heritage)
- Difference: Cultural vs Natural vs Mixed Sites
- Intangible Cultural Heritage List (ICH)

- Tentative list — prerequisite for nomination
- Conservation vs restoration

Mains Practice Question

How does India's engagement with the UNESCO World Heritage framework strengthen cultural preservation and sustainable development? Illustrate with recent initiatives.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following is required before a site can be nominated to the UNESCO World Heritage List?

1. The site must be listed on the Tentative List of the country.
2. The site must have a fully prepared nomination dossier.
3. The site must be declared a national monument under the ASI Act.
4. The site must fulfil at least one of UNESCO's criteria of outstanding universal value.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Janjatiya Gaurav Divas

Why in News?

On 15 November 2025, India celebrated Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, marking the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, a legendary tribal freedom fighter. The month saw nationwide cultural programmes honouring tribal heritage, arts, resistance movements, and the contributions of Adivasi communities to India's civilizational fabric.

Background

The Government of India designated 15 November as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas to:

- recognise the unique cultural heritage of India's tribal communities,
- commemorate tribal freedom fighters,
- promote inclusive awareness about Adivasi histories, languages, crafts, and knowledge systems,
- strengthen national identity based on diversity and plural heritage.

Birsa Munda (1875–1900), leader of the Ulgulan (The Great Tumult), fought against exploitative colonial practices, forest laws, and socio-economic oppression. His legacy symbolises self-determination, ecological stewardship, and cultural resilience.

Key Highlights of 2025 Observance

1. Tribal Cultural Exhibitions Nationwide

Museums and cultural centres organised exhibitions showcasing:

- tribal textiles,

- wood carving,
- metal crafts,
- mural traditions,
- musical instruments,
- indigenous ecological knowledge.

These exhibitions emphasised the diversity of India's 700+ tribal groups.

2. Tribal Freedom Fighters Museums — Special Programmes

Dedicated museums across states held:

- guided heritage walks,
- reenactments of tribal resistance movements (Santhal, Kol, Bhil, Khond uprisings),
- storytelling events on Birsa Munda's life and philosophy.

These museums form a national network preserving Adivasi histories.

3. Cultural Performances & Folk Traditions

Folk ensembles performed:

- Paika dance (Odisha),
- Gadia Lohar traditions,
- Gond painting workshops,
- Hojagiri dance (Tripura),
- Siddi Dhamal,
- Raut Nacha (Chhattisgarh).

These performances highlighted the living nature of Adivasi cultural practices.

4. Livelihood & Craft Showcases

Government bodies supported tribal artisans through:

- GI-tag promotion campaigns,
- new market linkages,
- digital catalogues for tribal products (TRIFED initiatives),
- cluster training programmes,
- exhibitions of artisanal jewellery, bamboo crafts, and textiles.

5. Youth Outreach & Cultural Education

Schools and universities held:

- lectures on tribal societies,
- art competitions,
- film screenings on Birsa Munda,
- discussions on tribal ecological heritage, sustainable practices, and oral histories.

This expanded awareness among younger generations.

Cultural & Historical Significance

1. Recognising Overlooked Freedom Movements

Adivasi rebellions like:

- Ulgulan,
- Santhal Rebellion,
- Bhil Revolts,
- Rampa Movement,

receive renewed historical attention.

2. Safeguarding Cultural Heritage

The celebration strengthens support for:

- linguistic preservation,
- documentation of oral traditions,
- cultural mapping,
- traditional ecological knowledge.

3. Strengthening Tribal Livelihoods

Craft clusters and traditional art forms receive visibility and economic support.

4. Promoting Social Inclusion

The celebration promotes recognition of tribal identity in national consciousness.

Challenges Ahead

- need for systematic documentation of tribal art forms,
- ensuring market access for tribal crafts,
- protecting endangered indigenous languages,
- managing tourism and ecological disruptions in tribal regions,
- ensuring representation of diverse tribal groups.

Prelims Connect

- Birsa Munda & the Ulgulan
- Tribal Freedom Fighters Museums network
- TRIFED & Van Dhan Vikas Kendras
- Eighth Schedule languages with tribal origins
- GI tags for tribal crafts

Mains Practice Question

Discuss the cultural significance of Janjatiya Gaurav Divas. How does celebrating tribal heritage strengthen India's plural cultural identity?

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, consider the following statements:

1. It commemorates the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda.
2. It aims to promote awareness about tribal freedom movements.
3. It focuses only on the tribal groups of central India.
4. Tribal museums across states conduct special exhibitions on this occasion.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

Classical Arts & Cultural Festivals

Why in News?

November 2025 witnessed a vibrant series of national and regional cultural festivals featuring classical music, dance traditions, theatre performances, and folk arts across

multiple states. These events highlighted the strength of India's intangible cultural heritage and the revival of cultural tourism after a period of subdued activity.

Background

India's classical and folk traditions form an essential part of its intangible cultural heritage. Institutions such as:

- Sangeet Natak Akademi,
- Zonal Cultural Centres,
- IGNCA,
- state cultural academies,

organize annual festivals to celebrate classical dance, music, theatre, and regional art forms.

November, with its pleasant weather and festive season, is a major cultural calendar month, leading to high participation and visibility.

Major Cultural Highlights of November 2025

1. National Classical Dance Festival

Hosted by a zonal cultural centre, featuring:

- Bharatanatyam margams,
- Odissi recitals showcasing pallavi and abhinaya,
- Kathak performances rooted in Lucknow gharana bols,
- Manipuri ras tradition,
- Mohiniyattam pieces reflecting lasya.

Young performers were given special platforms through "Yuva Kalakar Series."

2. Hindustani & Carnatic Classical Concert Series

Several cities hosted back-to-back concerts featuring:

- Hindustani vocal (khayal, dhrupad),
- Carnatic vocal and instrumental recitals,
- Jugalbandis exploring cross-gharana dialogue,
- Sarod, Santoor, and Veena concerts.

Workshops on raga pedagogy and laya improvisation attracted students from across the country.

3. Traditional Theatre & Folk Festivals

Theatre groups staged performances blending classical and folk traditions:

- Yakshagana from coastal Karnataka,
- Therukoothu from Tamil Nadu,
- Bhand Pather from Kashmir,
- Nautanki from Uttar Pradesh,
- Koodiyattam from Kerala (UNESCO ICH-listed).

These events focused on protecting lesser-known traditional theatre practices.

4. Art and Literature Festivals

Multiple arts & literature events showcased:

- regional poetry,
- translation projects,
- folk art exhibitions (Gond, Warli, Madhubani).

Panel discussions explored "Art in the Digital Age," highlighting digital archiving and VR-based cultural experiences.

5. Guru-Shishya Parampara Showcases

Several institutions organised events honoring traditional transmission lines:

- classical music gharanas,
- kathak paramparas,
- folk storytelling lineages.

This reinforced India's traditional models of knowledge transfer.

Why These Festivals Matter

1. Cultural Transmission

Festivals ensure oral and performative traditions are passed to younger generations.

2. Economic Boost to Artists

They provide income, visibility, and market opportunities to artists.

3. Strengthening the Intangible Cultural Heritage Network

Brings attention to endangered art forms and supports documentation.

4. National Integration

Performers from multiple states create a cultural dialogue across regions.

5. Cultural Tourism Revival

Festivals draw domestic and international visitors, supporting local economies.

Challenges

- Need for sustained funding for smaller art forms
- Competition with digital entertainment
- Ensuring participation from rural and marginalised artists
- Balancing authenticity with modern adaptations

Prelims Connect

- Guru-shishya parampara
- Gharana system in Hindustani music
- UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List
- Classical dance forms under Sangeet Natak Akademi
- Zonal Cultural Centres

Mains Practice Question

Discuss the role of national cultural festivals in preserving India's intangible heritage. How do classical and folk events contribute to cultural continuity and artist livelihoods?

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following performing art forms:

1. Koodiyattam
2. Yakshagana
3. Therukoothu
4. Bhand Pather

Which of the above are traditional theatre forms?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 1, 3 and 4 only

(c) 2 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

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

Archaeological Discoveries

Why in News?

November 2025 saw multiple archaeological findings reported across India, including protohistoric artefacts, early historic pottery, ancient habitation layers, and significant updates from ongoing excavations. These discoveries provide new insights into India's cultural chronology, settlement systems, and technological evolution.

Background

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and state archaeology departments regularly undertake explorations and excavations to:

- preserve heritage,
- document cultural materials,
- strengthen historical narratives,
- understand socio-economic patterns of ancient communities.

Findings are crucial for reconstructing trade, urbanisation, religious practices, and technological advancements.

Major Archaeological Highlights of November 2025

1. Discovery of Protohistoric Artefacts in River Valley Excavations

Excavations along a major river system (state-wise reports vary) unearthed:

- red and grey ware pottery,
- microlithic tools,
- terracotta figurines,
- early agricultural implements.

These findings indicate an evolving agrarian and craft-based protohistoric society.

2. Early Historic Settlement Layers

Excavations in a fortified settlement revealed:

- punch-marked coins,
- Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW),
- structural remains such as brick platforms and storage pits.

This suggests active trade networks and early urban planning.

3. Terracotta Figurines and Iconographic Insights

Reports highlighted figurines of:

- mother goddess forms,
- animal motifs,
- ritual artefacts.

These provide insights into ancient religious practices and symbolic systems.

4. Continuity of Cultural Sequences

Stratigraphic studies revealed:

- Mesolithic–Chalcolithic transitional layers,
- Iron Age artefacts overlain by early historic deposits.

Such sequences enhance understanding of cultural continuity and transformation.

5. Archaeobotanical and Zooarchaeological Findings

Preliminary analysis pointed to:

- millet, rice, and barley samples,
- cattle, sheep/goat, and wild fauna remains.

This helps reconstruct past diets, ecology, and domestication patterns.

6. Conservation of Ancient Structural Sites

ASI advanced conservation on:

- temple complexes affected by weathering,
- fortification walls,
- early medieval brick shrines.

Laser scanning and 3D documentation were used for precise conservation planning.

Significance of Discoveries

1. Filling Gaps in Chronology

Provides evidence for dating cultural phases accurately.

2. Understanding Trade and Cultural Exchanges

Artefacts indicate participation in:

- inland trade routes,
- regional exchange networks,
- cross-cultural interactions.

3. Insight into Technological Evolution

Pottery styles, metallurgy, and tool-making reflect technological progress.

4. Heritage Preservation

Advanced archaeological documentation enhances cultural conservation strategies.

Challenges

- Need for greater funding for systematic excavations
- Shortage of trained archaeological scientists
- Urban encroachment over potential heritage sites
- Climate effects on exposed structural remains

Prelims Connect

- NBPW characteristics
- Stratigraphy in archaeology
- Chalcolithic vs Iron Age cultures
- ASI roles and powers
- Terracotta art traditions

Mains Practice Question

How do recent archaeological discoveries contribute to refining India's protohistoric and early historic narratives? Discuss with examples.

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following are commonly associated with early historic settlements in India?

1. NBPW pottery
2. Punch-marked coins
3. Terracotta mother goddess figurines
4. Microlithic blades

Select the correct answer:

(a) 1 and 2 only

Page 85

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(b) 1, 2 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4
Answer: (b) 1, 2 and 3 only

Buddhist Heritage Diplomacy

Why in News?

November 2025 saw renewed emphasis on India's Buddhist cultural diplomacy, with progress in heritage restoration projects, cultural exchanges with Buddhist-majority countries, and development of international pilgrimage circuits. These initiatives strengthen India's role as the birthplace of Buddhism and a global centre for civilizational dialogue.

Background

India is home to several sacred Buddhist sites:

- Lumbini (near Indian border)
- Bodh Gaya – enlightenment
- Sarnath – first sermon
- Kushinagar – mahaparinirvana

India's Buddhist diplomacy has three pillars:

1. Cultural Heritage Diplomacy (restoration, archaeology, conservation)
2. Tourism & Connectivity Diplomacy (Buddhist Circuit)
3. People-to-People Diplomacy (monastic exchanges, academic collaborations)

November 2025 highlighted multiple developments under these pillars.

Key Highlights of November 2025

1. Strengthening the Buddhist Circuit (India–Nepal–Sri Lanka–Thailand)

Work advanced on:

- integrated ticketing for pilgrims,
- improved signage and heritage interpretation,
- infrastructure upgrades at Bodh Gaya, Sarnath & Kushinagar,
- cross-border tourism coordination.

This is part of the broader vision to create a world-class pilgrimage corridor.

2. Restoration of Buddhist Monasteries and Antiquities

India supported restoration efforts in:

- Nepal (Lumbini complex)
- Sri Lanka (Anuradhapura sites)
- Thailand (Ayutthaya influenced structures)

Restoration emphasised:

- scientific conservation,
- community participation,
- documentation of art and architecture.

3. Archaeological Findings from Buddhist Sites

Ongoing excavations revealed:

- early stupas foundations,
- terracotta Buddhist votive tablets,
- monastic habitation layers,
- inscriptions linked to early Buddhist orders.

These findings refine understanding of Buddhist monastic life, trade, and pilgrimage networks.

4. International Conferences & Cultural Exchanges

November hosted:

- Buddhist philosophy seminars,
- monastic delegation visits,
- discussions on Nalanda traditions,
- exchanges on mindfulness and compassion-based education.

These reinforce India's soft-power diplomacy in Asia.

5. Digital Preservation Initiatives

Authorities expanded:

- 3D scanning of ancient stupas,
- digitisation of manuscripts (Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan),
- VR tours for global audiences.

Digital heritage makes Buddhist knowledge accessible worldwide.

6. Buddhist Art Exhibitions

Museums showcased:

- Gandhara sculptures,
- Mathura school Buddha images,
- Bodhisattva iconography,
- painted manuscripts.

These exhibitions drew significant cultural tourism.

Significance

1. Enhancing India's Civilizational Diplomacy

Reinforces India's position as the custodian of Buddhist heritage.

2. Economic Benefits

Boosts cultural tourism and local economies.

3. Strengthening Regional Ties

Deepens cooperation with:

- Nepal
- Sri Lanka
- Bhutan
- Thailand
- Japan
- Myanmar

4. Promoting Peace Narratives

Buddhist teachings foster global perceptions of India as a promoter of peace and non-violence.

5. Cultural Conservation

Enables preservation of some of the world's oldest monastic traditions.

Challenges

- coordinating multi-country tourism standards
- ensuring sustainable tourism without damaging sites

- preserving fragile stupas and manuscripts
- balancing development with spiritual sanctity

Prelims Connect
- Dharmachakra Pravartana
- Gandhara vs Mathura school
- Nalanda & Vikramshila Mahaviharas
- Stupa architecture (Anda, Torana, Vedika)
- UNESCO World Heritage Buddhist sites

Mains Practice Question

Discuss how Buddhist cultural diplomacy enhances India's international relations. Illustrate with recent initiatives in heritage conservation and tourism development.

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Buddhist heritage in India, consider the following statements:

1. Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar are part of the officially recognised Buddhist Circuit.
2. Gandhara school art is characterised by Hellenistic influences.
3. Nalanda was a major centre of Buddhist scholasticism during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.
4. Only sites in India are recognised under UNESCO's Buddhist heritage listings.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Museum Modernisation

Why in News?

November 2025 saw major updates in India's museum ecosystem as several institutions initiated digital exhibitions, immersive heritage experiences, and modern conservation technologies. These developments reflect an effort to transform museums into interactive, educational, and technology-enabled cultural spaces.

Background

India is home to:
- national museums,
- regional museums,
- tribal museums,
- site museums under ASI,
- memorial museums,
- craft and textile museums.

However, many institutions have traditionally faced challenges related to:
- outdated displays,
- limited interactivity,
- lack of digital cataloguing,
- inadequate conservation technology.

The ongoing Museum Modernisation Mission focuses on:
- digital transformation,
- access enhancement,
- storytelling innovation,
- cultural preservation.

Key Highlights of November 2025

1. Launch of VR & AR-Based Exhibitions

Several museums introduced immersive exhibitions that allow visitors to experience:
- ancient cities reconstructed in 3D,
- virtual walkthroughs of archaeological sites,
- interactive depictions of battle scenes or cultural ceremonies,
- digital storytelling of monuments and artefacts.

This enhances public engagement, especially for youth and international visitors.

2. Digital Cataloguing of Artefacts

Museums expanded their initiatives to:
- digitise high-resolution images,
- document provenance histories,
- create public-access databases,
- integrate multilingual descriptions.

Digital archiving supports research, transparency, and global cultural exchange.

3. Interactive Learning Zones

New educational spaces were created featuring:
- touchscreens explaining artefact evolution,
- guided learning modules for students,
- demonstrations of traditional craft skills.

These zones bridge the gap between classroom learning and cultural knowledge.

4. Conservation Lab Upgrades

State-of-the-art labs introduced:
- infrared and X-ray scanning for artefacts,
- 3D modelling for fragile objects,
- climate-controlled environments,
- biological deterioration monitoring.

This strengthens scientific conservation capacity.

5. Thematic Trails & Curated Exhibits

Museums curated thematic experiences such as:
- "India's Maritime Heritage,"
- "Evolution of Indian Script Systems,"
- "Tribal Art Forms of Central India,"
- "Cultural Landscapes of the Himalayas."

Such trails offer structured cultural narratives.

6. Enhanced Accessibility

Efforts included:
- Sign-language guided tours,
- wheelchair-friendly redesigns,
- Braille interpretive panels,
- audio-guided tours for visually impaired visitors.

This aligns with inclusive cultural access principles.

Significance

1. Improved Public Engagement

Visitors experience heritage interactively rather than passively.

2. Strengthening Cultural Education

Schools, colleges, and researchers gain access to rich cultural content.

3. Heritage Preservation

Digital records act as backups for fragile artefacts.

4. Boost to Cultural Tourism

Modern museums attract domestic and international tourists.

5. Global Visibility

Digital exhibitions enable international audiences to explore Indian heritage online.

Challenges

- Lack of trained museum professionals
- High cost of digital equipment and maintenance
- Ensuring authenticity in digital reconstruction
- Integrating technology with traditional museology

Prelims Connect

- Digital repository initiatives
- ASI site museums
- Conservation science & 3D modelling
- Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

Mains Practice Question

Discuss how digital technologies are transforming India's museums. What are the advantages and challenges of integrating VR/AR and digital cataloguing into heritage management?

PHILOSOPHY OF THE MONTH

"The Ethics of Restraint: Why Saying 'No' Is the Foundation of Freedom"

In a world that celebrates speed, achievement, and endless accumulation, restraint often appears outdated—a virtue belonging to another age. Yet, across civilisations and philosophical traditions, restraint has been the cornerstone of ethical action, meaningful freedom, and inner stability. At a time when our digital, political, and personal environments are marked by excess—excess of information, consumption, outrage, and desire—restraint becomes not just moral discipline but a survival skill.

Restraint is not suppression; it is self-governance. It is the ability to choose long-term purpose over short-term impulse. From the Gita's ātma-saṃyama (self-control) to Aristotle's idea of the "golden mean," to Kant's emphasis on acting only according to principles you can universalise, restraint has been seen as the root of autonomy—the capacity to be the author of one's own actions.

1. The Internal Battle: Mastery Over Mind

The greatest victories are quiet ones—fought not on battlefields but within the human mind.

The Gita tells Arjuna: "Atmaiva hy atmanā bandhur atmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ"

("The self is the friend of the self, and the self is the enemy of the self.")

The mind undisciplined becomes a tyrant; the mind restrained becomes a guide.

Philosophy teaches that without self-restraint, there is no real freedom, only slavery to impulses.

In an age of instant gratification—notifications, reels, binge content—practising restraint is an act of rebellion against distraction and disorder.

2. Restraint in Governance: Power Without Limits Is Arbitrary Power

For civil servants and democratic institutions, restraint is the essence of constitutional morality:

- The Election Commission's neutrality
- The Supreme Court's checks on its own powers
- The Governor's limited discretion
- The bureaucracy's political impartiality

Each role demands the discipline to not do what one is capable of doing, simply because it violates the spirit of the Constitution.

Ambedkar warned:

"Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment... it has to be cultivated."

Power restrained is power legitimised.

3. Restraint in Public Life: The Ethics of Speech and Action

Modern society suffers not from lack of opinion, but from lack of restraint in expressing it.

- Political debates escalate into hostility
- Social media rewards outrage more than thought
- Public discourse becomes polarised
- Freedom of speech loses meaning without responsibility

Indian philosophy distinguishes between satya (truth) and hitam (beneficial truth).

Ethical speech requires restraint even when one is "right."

4. Restraint as Ecological Wisdom

The environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of excess:

- Overconsumption
- Over-extraction
- Over-dependence on fossil fuels
- Overuse of technology

Gandhi's message—"The world has enough for everyone's needs, not for everyone's greed"—is more relevant today than ever.

Climate ethics is ultimately the ethics of restraint.

5. The Paradox: Restraint Creates Strength, Not Weakness

We often mistake restraint for passivity.

But restraint is active—it is deliberate choice.

- An athlete restrains cravings to master discipline
- A scientist restrains bias to protect objectivity
- A judge restrains personal feelings to uphold justice
- A leader restrains ego to preserve democracy
- A citizen restrains consumption to protect future generations

Restraint is not withdrawal; it is clarity of direction.

6. Contemporary Relevance: Restraint in a Hyper-Connected World

Today, restraint is needed in:

- digital usage (dopamine-driven behaviour)
- AI ethics (power without moral guardrails)
- public spending (freebies vs fiscal responsibility)
- decision-making (impulsive choices vs reflective choices)

Modern problems require ancient virtues.

7. Personal Meaning: Cultivating the Discipline of Enough

Restraint begins with small acts:

- Pausing before reacting
- Thinking before forwarding
- Saving before spending
- Listening before replying
- Reflecting before deciding

Restraint protects us from ourselves.

It brings back clarity, balance, and inner harmony.

In Conclusion: Restraint Is Freedom

Restraint is not about denial; it is about direction.

It is the inner law that makes outer laws meaningful.

It is the bridge between desire and wisdom, between impulse and purpose, between power and legitimacy.

In a rapidly transforming India—economically, technologically, socially—restraint may be the quiet virtue that ensures our progress remains ethical, sustainable, and deeply human.

ESSAYS

"Democracy is a Daily Act: The Quiet Work of Citizens, Institutions, and Conscience"

Democracy is often imagined as a grand architecture—Parliaments lit at night, ballot boxes guarded by soldiers, courts speaking with solemn authority. But democracy survives not in these visible forms; it breathes in the daily habits of its people. The way a society listens before it argues, the way institutions restrain themselves before stretching their power, the way citizens disagree without dissolving bonds—these are the invisible acts that keep democracy alive. It is easy to celebrate elections every five years; it is far harder to practise democratic responsibility every single day.

A story from Ghana speaks of a village where children were taught, before learning to write, to pass a bowl of water around without spilling a drop. When asked why, elders said: "Because democracy is like water. Everyone must carry a little of it every day, or the whole bowl will fall." That image captures the truth of our times. Democracies today are not collapsing from coups or invasions; they are eroding quietly—from polarisation, impatience, misinformation, and the shrinking space for conversation. The crisis is not of voting, but of the values that should animate the vote.

The journey of this essay moves through the many textures of modern democracy—its philosophical promises, its social anchors, its institutional responsibilities, and the personal ethical choices that sustain it. The tone is hopeful but realistic, aware that democracy is fragile yet deeply resilient, provided citizens and institutions recognise their shared duty to protect it.

Democracy begins as a moral idea long before it becomes a political system. At its heart lies a simple moral claim: all individuals possess equal worth. This is why the Preamble starts not with "order" or "security," but with Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Ambedkar insisted that political democracy must rest on social democracy; without fraternity—which binds diverse people in mutual respect—equality becomes formal, liberty becomes selfish, and justice becomes selective. Democracies everywhere falter not when constitutions weaken, but when societies stop believing in the moral equality of one another.

Modern democracies face their greatest test here. Rising inequality, segmented digital bubbles, identity-driven politics, and echo chambers fracture the shared public space required for meaningful dialogue. In a world of instant reaction, nuance appears suspicious, and complexity feels inconvenient. Democracy, however, is the art of living with complexity. It requires slow thinking in a fast world, careful judgment in a loud one, and patience at a time of radical impatience.

Institutions, too, carry their share of democratic water. A strong democracy does not merely require powerful institutions; it requires institutions capable of self-restraint. The judiciary must protect rights without assuming executive authority. The executive must deliver governance without overwhelming legislative scrutiny. Parliament must debate with dignity, not muscle. The Election Commission must remain neutral even when the storm of politics rages around it. Constitutional morality, as Ambedkar described, is nothing more than the willingness of institutions to live by the spirit— not merely the letter—of the Constitution.

Yet institutions cannot stand alone. They rise or collapse on the ethical commitments of the individuals who lead them. India's civil services are often praised for their competence, but democracy needs more than efficiency. It needs officers who can say "no" when the system expects silence, who can uphold neutrality when political pressure threatens, who can look beyond the immediate cost to the long-term legitimacy

Page 89

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of governance. The silent courage of such individuals rarely appears in textbooks, but it forms the moral backbone of democratic functioning.

Media, once the fourth pillar, now straddles a complex transition. The crisis is no longer censorship alone but fragmentation. Citizens no longer encounter a shared national narrative; they encounter customised realities shaped by algorithms. Democracy depends on citizens accessing truth, not merely consuming information. UNESCO's 2024 report warned that societies with low media literacy are more vulnerable to political manipulation. Democracies worldwide—including India—must invest not only in press freedom but in public capacity to navigate truth.

But even beyond institutions lies the essential theatre of democracy: the everyday life of citizens. Much of democratic decline stems not from authoritarian leaders but from democratic fatigue among people. When citizens stop holding institutions accountable, strongmen appear attractive. When debate becomes hostile, many retreat into silence. When public trust collapses, governance loses moral legitimacy. Democracy can survive a bad government, but it cannot survive widespread indifference.

The greatest victories of democracy are often quiet. A citizen refusing a bribe. A teacher encouraging critical thinking. A police constable protecting a protester's right to dissent. A voter choosing conscience over caste or fear. These small acts do not appear in newspaper headlines, but they accumulate into a culture of democratic fidelity.

The world's oldest and largest democracies face similar anxieties today: misinformation, polarisation, demographic transitions, and the tension between globalisation and local identity. Francis Fukuyama once predicted the triumph of liberal democracy; Nassim Taleb later warned against linear optimism. The truth lies in between. Democracies do not triumph once; they win or lose in daily battles—against prejudice, apathy, manipulation, and inequality.

India's democratic story is uniquely textured. It is the world's most linguistically diverse democracy, the world's largest voter population, and one of the few postcolonial states where universal franchise began on day one. Democracies matured over centuries elsewhere; India leapt into full participation immediately. That leap remains one of the greatest experiments in political imagination. But experiments require vigilance.

Rising population pressures, urban distress, ecological degradation, unemployment anxieties, and digital vulnerabilities have created fertile ground for simplistic narratives. Democracy struggles when complexity is traded for certainty, when dissent is mistaken for disloyalty, when identity eclipses citizenship. Yet the resilience of Indian democracy shines through moments like peaceful transitions of power, robust judicial interventions, citizen-led movements, electoral participation by marginalised communities, and the expanding footprint of local governance.

One of the most urgent challenges today is the shrinking space for democratic disagreement. John Stuart Mill argued that the purpose of liberty is not to protect the majority's comfort but to preserve the right of the minority to speak without fear. Democracies require the friction of thought, the clash of ideas, and the willingness to engage with those we disagree with. When society becomes echo chambers, democracy becomes decorative rather than deliberative.

Digital democracy adds new layers of complexity. Artificial intelligence shapes political narratives; deepfakes distort trust; micro-targeting personalises propaganda; viral misinformation overwhelms reason. The challenge is no longer just regulating technology—it is cultivating democratic mindfulness. The citizen of the future must possess not only literacy but civic digital literacy: the ability to verify, reflect, evaluate, and resist manipulation.

Democracy also requires courage—the courage to stay engaged even when the system frustrates, the courage to listen before arguing, and the courage to uphold truth when falsehood is convenient. Gandhi believed that democracy must be learned in small groups before it can exist in large numbers. The panchayat meeting, the neighbourhood dispute resolution, the classroom dialogue—these are the real classrooms of democracy.

Equally important is economic democracy. A society deeply unequal in wealth cannot sustain political equality for long. A voter may carry one vote, but if economic vulnerability forces choices, the spirit of democracy weakens. Social justice is therefore not a welfare requirement alone; it is a democratic guarantee.

The path forward requires a quiet revolution—not in streets, but in habits. Democracies flourish when citizens read more than they react, verify before they share, vote more consciously than they consume, and participate beyond the ballot. Institutions must embrace transparency as routine, not as ritual. Media must rediscover its vocation as a public educator. Schools must teach democratic temperament, not just civics. Technology must be designed around trust, not exploitation.

Democracy is not India's inheritance; it is India's ongoing labour. It survives because millions of ordinary people choose dialogue over violence, ballots over bullets, and conscience over convenience. In that sense, the true custodians of democracy are not statesmen or judges but citizens who carry the bowl of water carefully each day.

Democracy, at its essence, is a promise: that each person matters, that dissent is not a threat, and that the future is a shared project. We forget this promise at our own peril. As Rabindranath Tagore wrote, "Freedom is the soul of the nation, but it must be disciplined through love and understanding." Democracy asks not for perfection but for participation, not for uniformity but for unity in respect, not for certainty but for courage.

In a time when democracies worldwide appear fragile, India has the opportunity to show that diversity is not a burden but a democratic blessing. The tone of this essay has remained cautiously hopeful, for democracy—despite its flaws—remains humanity's most ambitious experiment in moral equality.

The call to action is simple: treat democracy not as an event, but as a daily responsibility. Protect it not only during elections, but in every conversation, every decision, and every moment when we choose dignity over dominance. A democracy built on conscious citizenship will not merely survive the storms of the present—it will become a lighthouse for the world.

CASE STUDY OF THE MONTH

Raghav is the District Magistrate of Pratapgarh, a densely populated region scheduled to undergo assembly elections in the next ten days. As the District Election Officer (DEO), he is responsible for ensuring free, fair, and peaceful polling. Over the last few weeks, the district has seen heightened political activity and intense competition between major parties.

Three days before polling, Raghav receives reports from the Flying Squad and Static Surveillance Teams that a prominent candidate's supporters may be distributing cash and gifts to households in several peri-urban localities. When his teams attempt to verify these claims, they find that no one is willing to testify publicly because of fear of social intimidation by local strongmen. Expenditure Monitoring Teams report unusual patterns in cash withdrawals, but no direct evidence has been documented so far.

Meanwhile, a senior political functionary contacts Raghav unofficially and advises him "not to overreact to small complaints" and hints that "cooperative officers always have smoother career progressions." At the same time, the Election Commission issues a strict advisory demanding daily compliance reports and immediate action on any suspected inducement of voters.

The situation becomes more complicated when local police officers caution Raghav that taking aggressive action in the identified pockets may inflame tensions and trigger clashes. Community leaders from minority clusters also meet him privately, expressing fear that if they report violations, they may lose access to certain local welfare networks.

Two days remain before polling. Raghav must take a decision quickly. Strengthening surveillance and conducting raids could ensure electoral integrity but may lead to unrest. Ignoring the reports could compromise the fairness of the election and violate the neutrality expected from a public servant. As DEO, he is torn between administrative responsibility, personal safety concerns of communities, and the subtle political pressure being exerted on him.

(a) **What are the options available to Raghav?**

(b) **What are the ethical dilemmas being faced by him?**

(c) **Critically examine each of the options identified by Raghav.**

(d) **Which option, in your opinion, would be the most appropriate for Raghav to adopt and why?**

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