

AS ITS CHANGING

Typical Viewpoint August 2026



IMPULSE

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N.B:

- ⊗ A detailed comprehensive discussion has been projected in this study material from the viewpoint of **INTEGRATED UPSC CSE (PrIm+Mains)** preparation.
- ⊗ If any topic has been skipped here from the events of this respective month, it had been already duly discussed in the previous editions. So, please check the previous editions.
- ⊗ We are indebted to the different authenticated published news sources for the compilation of this study material

01.08.2026

GS - II

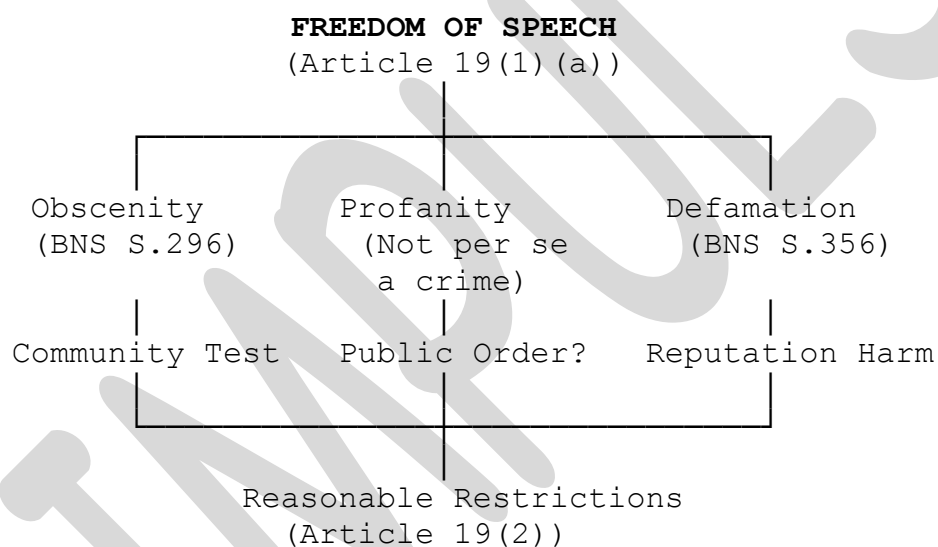
FIR over Remarks on PM –

Obscenity, Profanity & Freedom of Speech

Brief

- A Zero FIR was registered against a woman for remarks against the Prime Minister during a protest. The case raises questions about the **legal distinction between obscenity, profanity, defamation, and free speech** under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Mind Map



Constitutional & Legal Framework

Fundamental Right

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression.
- Subject to **reasonable restrictions** under **Article 19(2)**.

Relevant BNS Provisions

Section	Provision	Key Requirement
S.296	Obscene acts/songs/words	Must be legally "obscene" and cause annoyance

Section	Provision	Key Requirement
S.352	Intentional insult	Must provoke breach of public peace
S.353	Public mischief	Incitement causing fear, enmity or offences against State
S.356	Defamation	Harm to reputation; exceptions for good-faith criticism

Evolution of Obscenity Test

1. Hicklin Test (1965)

- **Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra**
- Focused on whether isolated passages could corrupt vulnerable minds.

- An 1868 English rule
- After some years the English law moved on....but India applied it for decades

2. Community Standards Test (2014)

- **Aveek Sarkar v. State of West Bengal**
- Obscenity judged by:
 - Contemporary social standards
 - Entire work, not isolated portions
 - Whether it arouses sexual feelings

Important Supreme Court Judgments

Case	Principle
Ranjit D. Udeshi (1965)	Hicklin Test adopted
Doordarshan v. Anand Patwardhan (2006)	Work must be viewed as a whole
Aveek Sarkar (2014)	Community Standards Test replaces Hicklin
College Romance Case (2024)	Vulgarity ≠ Obscenity
Sivakumar v. State (2026)	Mere swear words not obscene
Mani v. State (2026)	Profanity alone not punishable unless legally obscene

Key Takeaways

✓ Profanity or abusive language **is not automatically a criminal offence.**

✓ Obscenity requires:

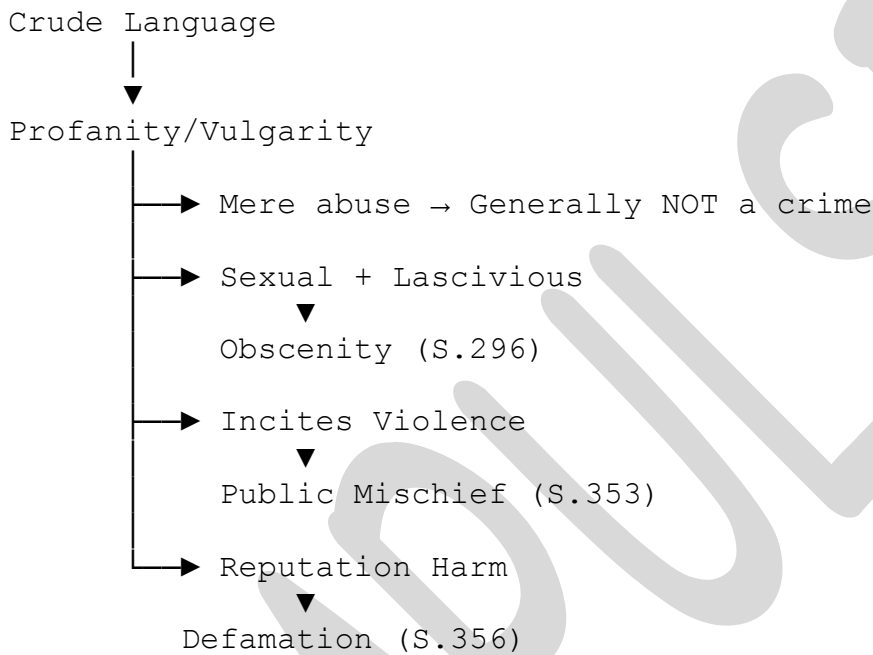
- Lascivious content

- Sexual connotation
- Tendency to arouse sexual feelings.

✓ Political criticism enjoys constitutional protection unless it:

- Incites violence,
- Disturbs public order,
- Constitutes criminal defamation.

Concept Diagram



UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to the law relating to obscenity in India, consider the following statements:

1. Mere use of abusive or vulgar language is sufficient to constitute obscenity under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.
2. The Supreme Court has replaced the Hicklin Test with the Community Standards Test.
3. Political criticism of public officials enjoys constitutional protection subject to reasonable restrictions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A..... Mere profanity is not per se obscenity. The Community Standards Test governs obscenity, and political speech is protected under Article 19(1)(a), subject to Article 19(2).

Probable UPSC Mains Question

"Freedom of speech includes the right to use offensive or unpopular expression, but not all offensive speech is protected. Discuss with reference to the legal distinction between obscenity, profanity, defamation, and public order under Indian law." (250 Words)

Value Addition

- **Articles:** 19(1)(a), 19(2)
- **Keywords:** Hicklin Test, Community Standards Test, Obscenity, Profanity, Defamation, Public Order, Reasonable Restrictions, Freedom of Expression, Constitutional Morality.

03.08.2026

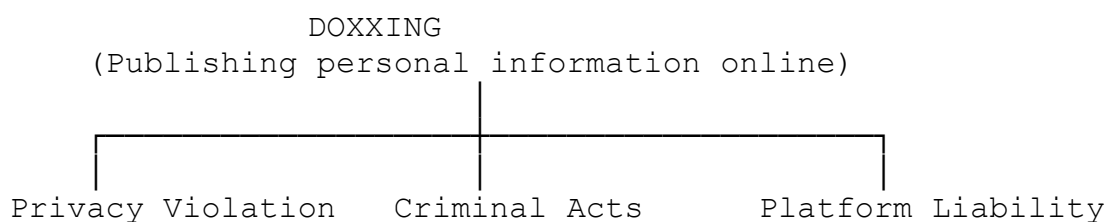
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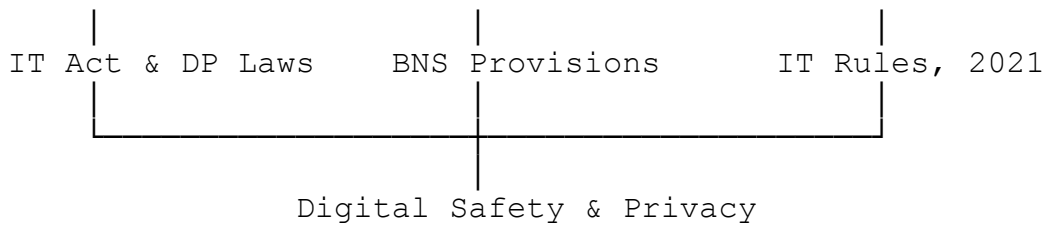
Doxxing in India – **Legal Framework, Challenges & Way Forward**

Brief

- Following protests at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, several women protesters were allegedly **doxxed online**, with their personal information (phone numbers, addresses, photographs) publicly shared, resulting in harassment, rape threats and death threats.

Mind Map





What is Doxxing?

Definition:

- **Doxxing** refers to the **public disclosure of an individual's personal information** (e.g., address, phone number, workplace, family details) without consent, often to intimidate, harass, shame or threaten them.

Note:

India **does not have a specific criminal offence for doxxing.** Victims rely on a combination of criminal and civil laws.

Legal Framework in India

1. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023

<i>Provision</i>	<i>Applicability</i>
Section 78	Stalking (repeated online contact or monitoring)
Section 79	Insulting modesty/privacy of a woman
Section 351	Criminal intimidation (death/rape threats)
Section 356	Criminal defamation (harm to reputation)

2. Information Technology Act, 2000

<i>Section</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Section 66E	Publishing private images/body parts without consent (criminal offence)
Section 72A	Unauthorised disclosure of personal information (primarily civil liability; compensation up to ₹5 lakh)

3. Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act

- **Section 12** invoked where the victim is a **minor** and subjected to sexual harassment.

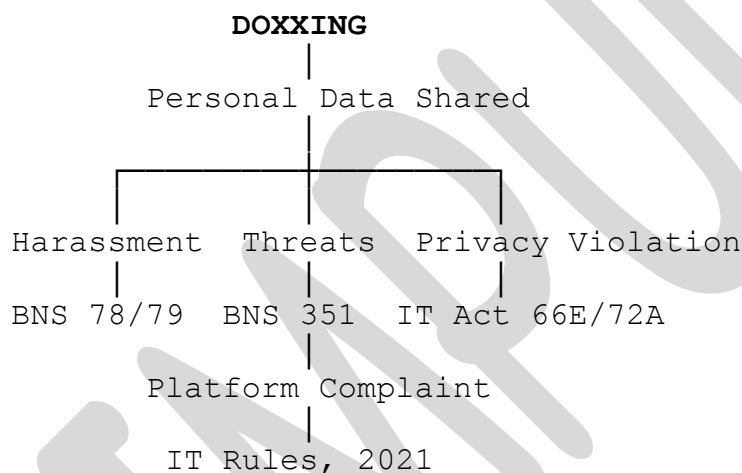
Platform Accountability

IT (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

Social media platforms must:

-  Acknowledge complaints within **24 hours**
-  Remove privacy-invasive or harassing content within **36 hours**
-  Resolve complaints within **7 days**
-  Failure may lead to loss of **Safe Harbour Protection**.

Concept Diagram



Challenges

- No standalone anti-doxxing legislation.
- Fragmented legal remedies under multiple laws.
- Slow platform compliance and inconsistent enforcement.
- Rapid viral spread of personal data.
- Greater vulnerability of women, journalists, activists and public figures.
- Balancing privacy protection with freedom of speech.

Way Forward

- Enact a **dedicated anti-doxxing law** defining the offence and prescribing penalties.
- Strengthen enforcement under the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**.

- Faster grievance redressal and stronger platform accountability.
- Promote digital literacy and cyber awareness.
- Enhance cyber police capacity and victim support mechanisms.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

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

1. Doxxing is expressly defined as a criminal offence under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
2. Section 66E of the Information Technology Act criminalises publishing private images without consent.
3. Under the IT Rules, 2021, intermediaries are required to acknowledge user complaints within 24 hours.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A.....India has no standalone criminal offence specifically called "doxxing." Section 66E covers violation of privacy through publication of private images, and the IT Rules prescribe complaint acknowledgement and takedown timelines.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

"The rise of doxxing exposes gaps in India's cyber and privacy laws. Discuss the adequacy of the existing legal framework to address online harassment while balancing the right to privacy and freedom of expression." (250 Words)



UPSC value Addition

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 21 – Right to Privacy (recognized in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, 2017**)
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression
- Article 19(2) – Reasonable restrictions

Important Judgments

- **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)** – Right to Privacy is a Fundamental Right.
- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)** – Protected online free speech while emphasizing lawful regulation of harmful content.

Keywords

- Doxxing
- Right to Privacy
- Article 21
- Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023
- Cyber Harassment
- Safe Harbour
- Intermediary Liability
- Online Gender-Based Violence
- Digital Governance
- Cyber Security

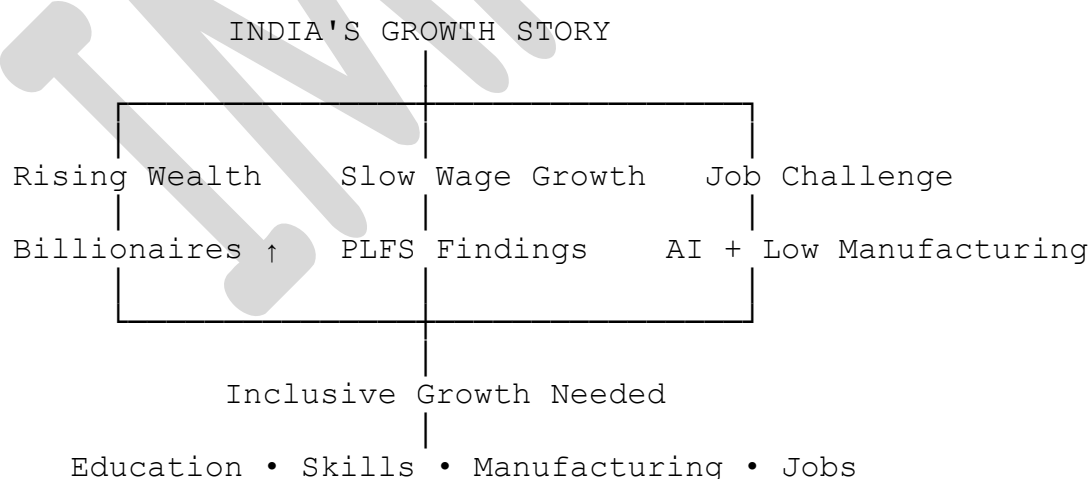
GS - III

Between Growth Haves and Have-Nots – Rising Inequality and Employment Challenge in India

Brief

- Recent data indicate a **sharp rise in the number of India's ultra-rich**, while wage growth and employment opportunities for a large section of the population remain modest, raising concerns about **inclusive growth** and the realization of the **demographic dividend**.

Mind Map



Key Facts & Data

Wealth Concentration

- Individuals with **gross total income $\geq$ ₹100 crore**:
 - **2021–22: 142**
 - **2025–26: 576**
- **UBS Global Wealth Report 2026**
 - India has **9.44 lakh dollar millionaires**, comparable to Switzerland.

Employment & Wages (PLFS 2025)

- **Average monthly salary of regular workers: ₹22,699**
 - Annual: ~₹2.7 lakh
- **Average daily wage (casual labour): ₹453**

Gig Economy Growth

- Zomato & Blinkit delivery partners: **has risen to 10 lakh numbers**
- Zepto delivery partners:
 - **2024: ~49,000**
 - **2026: 2.21 lakh in numbers**

Diagram: Uneven Growth

High-Income Group

▲
Wealth ↑↑↑
Consumption ↑
Luxury Goods ↑

|
Majority Population
Wages ↑ (Slow)
Jobs Limited
Consumption Weak
Employment Insecure

Major Issues

1. Rising Income Inequality

- Wealth growth concentrated among a small elite.
- Consumption increasingly driven by high-income households.

2. Slow Employment Growth

- Manufacturing has not generated sufficient labour-intensive jobs.
- Dependence on informal and gig economy employment.

3. AI and Technology Disruption

- IT sector, traditionally a source of upward mobility, faces automation-related challenges.

4. Limited Social Mobility

- High competition for government jobs.
- Exam leak controversies undermine trust in recruitment.
- Unequal access to quality education and skills.

Economic Significance

Why Inclusive Growth Matters

- Sustains domestic demand.
- Reduces inequality.
- Enhances social stability.
- Maximizes demographic dividend.
- Promotes balanced regional development.

Way Forward

- Promote **labour-intensive manufacturing** (textiles, food processing, electronics, MSMEs).
- Improve **quality education and vocational training** aligned with Industry 4.0.
- Strengthen **Skill India**, apprenticeship, and reskilling initiatives.
- Expand formal employment and social security for gig workers.
- Ensure transparent and timely recruitment in public employment.
- Encourage innovation, startups, and MSME financing.
- Invest in infrastructure to generate productive jobs.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding employment and income trends in India:

1. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) provides estimates of employment and wages.
2. The gig economy primarily consists of platform-based and short-term work arrangements.
3. Labour-intensive manufacturing is generally more effective than capital-intensive industries in generating large-scale employment.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

D. 1 and 2 only

Answer: A.....PLFS measures labour market indicators; gig work is platform-based; labour-intensive sectors create more jobs per unit of investment.



Probable UPSC Mains Questions

Q1. "India's economic growth has not translated into proportionate employment generation." Discuss the reasons and suggest measures to achieve inclusive growth. (250 words)

Q2. Examine the impact of rising income inequality on India's consumption pattern and long-term economic growth. (150 words)



Value Addition

Relevant Reports

- Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)
- UBS Global Wealth Report
- Economic Survey
- World Inequality Report (context)

Relevant Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 38:** Reduce inequalities.
- **Article 39:** Equitable distribution of resources.
- **Article 41:** Right to work, education and public assistance.
- **Article 43:** Living wage and decent working conditions.



UPSC Keywords

- Inclusive Growth
- Jobless Growth
- Demographic Dividend
- Gig Economy
- Labour Productivity
- Wage Stagnation
- Human Capital
- Social Mobility
- Skill Development
- Labour-Intensive Manufacturing
- Formalisation of Employment
- Consumption-Led Growth
- Income Inequality

04.08.2026

GS - III

US–Japan Joint Intervention in Yen Market & Impact on Indian Markets

Brief

- **US and Japan jointly intervened** in the foreign exchange market (first since **2011**) to support the **Japanese Yen**, which had fallen to a **40-year low**.
- The intervention aims to reduce excessive volatility and stabilize global financial markets.

Key Concepts

What is Currency Market Intervention?

- A central bank buys or sells its own currency in the forex market to influence its value.
- **Japan sold US dollars and bought Yen**, strengthening the Yen.
- The **US supported** the move through coordinated action.

Why was the Yen Weak?

- Ultra-low interest rates in Japan.
- Interest rate differential with the US.
- Capital outflow from Japan seeking higher returns abroad.
- Inflation and global uncertainty.

Why did the US Support Japan?

- Japan is one of the largest holders of **US Treasury Bonds**.
- A weak Yen may force Japan to sell US Treasuries.
- Selling Treasuries raises **US bond yields**, increasing borrowing costs for the US government.

Impact on India

Positive

- Stable global financial markets.
- Reduced volatility in currency markets.

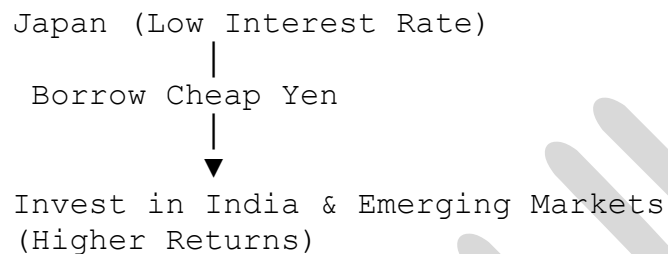
- Long-term investor confidence.

Negative

- **Unwinding of Yen Carry Trade** may lead to:
 - FII outflows from India.
 - Pressure on equity markets.
 - Rupee depreciation.
- Higher volatility in emerging markets.

☆ **However:** Analysts believe crude oil prices remain a bigger macro concern for India than Yen movements.

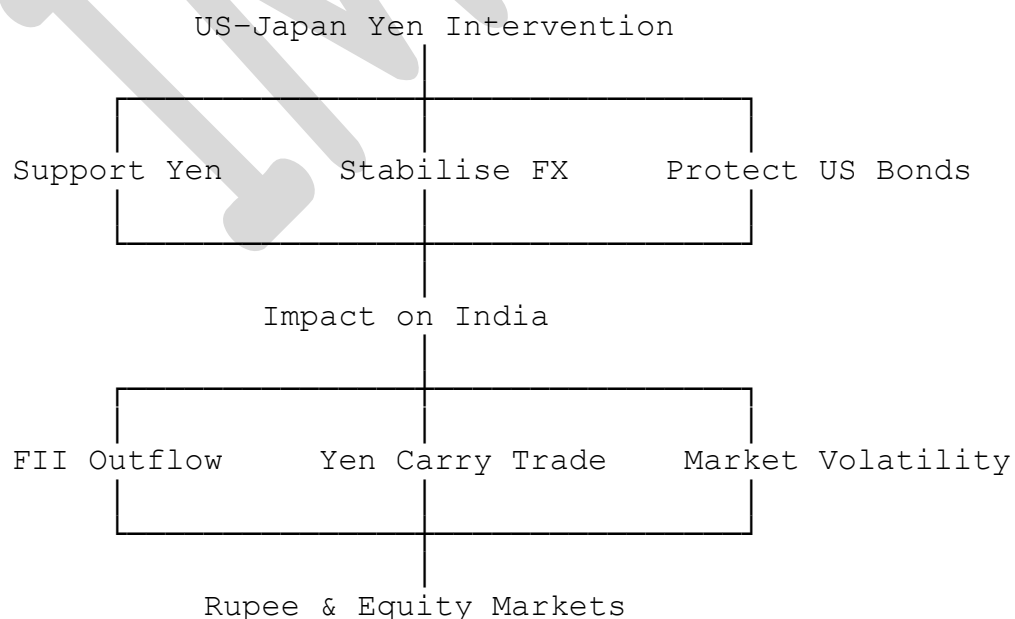
What is Yen Carry Trade?



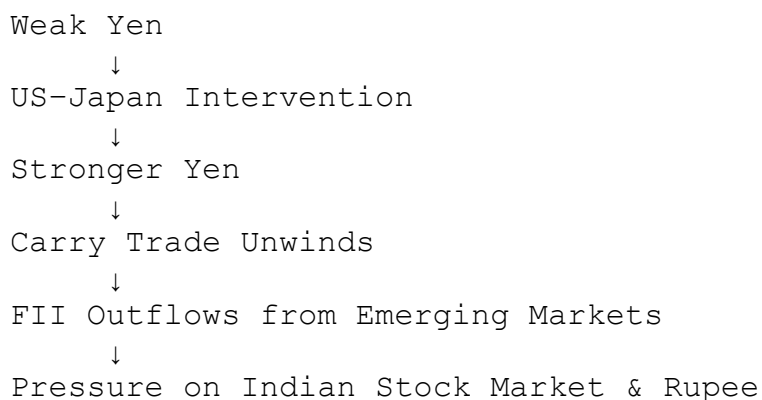
If Yen strengthens:

- Loan repayment becomes expensive.
- Investors sell Indian assets.
- Capital flows back to Japan.

Mind Map



Flow Diagram



Value Addition

Why is Japan Important?

- **World's largest creditor nation.**
- Major holder of US government debt.
- Important investor in Indian infrastructure.
- Key strategic partner under the Indo-Pacific framework.

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to the "Yen Carry Trade", consider the following statements:

1. Investors borrow Japanese Yen because interest rates in Japan have historically remained low.
2. A sharp appreciation of the Yen may trigger capital outflows from emerging markets.
3. India has no exposure to Yen Carry Trade.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. "Global currency market interventions by major economies have significant spillover effects on emerging markets like India." Discuss with reference to the recent US-Japan intervention in the Yen market. (250 Words)

Answer Hints

- Explain currency intervention and objectives.
- Discuss Yen Carry Trade mechanism.
- Analyse impact on FII flows, rupee, equity markets, and bond markets.
- Mention broader implications for India's macroeconomic stability.
- Suggest policy measures such as strengthening forex reserves, attracting stable long-term capital, and reducing dependence on volatile portfolio flows.

UPSC Keywords

Currency Intervention | Yen Carry Trade | FII Flows | Bond Yields | Exchange Rate | Monetary Policy | Forex Reserves | Capital Mobility | Financial Stability | Emerging Markets

Key Terms for UPSC

- Currency Intervention
- Forex Market
- Yen Carry Trade
- US Treasury Bonds
- Bond Yield
- Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs)
- Exchange Rate Volatility
- Capital Flows
- Monetary Policy

GS - II

Illegal Geotagging of Sensitive Forest Areas in Kerala

Brief

- Kerala Forest Department has decided to identify and remove **illegally geotagged locations** from online mapping platforms such as Google Maps.
- **Objective:** prevent **unauthorised entry into ecologically sensitive forest areas**, protect wildlife and reduce disaster risks.

What is Geotagging?

Geotagging = attaching precise **geographical coordinates/location** information to a photograph, video or place on a digital map.

Photo / Video / Location
↓
Geographical Coordinates
↓
Online Map / Navigation Platform
↓
Easy Public Access to Location

 When precise locations of **sensitive ecological sites** are publicly mapped without authorisation, it can facilitate illegal tourism and entry.

Why is Kerala Concerned?

1. Ecological Sensitivity

- Sensitive forest patches, including areas of **Silent Valley**, may be exposed.
- Even internal trekking trails used by forest officials have reportedly appeared on online maps.

2. Wildlife Protection

Geotagged Wildlife Corridor
↓
Increased Tourist Access
↓
Human-Wildlife Interaction
↓
Risk to Humans + Animals

- Exposure of wildlife corridors can increase encounters with:
 -  Elephants
 -  Big cats
 -  Bison

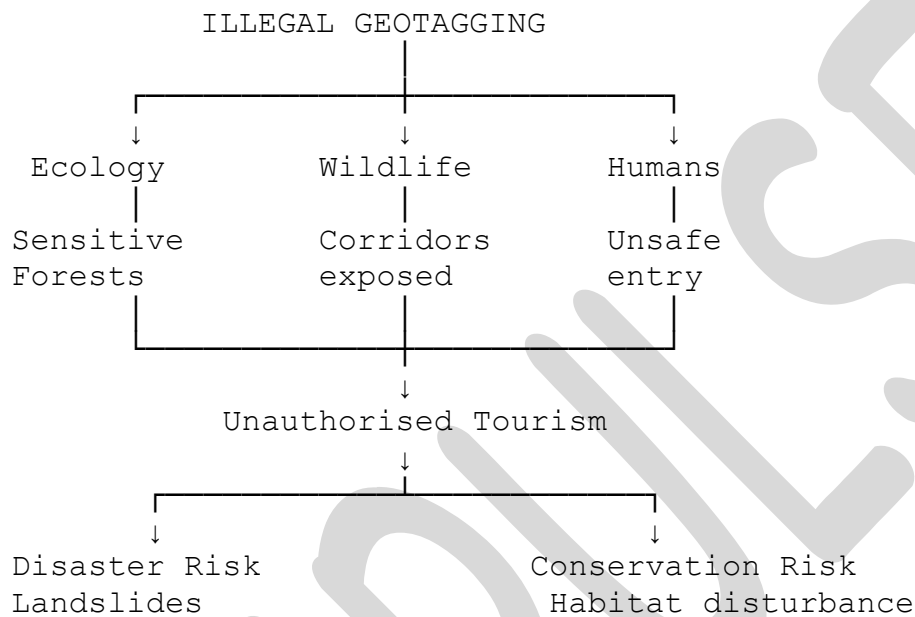
3. Disaster Risk

- Many such locations are mountainous and vulnerable to:
 - Landslides
 - Mudslides
 - Extreme monsoon conditions

4. Illegal Tourism

- Tourists may use online navigation to reach locations **without forest department permission**.
- This undermines regulated eco-tourism and forest management.

Mind Map



Governance Dimension

The issue reflects the need to balance:

Right to information/access to digital maps



VS

Ecological security + public safety + wildlife conservation

Government's proposed action:

- Forest Department's **IT Wing** → identify illegal tags.
- Forest Management Wing → examine sensitive locations.
- Submit list to online mapping platforms.
- Seek **removal of unauthorised locations**.
- Identify persons responsible for uploading locations.
- Initiate legal action where applicable.

UPSC Significance

Environment

- Protection of fragile ecosystems.
- Wildlife corridors.
- Habitat conservation.

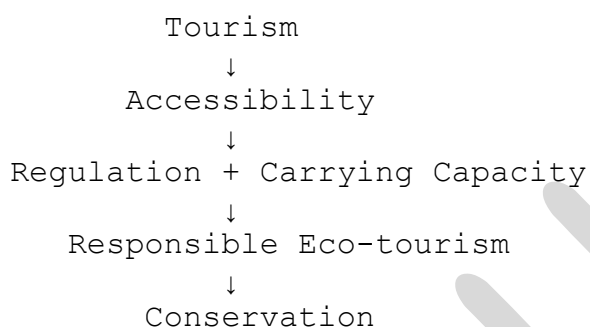
Technology & Governance

- Digital platforms can create unintended environmental consequences.
- Need for **responsible geospatial information management**.

Disaster Management

- Restricting access to landslide-prone areas can reduce human casualties.

Sustainable Tourism



Prelims Facts

Concept

Key Point

Geotagging

Linking digital content to geographic coordinates

Silent Valley

Ecologically important forest region in Kerala

Wildlife corridors

Facilitate movement of animals between habitats

Illegal geotagging

Unauthorised mapping of sensitive ecological locations

Major risks

Illegal entry, human-wildlife conflict, habitat disturbance, disasters

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to geotagging of ecologically sensitive areas, consider the following statements:

1. Geotagging involves associating digital content with geographical coordinates.
2. Publicly available geotags can facilitate unauthorised access to sensitive ecological locations.
3. Wildlife corridors are important only for preventing habitat fragmentation and have no relevance to human-wildlife conflict.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A

- **1 is correct:** Geotagging attaches geographical information to digital content.
- **2 is correct:** Precise online locations can encourage unauthorised tourism.
- **3 is incorrect:** Wildlife corridors also help regulate animal movement and can reduce human-wildlife conflict by maintaining habitat connectivity.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Digital accessibility can sometimes conflict with ecological security.” Discuss with reference to the Kerala government's action against illegal geotagging of forest locations. (150 Words)

Answer Framework

Introduction:

Digital maps and geotagging have improved navigation and information access, but unrestricted disclosure of sensitive ecological locations can create conservation and safety risks.

Body:

- **Ecological:** disturbance of fragile habitats and wildlife corridors.
- **Wildlife:** increased human-animal encounters.
- **Disaster:** tourist access to landslide/mudslide-prone areas.
- **Governance:** need coordination between forest departments and digital platforms.
- **Tourism:** promote regulated, carrying-capacity-based ecotourism.
- **Technology:** responsible disclosure of sensitive geospatial information.

Conclusion:

India needs a “**responsible geospatial governance**” framework where digital innovation is balanced with ecological protection, public safety and sustainable tourism.



UPSC Keywords

Geospatial Governance | Ecological Sensitivity | Wildlife Corridors | Human-Wildlife Conflict | Carrying Capacity | Eco-tourism | Digital Governance | Disaster Risk Reduction | Sustainable Development

05.08.2026

SC Extends Domestic Cruelty Protection to Certain Live-in Relationships

Brief

- The **Supreme Court** has expanded the protection against domestic cruelty under **Section 498A IPC**—now corresponding to **Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**—to certain women in **live-in relationships**.
- However, **not every live-in relationship qualifies**. The Court requires a relationship “**in the nature of marriage**” + **an intent to marry**.

1 Earlier Legal Position

Section 498A IPC

- Criminalised cruelty by a **husband or his relatives** against a woman.
- Traditionally applied to **legally valid marriages**.
- SC had gradually expanded its interpretation to include cases involving:
 - Void/voidable marriages.
 - Men who fraudulently induced women to believe they were legally married.

Present Position

Since IPC has been replaced:

Section 498A IPC → Section 85 BNS

IPC Section 498A

↓

BNS Section 85

↓

Protection against cruelty

↓

Expanded to qualifying live-in relationships

2 What Did the Supreme Court Hold?

The Court adopted a **purposive interpretation**.

Core reasoning:

- Objective of the law = **prevent domestic cruelty**.

- Cruelty does not disappear merely because the couple lacks a formal marriage certificate.
- Criminal protection should not become dependent solely on the technical validity of marriage.

Key principle: Law must respond to changing social realities while remaining within constitutional limits.

3 **NOT Every Live-in Relationship is Covered**

The Court distinguished between:

Ordinary Live-in Relationship



Not automatically covered.

Relationship in the Nature of Marriage



PLUS

Intent to Marry



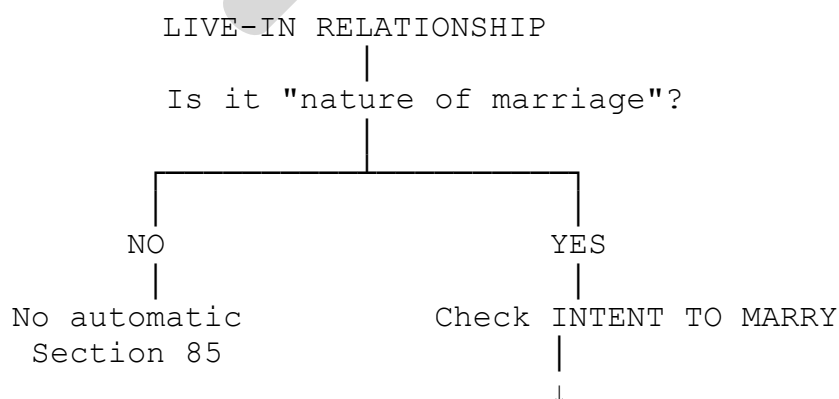
Protection under Section 85 BNS

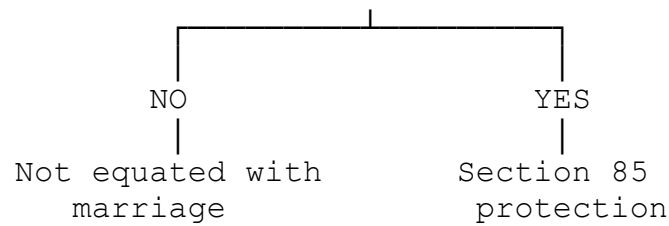
Conditions Indicating “Relationship in Nature of Marriage”

The Court referred to factors such as:

- **Pooling of financial resources**
- Shared domestic arrangements
- Sexual relationship
- Holding themselves out to society as spouses
- Other characteristics resembling marital life
- **Intent to marry** — additional requirement

Mind Map





4 **Why is “Intent to Marry” Important?**

- The Court recognised that some couples may satisfy several characteristics of a marriage-like relationship but **deliberately choose not to marry**.
- Therefore: **Live-in alone ≠ Marriage**
- The additional requirement prevents an excessively broad application of a **criminal provision**.
- The Court also indicated that the **initial burden of establishing intent to marry lies on the woman seeking protection**.

5 **Section 85 BNS vs Domestic Violence Act**

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Section 85 BNS</i>	<i>Domestic Violence Act, 2005</i>
Nature	Criminal	Primarily civil/protective
Focus	Punishment for cruelty	Protection/remedies
Coverage	Traditionally husband/relatives; now qualifying relationships	Includes relationship in nature of marriage
Remedies	Criminal prosecution	Protection orders, maintenance etc.
Objective	Criminal deterrence	Protection and relief

Why DV Act alone was insufficient?

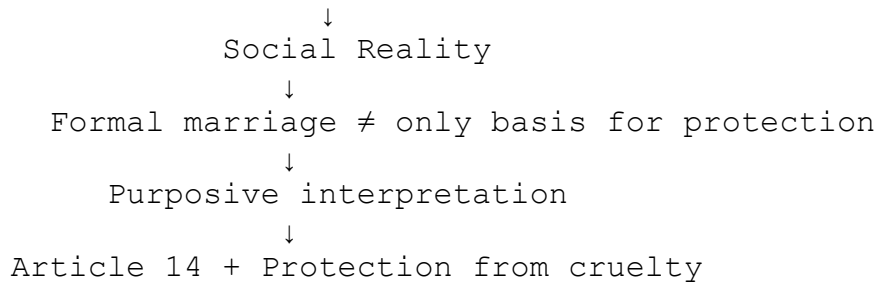
- The SC observed that **civil remedies under the DV Act and criminal deterrence under Section 85 serve different purposes**.
- Therefore, merely having access to civil remedies does not necessarily justify denying criminal protection.

Constitutional Dimension

Article 14 – Equality Before Law

- The Court reasoned that denying criminal protection merely because a woman is not formally married could create an **unreasonable distinction**, particularly when the underlying domestic relationship resembles marriage.

Domestic Cruelty



Significance

Women's Rights

- Extends criminal-law protection to vulnerable women outside formal marriage in qualifying circumstances.

Judicial Interpretation

- Demonstrates **purposive interpretation** rather than a purely literal reading.

Social Change

- Law adapts to changing family and relationship structures.

Safeguard against Overcriminalisation

- “Intent to marry” prevents **every live-in relationship** from being automatically treated as marriage.



Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to the Supreme Court's interpretation of domestic cruelty law, consider the following statements:

1. Every live-in relationship automatically attracts the protection available under Section 85 of the BNS.
2. A relationship in the nature of marriage may qualify for such protection if the partners also possess the requisite intent to marry.
3. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 recognises relationships in the nature of marriage.
4. The judgment is based partly on a purposive interpretation of the law.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: B

Prelims Trap:

- 👉 Live-in relationship ≠ automatically equivalent to marriage.
- 👉 Intent to marry is an additional requirement in the SC's formulation.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The judiciary must balance protection of women from domestic cruelty with the need to prevent over-extension of criminal law.” Discuss in light of the Supreme Court's recent judgment on live-in relationships. (250 Words)

Introduction:

The Supreme Court has extended the protection against domestic cruelty under Section 85 BNS to qualifying relationships in the nature of marriage where there is also an intent to marry.

Body:

Significance

- Protects women from a technicality-based denial of criminal protection.
- Recognises changing social realities.
- Advances substantive equality under Article 14.
- Distinguishes civil remedies from criminal deterrence.

Safeguards

- Not every live-in relationship is covered.
- Relationship must resemble marriage.
- Intent to marry is necessary.
- Initial burden of establishing such intent lies on the woman seeking protection.

Challenges

- “Intent to marry” is an internal state and may be difficult to establish.
- Possibility of inconsistent judicial interpretation.
- Need to balance women's protection with safeguards against misuse of criminal provisions.

Conclusion:

The judgment represents a **middle path between formalism and overcriminalisation**. Clear judicial guidelines on determining “intent to marry” can ensure both effective protection and legal certainty.



UPSC Keywords

Article 14 | Purposive Interpretation | Substantive Equality | Gender Justice | Domestic Cruelty | Section 85 BNS | Section 498A IPC | Live-in Relationship | Relationship in Nature of Marriage | Judicial Activism | Criminal Deterrence | Constitutional Morality

“Love Me Like AI Does” —

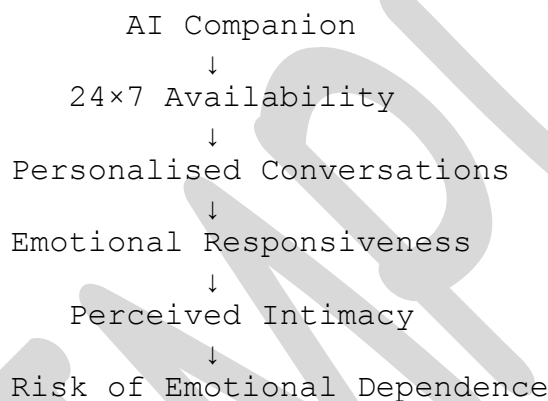
AI Companionship and the Future of Human Relationships

Brief

- The rapid growth of **AI companionship**—chatbots designed to provide emotional support, conversation and even simulated romantic relationships—has triggered regulatory concerns.
- **China** *has introduced safeguards against emotional dependence on AI*, including restrictions on virtual romantic relationships involving minors and alerts when users show signs of emotional distress.

1 What is AI Companionship?

AI companionship refers to AI systems designed to simulate human-like friendship, emotional support or romantic relationships.



🧠 Why are AI Companions Attractive?

Human relationships

- Require compromise
- Can involve rejection
- Misunderstandings and conflict
- Emotional vulnerability
- Time and effort

AI relationships

- Always available
- Highly responsive
- Personalised

- Patient
- Little/no risk of rejection
- Can be designed to provide constant validation

Core dilemma:

- AI can provide affection without the vulnerability normally associated with human relationships.

🇨🇳 Why is China Regulating AI Companionship?

China's concerns extend beyond technology.

1. Emotional Dependence

- Excessive reliance on chatbots may weaken real-world social relationships.

2. Mental Well-being

- Companies may need to respond when users display signs of emotional distress.

3. Children & Minors

- Virtual romantic relationships involving minors raise concerns about:
 - Psychological development
 - Manipulation
 - Sexual exploitation
 - Unhealthy attachment

4. Demographic Concerns

Ageing Population
+
Population Decline
+
Historically Low Birth Rate
↓
Concern over weakening family formation
↓
AI companionship adds another dimension

Important UPSC nuance:

- AI companionship cannot be assumed to be the direct cause of demographic decline. Rather, it raises questions about how technology may interact with **loneliness, social isolation and changing relationship patterns.**

Global Regulatory Response

China

- Restrictions on cultivating excessive emotional dependence.
- Protection of minors from virtual romantic relationships.
- Alerts for signs of emotional distress.

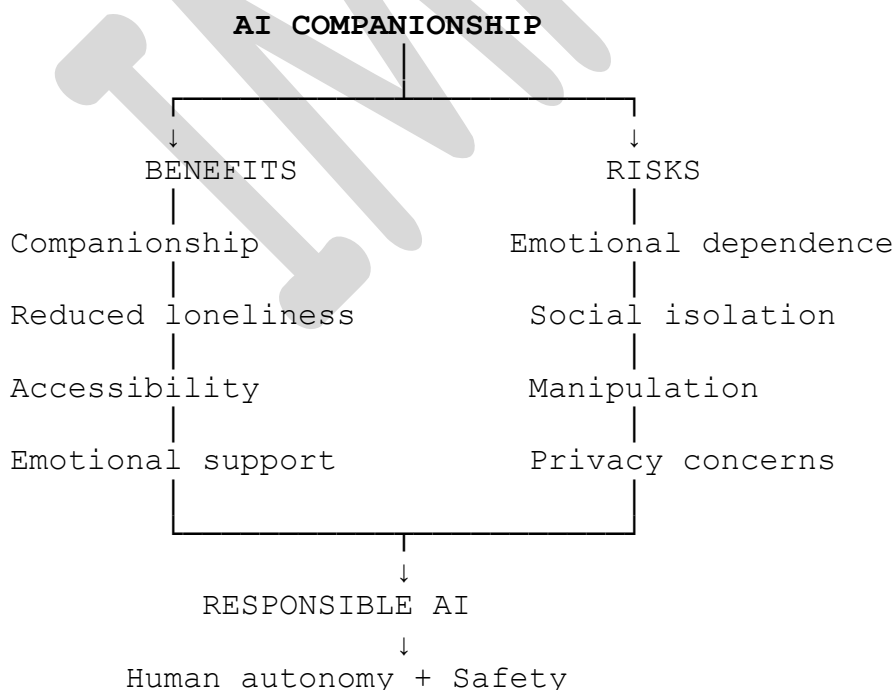
United States

- States such as **New York and California** have introduced measures requiring AI chatbots to periodically clarify that they are **not human**.

Ethical Concerns

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Concern</i>
Emotional manipulation	AI may be designed to maximise user engagement
Dependency	Users may substitute AI for human relationships
Privacy	Highly intimate conversations generate sensitive personal data
Children	Vulnerability to manipulation and inappropriate content
Mental health	AI may not reliably recognise or manage crises
Authenticity	Simulated affection is not equivalent to human emotion
Commercial incentives	Companies may benefit from prolonged emotional attachment

Ethical Dilemma



UPSC Significance

Society

- Changing nature of intimacy and relationships.
- Rise of loneliness and social isolation.
- Changing meaning of companionship.

Science & Technology

- Human-AI interaction.
- Anthropomorphism.
- Algorithmic emotional manipulation.

Ethics

Relevant principles:

- Autonomy
- Human dignity
- Non-maleficence
- Privacy
- Informed consent
- Accountability

Governance

Need for:

- Age-appropriate safeguards.
- Transparency about AI identity.
- Emotional-dependency monitoring.
- Data protection.
- Independent auditing of AI companions.
- Stronger safeguards for vulnerable users.



Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to AI companionship, consider the following statements:

1. AI companions can be designed to simulate friendship or romantic relationships.
2. Emotional dependence on AI can raise concerns relating to autonomy and mental well-being.
3. Requiring AI systems to disclose that they are non-human is one possible regulatory safeguard.
4. AI companionship has been conclusively established as the primary cause of declining fertility rates in ageing societies.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: B

Prelims trap: Correlation between demographic change and AI companionship should **not** be treated as established causation.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The rise of AI companionship challenges the conventional understanding of intimacy, autonomy and human relationships.” Discuss the ethical and regulatory challenges associated with AI companions. (250 Words)

Introduction:

AI companionship represents a new form of human-machine interaction in which algorithms simulate friendship, emotional support and romantic intimacy.

Opportunities:

- Reduces loneliness.
- Provides accessible companionship.
- Can offer conversational and emotional support.
- Useful for socially isolated individuals.

Concerns:

- Emotional dependence.
- Manipulation through personalised algorithms.
- Privacy risks from intimate data.
- Vulnerability of children.
- Blurring of human-machine boundaries.
- Commercialisation of emotional attachment.
- Possible weakening of real-world social interactions.

Way Forward:

- Mandatory disclosure that AI is non-human.
- Age verification and child safeguards.
- Restrictions on manipulative emotional design.
- Data minimisation and privacy protection.
- Human oversight in high-risk situations.
- Independent audits and transparency.

Conclusion:

The objective should not be to prohibit AI companionship outright, but to ensure that **technology complements rather than replaces meaningful human relationships**, while protecting autonomy, dignity and vulnerable users.

UPSC Keywords

AI Companionship | Emotional Dependence | Anthropomorphism | Human-AI Interaction | Algorithmic Manipulation | Digital Well-being | Privacy | Autonomy | Human Dignity | Responsible AI | AI Governance | Technology & Society

06.08.2026

GS -II

SC Safeguards for Live-in Partners & Protection Against Domestic Cruelty

Brief

- The **Supreme Court** has held that protection against domestic cruelty under **Section 498A IPC**, now corresponding to **Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**, can extend to women in **live-in relationships that are “in the nature of marriage”**, subject to the Court's prescribed conditions.
- The judgment seeks to reconcile **women's protection, changing social realities** and **safeguards against unnecessary criminal prosecution**.

1 Core SC Position

Formal Marriage
≠
Only basis for protection
↓
Relationship in nature of marriage
+
Genuine intent to marry
↓
Protection against domestic cruelty
under Section 85 BNS

Key principle

Substance of the relationship > merely its formal status

Domestic abuse is rooted in **power imbalance, coercion and violence**, and its impact does not disappear simply because a relationship was not formally solemnised.

2 Existing Legal Protection

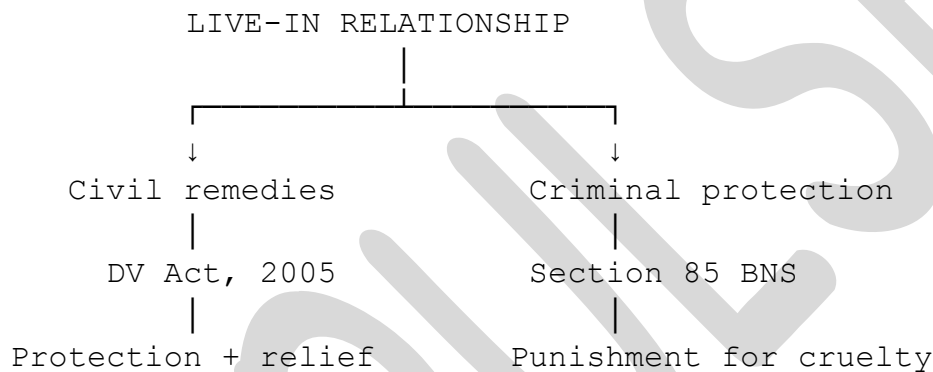
Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

The Act already recognises a “relationship in the nature of marriage” and provides civil/protective remedies such as:

- Protection orders
- Residence-related relief
- Monetary relief
- Compensation

SC's latest approach

The Court distinguishes these civil remedies from **criminal deterrence under Section 85 BNS**.



3 How is “Nature of Marriage” Determined?

The SC's earlier decisions provide relevant indicators.

- ☐ **Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal (2010)**
- ☐ **Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013)**

Relevant factors include:

- Couple living together for a considerable period
- **Permanence** of relationship
- **Commitment**
- Shared domestic life
- Relationship resembling that of spouses

👉 **Intent to marry**

Thus:

Every live-in relationship ≠ relationship in nature of marriage.

Safeguard: Arnesh Kumar Guidelines

The SC has directed that safeguards laid down in **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)** must be followed.

Why important?

- Section 498A-type offences have historically raised concerns regarding **unnecessary arrests and misuse of criminal procedure**.

Therefore:

Allegation of cruelty

↓

Legal scrutiny

↓

Arnesh Kumar safeguards

↓

Avoid automatic arrest

↓

Balance victim protection + accused's rights

- ☆ This represents the constitutional principle that **criminal law must protect victims without becoming mechanically punitive**.

Why is the Judgment Significant?

Women's Rights

- Extends protection to vulnerable women outside formally solemnised marriages.
- Recognises domestic violence as a **substantive problem rather than a formal marital-status issue**.

Constitutionalism

- Promotes substantive equality.
- Responds to evolving social realities.

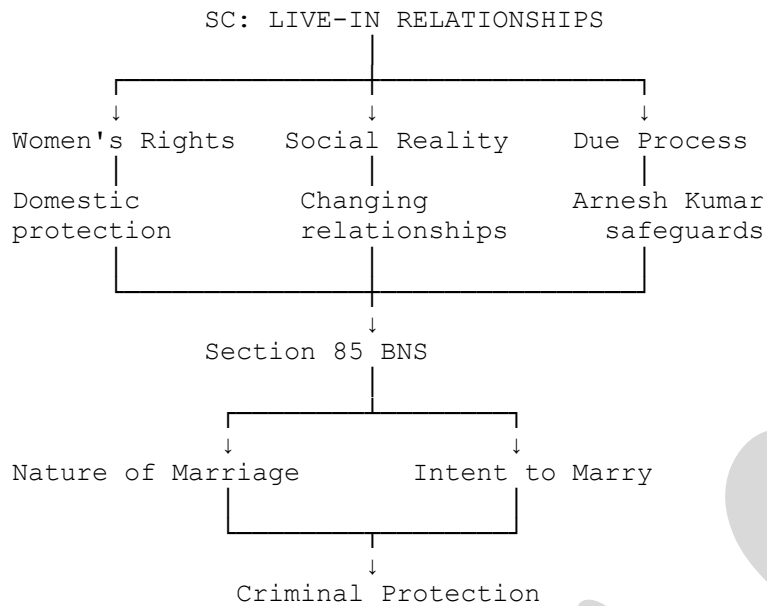
Judicial Role

- Demonstrates **purposive interpretation**.
- Balances competing rights.

Due Process

- Application of **Arnesh Kumar safeguards** prevents automatic criminalisation.

Mind Map



Important Cases for UPSC

Case

Significance

D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal (2010)	Identified characteristics of relationship in nature of marriage
Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013)	Elaborated conditions for recognising marriage-like relationships
Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)	Safeguards against unnecessary arrest in cruelty-related cases
Recent SC judgment	Extended Section 85 protection to qualifying live-in relationships with requisite intent to marry

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to the Supreme Court's approach towards live-in relationships, consider the following statements:

1. Every live-in relationship is automatically treated as a marriage for invoking Section 85 of the BNS.
2. A relationship in the nature of marriage may receive criminal-law protection where the requisite intent to marry exists.
3. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 recognises relationships in the nature of marriage.

4. The Supreme Court has directed that safeguards laid down in *Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar* be followed.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: B...A live-in relationship by itself does **not** automatically attract Section 85 BNS.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The Supreme Court's extension of domestic-cruelty protection to certain live-in relationships reflects a shift from formal marital status towards substantive protection.” Discuss. (250 Words)

Introduction:

The SC has extended Section 85 BNS protection against domestic cruelty to relationships in the nature of marriage where there is a genuine intent to marry.

Significance

- Protects women from violence despite absence of formal solemnisation.
- Recognises changing social realities.
- Advances substantive equality and gender justice.
- Complements the civil remedies available under the DV Act.

Safeguards

- Relationship must possess marriage-like characteristics.
- Requisite intent to marry.
- Earlier SC jurisprudence provides factors such as permanence and commitment.
- *Arnesh Kumar* safeguards against unnecessary arrest.

Challenges

- Proving an individual's “intent to marry” can be difficult.
- Possibility of inconsistent application.
- Need to balance protection of women with procedural fairness.

Conclusion:

The judgment attempts a **middle path between legal formalism and unchecked criminalisation**. Clear procedural guidelines and sensitive judicial application are essential to ensure that both **women's dignity and due process** are protected.

🔑 UPSC Keywords

Substantive Equality | Gender Justice | Purposive Interpretation | Domestic Violence | Section 85 BNS | Live-in Relationship | Relationship in Nature of Marriage | Article 14 | Due Process | Arnesh Kumar Safeguards | Judicial Activism | Constitutional Morality

GS - III

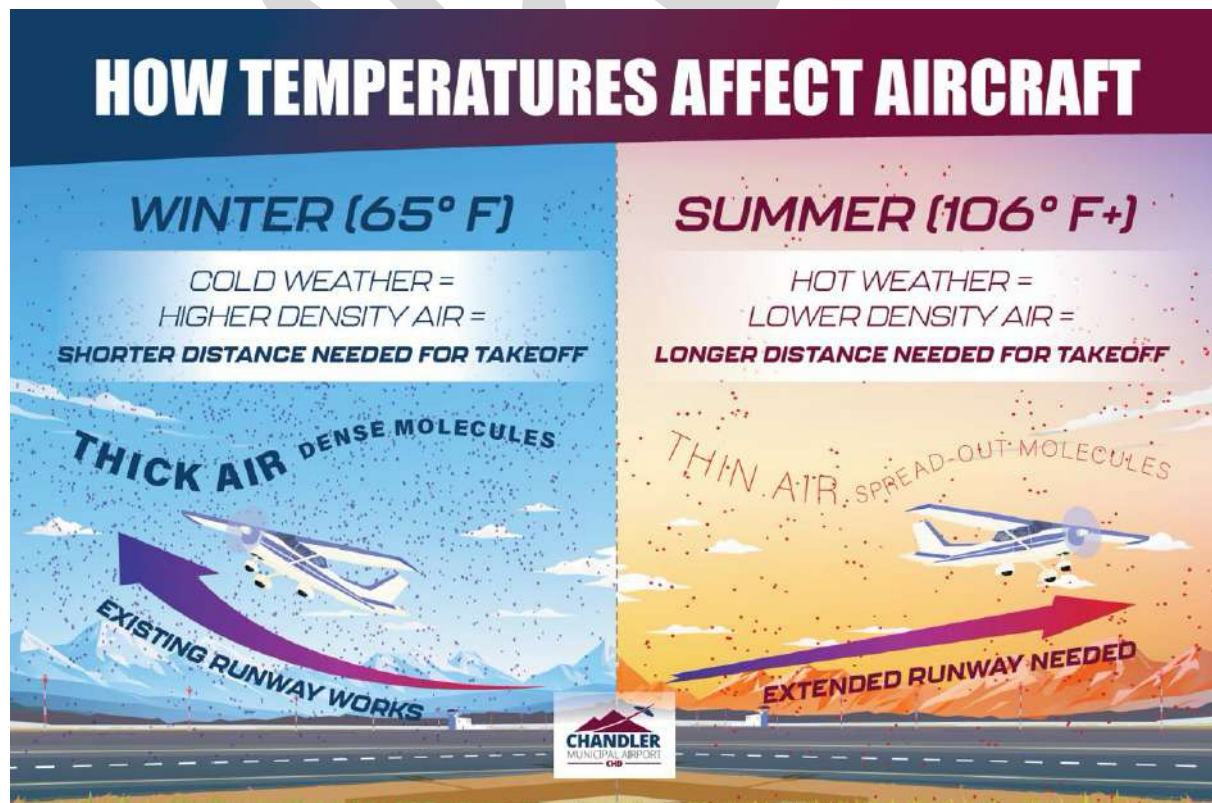
Extreme Heat & Aircraft Take-off

Brief

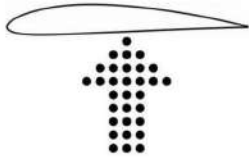
- With heat waves searing parts of the US and Europe this summer, Las Vegas illustrated how extreme heat can interfere with air travel.
- American Airlines offered compensation to customers who voluntarily gave up their seats on a July 24 flight from Harry Reid International Airport after temperatures reached 47 degrees Celsius.

🔑 Core Concept

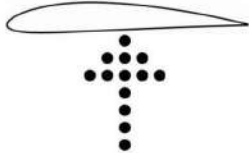
High temperature → Air density ↓ → Aircraft performance ↓ → Take-off becomes difficult



Cold temperature =
more air, more lift



Hot temperature =
less air, less lift



Why does extreme heat affect flights?

- Hot air is less dense than cool air.
- Lower air density means:
 - **Less lift** generated by aircraft wings at a given speed.
 - **Less thrust** from jet engines because engines receive less oxygen-rich air.
- Therefore, aircraft need **greater speed and/or longer runway distance** to achieve safe take-off.
- Airlines may have to reduce **aircraft weight** by:
 - Carrying less cargo
 - Removing passengers
 - Reducing fuel load, where operationally feasible.

Factors determining take-off performance

Temperature ↑
↓
Air density ↓
↓
Lift + Engine thrust ↓
↓
Required take-off distance ↑
↓
Risk of operational restrictions/delays ↑

Other important variables:

Airport elevation ↑ → Air density ↓

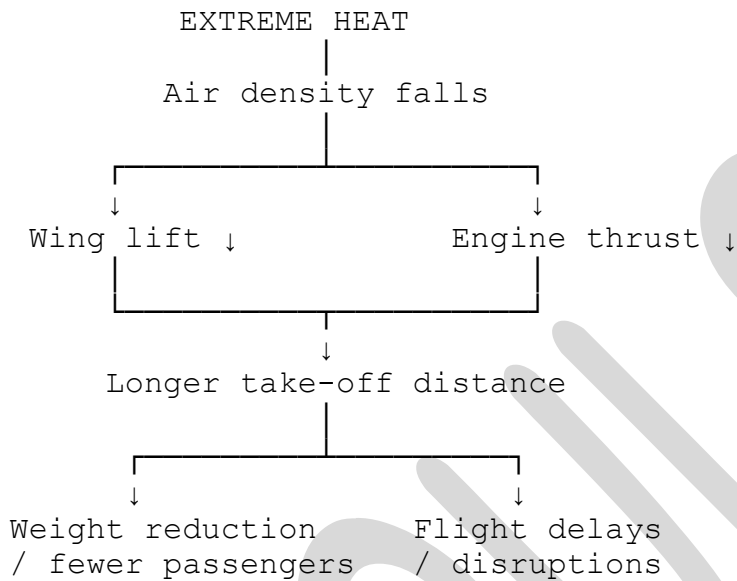
Runway length ↓ → Less distance available for acceleration

 Hence, **hot + high-altitude + short-runway airports** are particularly vulnerable.

Climate Change Link

- Rising global temperatures and more frequent **heatwaves** can increase the number of days when aircraft face heat-related operational restrictions.
- This represents an example of **climate change affecting infrastructure and transport systems**, even without storms or heavy rainfall.

Mind Map



UPSC Significance

Environment: Climate-change impacts → infrastructure vulnerability

Geography: Atmospheric temperature → air density

Physics: Lift, thrust and density

Economy: Flight delays → tourism, logistics and aviation costs

Disaster management: Heatwave preparedness for critical infrastructure

Prelims Question

Q. With reference to the effect of extreme heat on aircraft operations, consider the following statements:

1. Hot air is less dense than cold air.
2. Lower air density can reduce the lift generated by an aircraft wing at a given speed.
3. High-altitude airports are generally more vulnerable to temperature-related take-off restrictions.
4. Longer runways can help compensate for reduced aircraft performance during very hot conditions.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: D.....All four statements are correct. High temperature reduces air density, affecting both wing lift and engine performance. High elevation further reduces air density, while longer runways provide greater distance for the aircraft to accelerate.



Probable Mains Question

Q. “Climate change is increasingly becoming an infrastructure and operational challenge, not merely an environmental issue.” Discuss with reference to the impact of extreme heat on aviation. (150 words)

Answer structure:

Introduction → Physics of heat and air density → impact on lift/thrust → vulnerability of high-altitude/short-runway airports → climate-change implications → adaptation measures → conclusion.

Conclusion:

Extreme heat demonstrates how climate change can affect the **design, capacity and reliability of critical infrastructure**. Aviation planning must therefore integrate heat-risk assessments, resilient airport design, operational temperature thresholds and broader climate adaptation strategies.

SC Gender Guide —

From Neutral Language to Gender-Sensitive Justice



Brief

- The **Supreme Court's 2026 report, “Judgments and Gender: Sensitivity and Compassion in Writing Judgments”**, seeks to make judicial processes more **gender-sensitive, survivor-centric and trauma-informed**.
- It differs from the **2023 Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes** mainly in its emphasis:

2023 → language and stereotypes;

2026 → courtroom practices, survivor trauma and judicial conduct.

2023 vs 2026: Key Difference

Aspect	2023 Handbook	2026 Report
Main focus	Identifying patriarchal/gender-stereotypical language	Compassionate and survivor-sensitive justice
Target	Judicial language & reasoning	Trial procedures + judgment writing
Approach	Replace archaic/colloquial terms with neutral legal terminology	Avoid moralistic, victim-blaming and insensitive expressions
Key idea	Gender-neutral judicial language	Emotional Quotient + legal competence
Evidence base	General judicial guidance	Analysis of 125 trial-court judgments
Survivor protection	Limited emphasis	Central focus
Courtroom conduct	Less prominent	Control aggressive cross-examination, prevent secondary trauma
Broader objective	Remove stereotypes	Make justice accessible, dignified and trauma-informed

Key Recommendations of 2026 Report

1. Prevent Secondary Traumatization

Sexual assault
 ↓
 Primary trauma
 ↓
 Police / court / cross-examination
 ↓
 Insensitive treatment
 ↓
 SECONDARY TRAUMA
 ↓
 Reduced willingness to seek justice

2. Compassionate Court Practices

- Judges should actively prevent **aggressive or humiliating cross-examination**.
- Defence lawyers should comply with safeguards against **indecent or annoying questions**.
- Survivor's **sexual history is generally immaterial** to determining rape.
- Sexual-offence trials should be conducted **in camera/closed proceedings** where legally applicable.
- Victims should receive **pre-trial counselling**.
- Witnesses should be treated as **guests assisting the court**, rather than being subjected to unnecessary waiting and poor treatment.

3. “Emotional Quotient” of Judges

Judicial competence = IQ + EQ

➡ Legal knowledge

+

➡ Empathy & sensitivity

+

➡ Awareness of trauma

= **Survivor-centric justice**

👉 Language Reform

❌ **Avoid:**

“Crime destroyed the very soul of a helpless woman.”

✅ **Prefer:**

“The crime caused severe trauma to the survivor.”

Principle:

Moral judgement → Legal description

Judges are also advised to avoid unnecessary **religious/cultural references** and focus on constitutional and legal rights.

⚠️ Why Was the New Report Needed?

Allahabad HC judgment (March 2025)

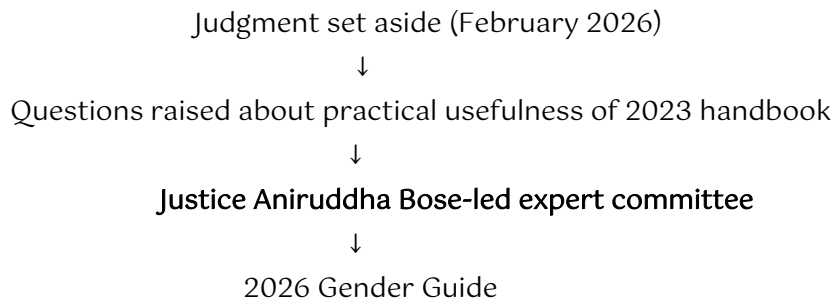
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Controversial characterisation of sexual assault as merely “preparation” for rape

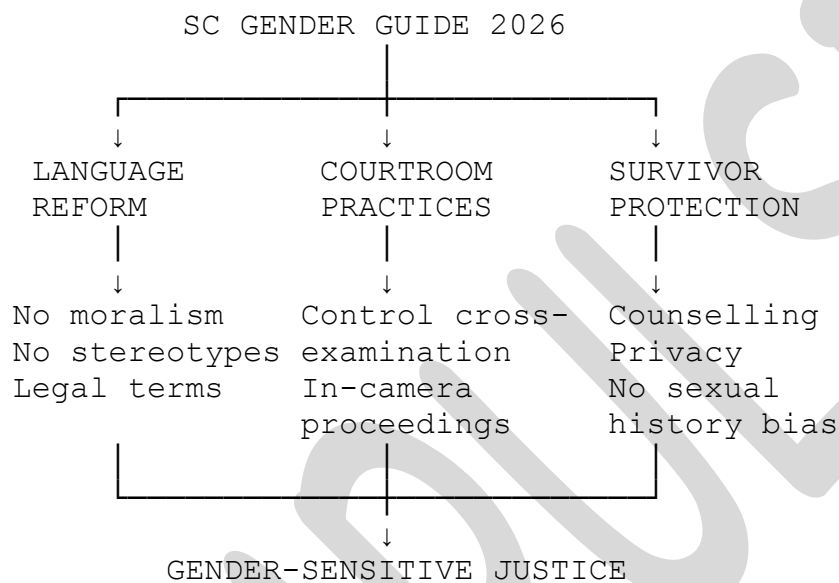
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SC suo motu intervention

↓



Mind Map



UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to the Supreme Court's gender-sensitivity guidelines, consider the following statements:

1. The 2026 report places greater emphasis on courtroom practices and secondary traumatisation than the 2023 handbook.
2. The report recommends that a survivor's sexual history should generally be treated as relevant evidence in rape trials.
3. It advocates sensitivity in judicial language and discourages moralistic descriptions of survivors.
4. It emphasises the importance of an “Emotional Quotient” alongside judicial legal competence.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

✓ **Answer: A.....**Statement 2 is incorrect. The report reiterates that a survivor's sexual history is generally **immaterial to a rape trial**.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Gender-sensitive justice requires not merely changing judicial vocabulary but transforming courtroom practices.” Discuss in the context of the Supreme Court's 2026 gender guide. (250 words)

Introduction:

Gender justice requires equality not only in substantive law but also in the manner in which victims experience the justice system.

Body:

- 2023 handbook → **elimination of patriarchal stereotypes and neutral terminology.**
- 2026 report → moves towards **trauma-informed and compassionate judicial practices.**
- Prevent secondary victimisation through controlled cross-examination.
- Sexual history should not become a tool for victim-blaming.
- Closed-door proceedings and privacy protection.
- Pre-trial counselling and better treatment of witnesses.
- Judges require both **legal competence and emotional sensitivity.**
- Avoid moralistic/religious/cultural descriptions and focus on legally relevant facts.
- Strengthens **Article 14 equality, Article 15 non-discrimination and Article 21 dignity.**

Conclusion:

The shift from “**correct language**” to “**correct institutional behaviour**” represents a deeper evolution in India's gender-justice framework. Its success, however, will depend on judicial training, consistent implementation and institutional accountability.

07.08.2026

GS-II

India-Bangladesh Relations —

Why Ties Should Be “Hasina-Proof”



Brief

- The political return of former Bangladesh PM **Sheikh Hasina** from exile has created fresh diplomatic sensitivities between India and Bangladesh.
- The broader lesson is that **India-Bangladesh relations should be institutional and interest-based rather than dependent on a particular political leader or party.**



Core Issue

Sheikh Hasina in India



Political comeback announcement



Dhaka's diplomatic concerns



Risk of India-Bangladesh tensions



Need for “Hasina-proof” bilateral relations



Institutional + pragmatic engagement



Why Bangladesh Matters to India?

1. Geographical importance

- India and Bangladesh share a **~4,000-km land border**.
- Bangladesh is crucial for India's **Northeast connectivity**.

2. Security

- Cooperation is necessary against:
 - Cross-border terrorism
 - Extremism
 - Human trafficking
 - Illegal migration
 - Smuggling

3. Connectivity

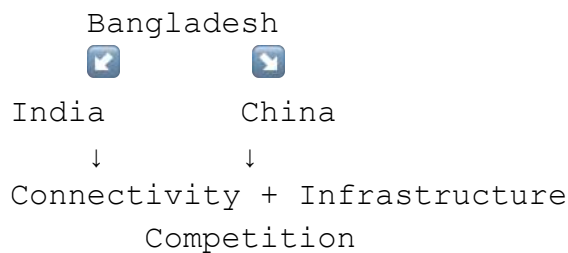
- Bangladesh provides important routes for India's **Northeast-mainland connectivity**.

- Road, rail, inland waterways and port connectivity can reduce the geographical isolation of the Northeast.

4. Economic interests

- India has invested in Bangladesh's:
 - Power sector
 - Infrastructure
 - Connectivity
- Bangladesh is an important economic partner in India's neighbourhood.

5. Strategic competition



India is concerned about excessive Chinese strategic and economic influence in Bangladesh.

! Major Challenges

- **Political transition:** India's traditionally close relationship with the Awami League creates perceptions of political bias.
- **Sheikh Hasina's presence in India:** Her political statements can complicate India's relations with Dhaka.
- **Illegal migration & border management**
- **Ganga Water Treaty:** Long-standing unresolved issue.
- **Trade and economic concerns**
- **China's growing footprint**
- **Cross-border security**
- **Public perception and political trust**

🧠 "Hasina-Proof" Diplomacy

The phrase essentially means:

India should maintain strong relations with Bangladesh irrespective of which political party or leader is in power.

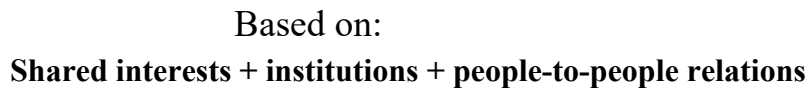
From:

Leader-centric diplomacy



To:

Institution-centric diplomacy



```

graph TD
    A[INDIA-BANGLADESH] --> B[SECURITY]
    A --> C[ECONOMY]
    A --> D[CONNECTIVITY]
    B --> B1[Border]
    B --> B2[Terrorism]
    B --> B3[Trafficking]
    C --> C1[Investment]
    C --> C2[Power]
    C --> C3[Trade]
    D --> D1[Rail/Road]
    D --> D2[Waterways]
    D --> D3[Ports]
    B1 --> E[STRATEGIC TRUST]
    B2 --> E
    B3 --> E
    C1 --> E
    C2 --> E
    C3 --> E
    D1 --> E
    D2 --> E
    D3 --> E
    E --> F[Ganga Treaty]
    E --> G[Migration]
    E --> H[China factor]
    E --> I[Regional security]
    F --> J[INSTITUTIONAL TIES]
    G --> J
    H --> J
    I --> J
    J --> K["HASINA-PROOF"]

```

Q. With reference to India-Bangladesh relations, consider the following statements:

1. Bangladesh is strategically important for India's connectivity with its northeastern states.
2. India and Bangladesh share a land border of more than 4,000 km.
3. Cooperation between the two countries is relevant to combating cross-border trafficking and extremism.
4. The Ganga Water Treaty remains an important issue in bilateral relations.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

✓ **Answer:** C.....Statements 1, 3 and 4 are correct. The India–Bangladesh land border is approximately **4,096 km**, so statement 2's “more than 4,000 km” is broadly accurate as a rounded figure; however, for a precision-based UPSC question, the official figure is about 4,096 km. Thus, if interpreted literally, statement 2 is also correct. **Therefore, D is the better answer.**

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “India–Bangladesh relations must move from leader-centric diplomacy to institution-centric engagement.” Discuss the significance of this approach for India's neighbourhood policy. (250 words)

Introduction:

India–Bangladesh relations have deep geographical, economic, cultural and security interdependence. Political transitions, however, can create temporary strains.

Why institutionalisation is necessary

- Ensures continuity despite changes in government.
- Prevents bilateral ties from becoming dependent on individual leaders.
- Strengthens diplomatic predictability.
- Facilitates long-term infrastructure and connectivity projects.

Areas requiring cooperation

- Border management and security
- Trade and investment
- Energy cooperation
- Northeast connectivity
- River-water sharing
- Counter-terrorism
- People-to-people relations

Challenges

- Political distrust
- Illegal migration
- Water-sharing disputes
- Chinese influence
- Domestic political sensitivities

Way forward

- Maintain dialogue with the elected government.
- Separate bilateral interests from individual political personalities.
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms and Track-II diplomacy.
- Resolve outstanding issues through sustained negotiations.
- Expand economic interdependence.

Conclusion:

India's Bangladesh policy should be **government-to-government, institution-to-institution and people-to-people**, rather than personality-driven. A stable Bangladesh partnership is essential for India's **Neighbourhood First policy, Northeast development and regional security**.

GS -II

Why HC overturned trial court's acquittal of Tejpal

The Bombay High Court criticised the trial court for focusing on survivor's conduct and for allowing an invasive cross-examination into her past

The 'perfect victim' myth

The defence argued that the survivor's composure, later photos and talk of a severance package showed no genuine trauma.

The High Court rejected this.

'These concepts of a perfect victim are a myth. Credibility must be evaluated on facts,' it said.

Behind Tejpal Verdict — Survivor's Long Journey

Brief

- **Tarun Tejpal sexual-assault case** emerged in **2013**, amid the nationwide debate on women's safety following the **2012 Delhi gang rape**.
- A Goa sessions court **acquitted Tejpal in 2021**.
- The **Bombay High Court** later **convicted him and sentenced him to 10 years' imprisonment**, according to the article.
- The case highlights the continuing tension between **victim-sensitive justice** and traditional approaches to assessing sexual-assault testimony.

Why the verdict is significant

Sexual violence → Criminal justice → Survivor's testimony → Accountability

2012 Delhi gang rape
↓
National debate on gender justice
↓
Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013
↓
Tejpal case (2013)
↓
Sessions Court acquittal (2021)
↓
Bombay HC conviction
↓
Debate on survivor-sensitive justice

Key Issues

A. Victim-blaming

- Trial proceedings can sometimes focus excessively on the **conduct, appearance and behaviour of the survivor**.
- The assumption that a “genuine victim” must appear frightened, traumatised or emotionally distressed can reinforce stereotypes.
- **Trauma responses vary** among individuals.

B. Consent

- Sexual-assault adjudication must distinguish between:
 - genuine consent,
 - absence of consent,
 - coercion/intimidation,
 - and the subsequent conduct of the survivor.
- A survivor's later behaviour should not automatically determine whether an assault occurred.

C. Power asymmetry

- The case raises questions about how **institutional position, professional hierarchy and influence** can affect women's ability to seek justice.

Important Constitutional & Legal Linkages

<i>Area</i>	<i>UPSC relevance</i>
Article 14	Equality before law
Article 15(3)	Special provisions for women and children
Article 21	Life, dignity and personal liberty
Criminal Law Amendment, 2013	Strengthened legal framework concerning sexual offences

<i>Area</i>	<i>UPSC relevance</i>
Justice J.S. Verma Committee	Recommended comprehensive reforms after 2012 rape case
POSH Act, 2013	Prevention of sexual harassment at workplace

Gender-sensitive justice

Gender Justice

- Survivor dignity
- Fair investigation
- Sensitive courtroom procedures
- Protection from secondary trauma
- Impartial trial
- Accountability of perpetrators

Core principle:

Justice should scrutinise the alleged offence, not impose stereotypes about how a survivor should behave.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **gender-sensitisation training** for police, prosecutors and judges.
- Ensure **trauma-informed investigation and trial procedures**.
- Avoid irrelevant scrutiny of a survivor's character or post-incident behaviour.
- Improve witness/survivor protection.
- Ensure speedy trials without compromising due process.
- Implement the recommendations of the **Justice J.S. Verma Committee** more effectively.

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

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

1. The Justice J.S. Verma Committee was constituted following the 2012 Delhi gang-rape incident.
2. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 introduced significant changes to India's legal framework concerning sexual offences.
3. Article 15(3) permits the State to make special provisions for women and children.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

Answer: 1, 2 and 3.....Articles 14, 15(3) and 21 form an important constitutional foundation for gender justice.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Gender justice requires not merely stronger laws but also a transformation in the institutions responsible for enforcing them.” Discuss in the context of sexual-offence trials in India. (250 words)

Introduction:

Despite significant legal reforms after 2012, sexual violence continues to expose gaps between **formal legal rights and their implementation**.

Body:

- **Legal reforms:** Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013; POSH Act, 2013.
- **Institutional challenges:** victim-blaming, insensitive questioning, delays, inadequate witness protection.
- **Constitutional dimension:** Articles 14, 15(3), 21 → equality, affirmative protection and dignity.
- **Justice Verma Committee:** emphasised institutional accountability and survivor dignity.
- **Need for reform:** gender-sensitive judicial training, trauma-informed procedures, speedy trials and protection from secondary victimisation.

Conclusion:

A gender-just criminal justice system must balance **fair trial for the accused with dignity, safety and meaningful access to justice for survivors**.

Fraggle, the dolphin, is grieving

MAN HAD always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins,” wrote Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, “because he had achieved so much — the wheel, New York, wars and so on -- while all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time... dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man — for precisely the same reasons.” There is indeed quite a bit of culture, in the broadest sense of all human endeavour, that moves away from nature, that separates the homo sapien from other feeling, thinking mammals. But there is also enough of the universal “human” condition, beyond the over-rated quality of intelligence, that bridges the gap between species.

A video posted by Geographe Marine Research, a whale conservation organisation, went viral this week. In it, a dolphin, named Fraggle, is seen carrying the body of her deceased calf. It is the fourth child she has lost. She is surrounded by others from her pod. Dolphins, along with cetaceans like whales, and land mammals including elephants and primates, are known to form social bonds and grieve, much like humans.

There has been an outpouring of sympathy for Fraggle. Of course, the fleeting sense of solidarity from a social media crowd is of little value to the grieving mother. In fact, emotion and empathy barely move the needle on how people treat each other — as a cursory glance at the wars and politics will show. Thankfully, Fraggle isn’t reliant on the homo sapien. Her pod is with her.

● WORDLY WISE

Justice is doing for others what we would want done for us.

— Gary Haugen

FIRs Cannot Be “Withdrawn” —

3 Legal Routes for Relief

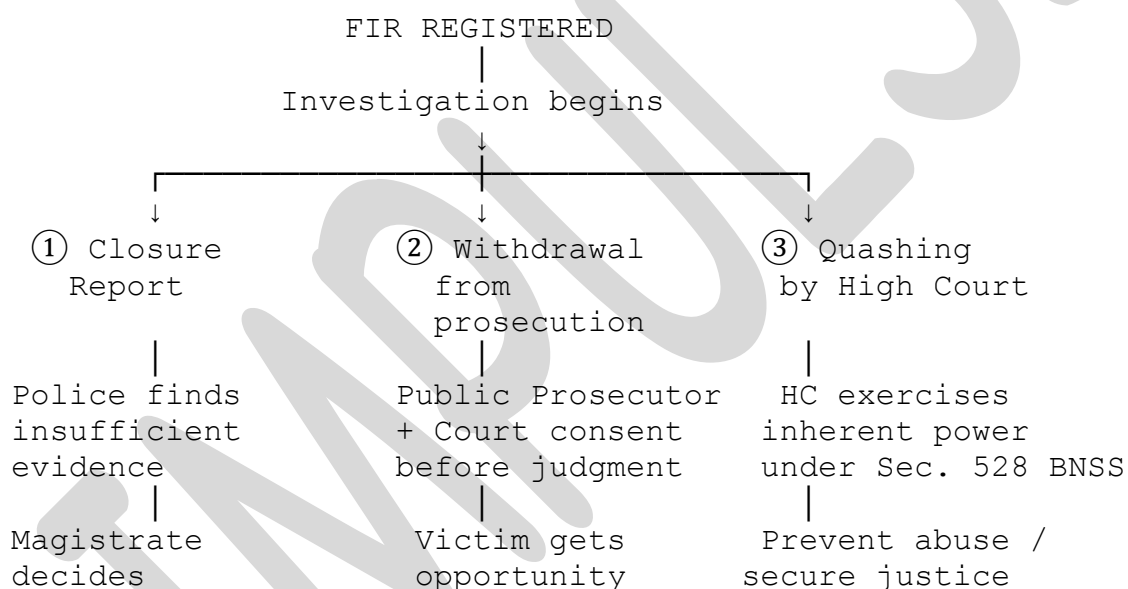
◆ **Core Concept**

- An **FIR (First Information Report)** is the initial information recorded by police regarding a cognisable offence. It **sets the criminal investigation in motion**.

N.B:

An FIR itself cannot ordinarily be “withdrawn” by an executive order. However, the **criminal case arising from it** can come to an end through legally prescribed mechanisms.

🧠 **3 Routes to End a Criminal Case**



① **Closure Report – Section 193 BNSS**

- Police may submit a **closure report** if investigation does not reveal sufficient material to proceed.
- **Magistrate is not bound** by the police report.
- The Magistrate may:
 - accept the closure report;
 - take cognisance; or
 - order further investigation.
- **Case:** *Abhinandan Jha v. Dinesh Mishra (1967)*.

② Withdrawal from Prosecution – Section 360 BNSS

- **Public Prosecutor/Assistant Public Prosecutor** may seek withdrawal **before judgment**.
- **Court's consent is mandatory.**
- Prosecutor must exercise **independent judgment**, rather than merely implementing a government directive.
- Court examines:
 - good faith,
 - public policy,
 - interests of justice.
- **Victim must get an opportunity to be heard.**
- **Case:** *Sheonandan Paswan v. State of Bihar (1986)*.

③ Quashing by High Court – Section 528 BNSS

- High Court possesses inherent powers to:
 - prevent abuse of judicial process; or
 - secure the **ends of justice**.
- Such power is exercised **sparingly**, particularly during an ongoing investigation.

Public Interest vs Rule of Law

Withdrawal of cases



Peace + reconciliation



Rule of law + victim's rights



Judicial scrutiny is essential

In the **Baroda Dynamite case (1980)**, the Supreme Court recognised that withdrawal of prosecutions arising from **mass agitations, communal riots, regional disputes, industrial conflicts and student unrest** may, in appropriate circumstances, help restore peace.

However, such power **cannot become a blanket political mechanism for eliminating criminal liability**.

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to criminal proceedings under the BNSS, consider the following statements:

1. An FIR can be cancelled by the executive government through an administrative order.
2. A police closure report is binding on the jurisdictional Magistrate.
3. Withdrawal from prosecution under Section 360 BNSS requires the consent of the court.
4. The High Court's inherent powers under Section 528 BNSS may be exercised to prevent abuse of the process of court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

Answer: 3 and 4 only.

Prelims Trap

FIR ≠ criminal case.

The FIR initiates the process; what can be terminated through prescribed legal routes is the **prosecution/case arising from it**.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The power to withdraw prosecution must balance public interest and reconciliation with the rule of law.” Discuss with reference to the BNSS. (250 words)

Introduction:

The BNSS does not provide for an executive “withdrawal” of an FIR. Relief from prosecution must follow legally recognised procedures.

Body:

- **Closure report** — **Sec. 193:** police concludes investigation; Magistrate retains independent authority.
- **Withdrawal** — **Sec. 360:** Prosecutor seeks withdrawal with court's consent; victim must be heard.
- **Quashing** — **Sec. 528:** High Court can intervene to prevent abuse of process and secure justice.
- **Judicial safeguards:** *Abhinandan Jha* and *Sheonandan Paswan* establish limits on executive influence.
- **Public-order dimension:** In exceptional cases involving mass agitation or unrest, withdrawal may promote reconciliation and restore peace.
- **Risks:** Political misuse, selective withdrawal, undermining victims and weakening equality before law.

Conclusion:

Withdrawal should be an **exception based on demonstrable public interest**, subject to prosecutorial independence, judicial scrutiny and victims' rights. This ensures that reconciliation does not come at the cost of the **rule of law**.

School Consolidation in India — Balancing Access & Quality

◆ **Brief**

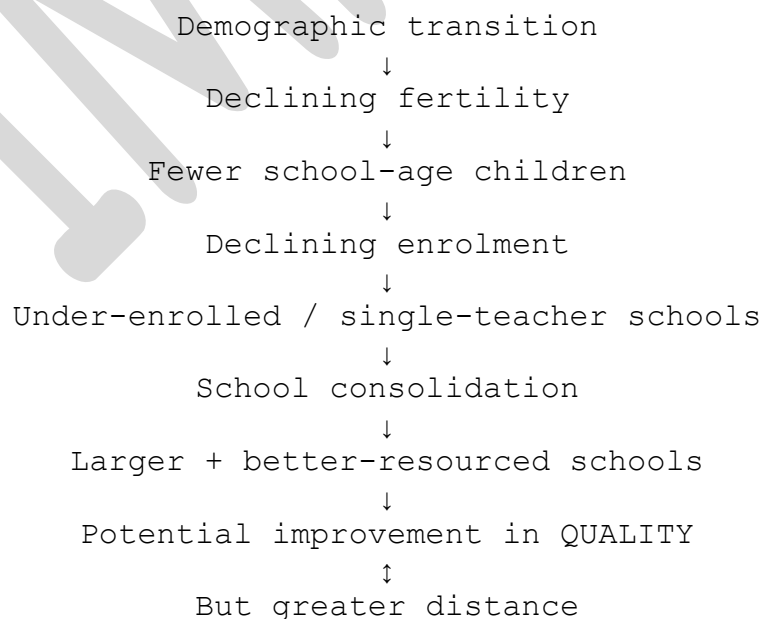
- The closure/merger of government schools has generated debate over whether it represents **loss of neighbourhood access** or a necessary response to **demographic change and declining enrolment**.

📊 **Key Data: 2014-15 → 2024-25**

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2014-15</i>	<i>2024-25</i>	<i>Change</i>
Total schools	15.16 lakh	14.71 lakh	↓ 45,000
Government schools	11.07 lakh	10.13 lakh	↓ 94,000
Teachers	89.84 lakh	1.01 crore	↑ 11.2 lakh
Student enrolment	26.95 crore	24.69 crore	↓ 2.26 crore
Students/school	26.95	24.69	↓
Teachers/school	5.9	6.9	↑

Source: UDISE/UDISE+ data

🧠 **Understanding the Transformation**



↓
Potential reduction in ACCESS

◆ Demographic factor

- India's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** has fallen from >3 in the early 1990s to around **2.0**, below the replacement level of **2.1**.
- Fewer children entering school naturally reduces enrolment pressure.

◆ Changing parental preferences

- Government-school enrolment has declined while **private-school enrolment has increased**.
- This indicates that school consolidation is occurring alongside changing preferences and enrolment patterns.

Why Consolidation Can Improve Quality

Very small schools may face:

- **Single-teacher schools**
- Multi-grade teaching
- Limited subject-specialist teachers
- Poor laboratory/sports facilities
- Fewer opportunities for peer learning
- Greater administrative burden on teachers

Consolidation seeks to create:

Small/under-enrolled schools
↓ MERGER
Composite schools
↓
More teachers
Better infrastructure
Subject-wise teaching
Labs + sports
Peer learning
Holistic education

But: Consolidation should be a **quality-enhancement strategy**, not merely a cost-cutting exercise.

⚠ Major Challenges

1. Access vs Quality

Consolidation

Better resources

More teachers

Better peer learning

Better infrastructure

Neighbourhood school

Greater accessibility

Shorter travel

Important for young children

Particularly useful in remote areas

2. Vulnerable groups

Greater travel distance can disproportionately affect:

- **Young children**
- **Girls**
- **Children in tribal/remote areas**
- **Economically disadvantaged households**

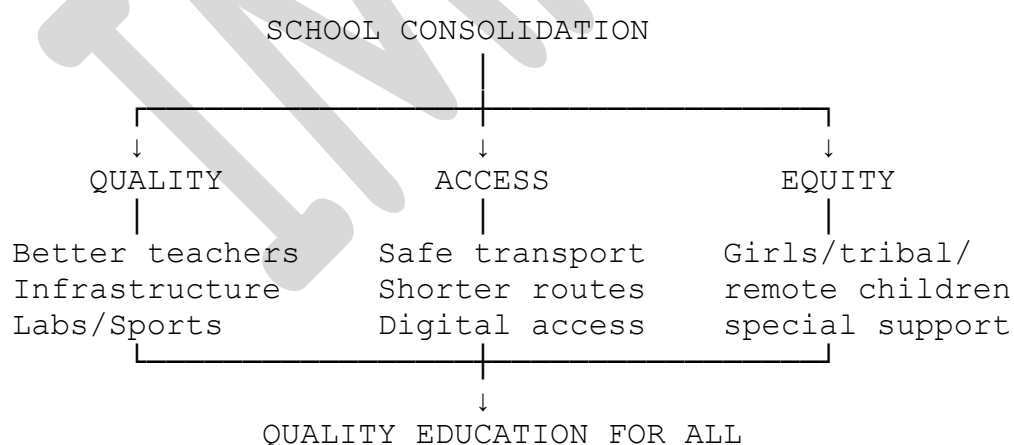
3. Regional disparities

National averages can hide:

- Rural single-teacher schools
- Urban overcrowded schools
- Differences between States and districts.

🎯 Way Forward

Data-driven consolidation + universal access



- Use **district-level demographic and enrolment data**, rather than blanket closures.
- Ensure **safe and affordable transport** where schools are merged.

- Protect access for girls, tribal communities and remote settlements.
- Strengthen composite schools with teachers, laboratories, libraries and sports facilities.
- Evaluate consolidation by **learning outcomes and equity**, not simply the number of schools closed.
- Align school planning with India's **demographic transition**.

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

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

1. Education is included in the Concurrent List of the Constitution.
2. India's declining fertility rate can contribute to declining school enrolment over time.
3. School consolidation necessarily improves educational access for children in remote areas.
4. UDISE+ is an education management information system used for school-education data.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

Answer: 1, 2 and 4 only.

Prelims Trap:

Consolidation may improve **quality**, but can simultaneously create **accessibility challenges**.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. "School consolidation in India represents both an opportunity to improve educational quality and a risk to equitable access." Discuss in the context of demographic transition. (250 words)

Introduction:

India's declining fertility and changing enrolment patterns are transforming the school-education landscape. This has prompted consolidation of under-enrolled government schools.

Body:

- **Need:** demographic transition, declining enrolment, single-teacher schools and inadequate infrastructure.
- **Benefits:** better teacher utilisation, subject-specific teaching, laboratories, sports and peer learning.

- **Concerns:** longer travel distances, gender barriers, risks for tribal/remote children and exclusion of disadvantaged groups.
- **Governance challenge:** national averages conceal substantial rural-urban and inter-State disparities.
- **Way forward:** data-driven consolidation, safe transport, composite schools, local consultation and learning-outcome-based assessment.

Conclusion:

India should move from measuring educational progress by “**how many schools exist**” to whether **every child can access a well-resourced, safe and quality school**. Consolidation should therefore be **selective, participatory and equity-oriented**, rather than an across-the-board closure policy.

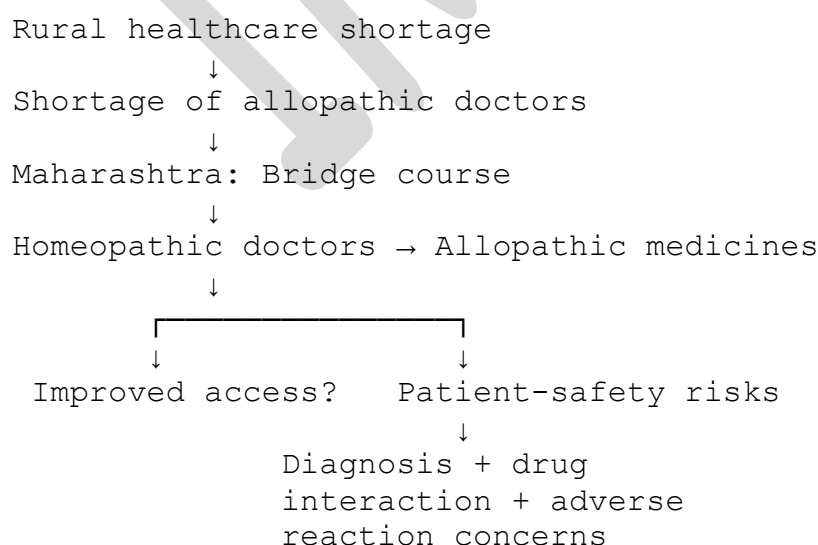
08.08.2026

Maharashtra’s Rural Healthcare “Shortcut” — **Risks of Cross-System Practice**

◆ **Brief**

- The Maharashtra government has allowed **homeopathic doctors to prescribe allopathic medicines after completing a bridge course**, citing shortages of allopathic practitioners in rural areas.
- The debate raises an important public-health question:
Can shortage of doctors be solved by expanding the scope of practitioners trained in another system of medicine?

🧠 **Core Issue**



Why the Government Supports It

- Rural areas continue to experience a **shortage of allopathic practitioners**.
- Increasing the availability of healthcare personnel can improve access to basic treatment.
- A bridge course is intended to provide practitioners with knowledge of selected allopathic medicines and standard treatment protocols.
- The broader objective is **universal and affordable healthcare access**.

⚠ **But access ≠ quality**

Merely increasing the number of people authorised to prescribe medicines does not necessarily create adequate **diagnostic and clinical capacity**.

Why the Move is Controversial

🔗 Allopathic/modern medicine requires extensive training

MBBS Training
↓
Basic sciences
↓
Clinical subjects
↓
Laboratory + clinical postings
↓
Diagnosis & differential diagnosis
↓
Pharmacology
↓
Drug interactions/adverse effects
↓
Supervised internship
↓
Clinical practice

A short bridge course **cannot necessarily replicate this integrated training architecture**.

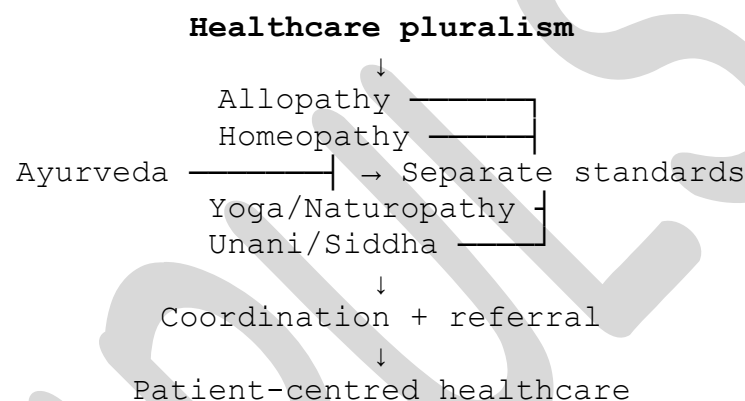
Major risks

- **Misdiagnosis:** Symptoms may have multiple underlying causes.
- **Drug interactions:** Medicines can interact with other drugs or medical conditions.

- **Adverse reactions:** Recognition and management require pharmacological knowledge.
- **Delayed referral:** Serious conditions may be treated as routine illnesses.
- **Professional accountability:** Unclear boundaries between different medical systems.
- **Public trust:** Poor outcomes could undermine confidence in healthcare systems.

Homeopathy and AYUSH

- Homeopathy has a recognised place within India's **AYUSH framework**.
- The Union government created the **Ministry of AYUSH in 2014** to promote traditional and alternative systems.
- The key policy principle should be **parallel strengthening**, rather than indiscriminate blending of distinct systems.



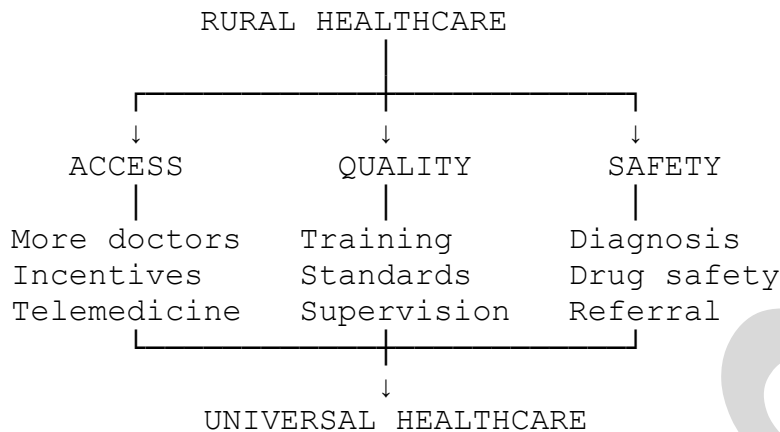
Better Alternatives to the “Shortcut”

Government should focus on:

- ① **Expand medical education**
 - More medical colleges and training capacity.
- ② **Rural incentives**
 - Better remuneration, accommodation and career progression for doctors serving rural areas.
- ③ **Strengthen primary healthcare**
 - Functional Health and Wellness Centres/primary-care facilities.
- ④ **Task-sharing with safeguards**
 - Non-physician health workers can undertake clearly defined preventive and basic-care functions **within competency limits**.
- ⑤ **Telemedicine**
 - Connect rural patients with qualified specialists.
- ⑥ **Strong referral systems**

- Early identification and referral of complicated cases.

🎯 UPSC Concept Map



🔑 Key Takeaway

Healthcare policy should solve the shortage of doctors by strengthening human resources and primary-care infrastructure—not by weakening professional boundaries between medical systems.

🟢 Probable UPSC Prelims Question

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

1. The Ministry of AYUSH was created in 2014.
2. AYUSH includes systems such as Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy.
3. A practitioner trained in one recognised system of medicine automatically acquires the same professional competence as an MBBS doctor after completing a short bridge course.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

Answer: 1 and 2 only.....Recognition of a medical system **does not imply equivalence of training, qualifications or scope of practice.**

🟡 Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Expanding access to healthcare cannot come at the cost of compromising clinical competence and patient safety.” Discuss in the context of cross-system medical practice in rural India. (250 words)

Introduction:

Rural healthcare suffers from uneven distribution of qualified medical personnel. Maharashtra's proposal to permit trained homeopathic practitioners to prescribe allopathic medicines highlights the tension between **access and clinical safety**.

Body:

- **Rationale:** rural doctor shortages and inadequate access to modern medical care.
- **Concerns:** differences in training, diagnosis, pharmacology, drug interactions and management of complications.
- **Systemic solution:** increase medical education capacity, rural incentives, telemedicine, stronger primary healthcare and referral networks.
- **AYUSH:** preserve recognised alternative systems while maintaining distinct professional standards.
- **Governance:** competency-based regulation, clear scope of practice and strong accountability.

Conclusion:

India needs **more healthcare professionals, not diluted professional standards**. A sustainable rural-health strategy should combine increased workforce availability with strong primary-care infrastructure, appropriate task-sharing and safe referral mechanisms.

09.08.2026

On Rural Jobs, the 60:40 Dilemma

Context

- **MGNREGA (2005/06)** has been rechristened as **Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) — VB-GRAM-G**.
- **Major change:**

Earlier,	under the new arrangement,
the Centre largely bore the wage expenditure;	the Centre–State funding ratio is generally 60:40 .
	Himalayan & North-Eastern States: 90:10 ;
	UTs without legislature: 100% Central funding .

Why are States opposing the change?

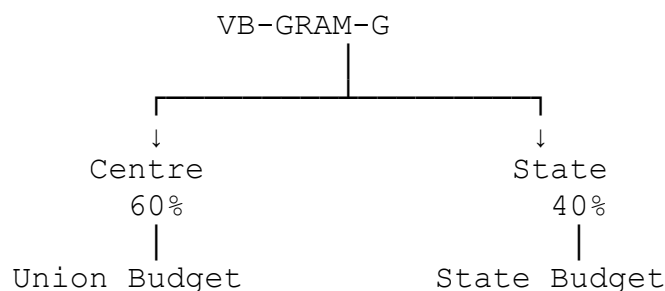
Economic → Rural employment + wage security

Social → Safety net for landless/labour households

Fiscal → States already face limited fiscal space

Political → Scheme was historically associated with MGNREGA

The 60:40 mechanism



Special cases:

Himalayan + NE States → 90:10

UTs without legislature → 100% Centre

Why is the scheme important?

Rural Employment Scheme

- Employment security
- Wage floor
- Income protection
- Bargaining power of workers
- Rural demand → Local economy

- MGNREGA wages effectively act as a **floor for rural wages**.
- Workers can reject private employment offering wages below the scheme wage.
- Thus, it influences the broader rural labour market, not merely employment generation.

The core dilemma

Arguments for 60:40

Greater State ownership
Cooperative federalism
Shared responsibility
Better accountability

Concerns

Fiscal burden on States
Unequal State capacities
Risk of underfunding
Rural workers may lose employment opportunities

Arguments for 60:40

Fiscal discipline

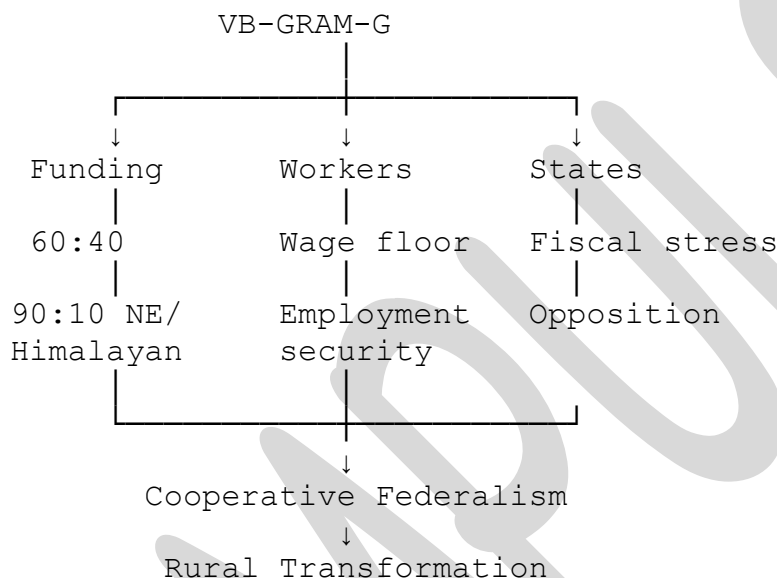
Concerns

Could weaken rural wage floor

Constitutional/UPSC angle

- **MGNREGA/VB-GRAM-G → rural employment + livelihood security**
- Raises issues of:
 - **Cooperative federalism**
 - **Fiscal federalism**
 - **Decentralised governance**
 - **Social security**
 - **Centre–State financial relations**

Mind Map



Probable Prelims Question

Q. With reference to VB-GRAM-G, consider the following statements:

1. The general Centre-State funding ratio is 60:40.
2. Himalayan and Northeastern States have a 90:10 funding ratio.
3. Union Territories without legislatures are fully funded by the Centre.
4. The scheme can influence rural wages by providing an alternative employment opportunity.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (D).....Remember the funding exceptions and the scheme's wider role as a rural wage/employment floor.

Probable Mains Question

Q. “The 60:40 funding pattern under VB-GRAM-G represents a dilemma between fiscal federalism and rural livelihood security.” Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction:

VB-GRAM-G seeks to provide rural employment and livelihood security but changes the traditional financing structure by requiring States to share expenditure.

Body:

- **Benefits:** greater State ownership, fiscal accountability, cooperative implementation.
- **Concerns:** varying State fiscal capacities; possibility of reduced allocations; threat to employment and rural wage security.
- MGNREGA-type employment also generates **rural demand and bargaining power**, making its impact broader than direct income support.
- Excessive fiscal burden could disproportionately affect poorer States.

Way forward:

- Flexible funding based on **regional unemployment and poverty**.
- Protect legally guaranteed employment.
- Strengthen outcome-based monitoring.
- Provide greater fiscal support to fiscally constrained States.
- Encourage convergence with rural infrastructure and skilling programmes.

Conclusion:

The objective should not be merely to transfer fiscal responsibility to States, but to create a **sustainable Centre–State partnership** that protects rural workers while improving fiscal accountability.

11.08.2026

Seamless Digital Payments Have a Price

Context

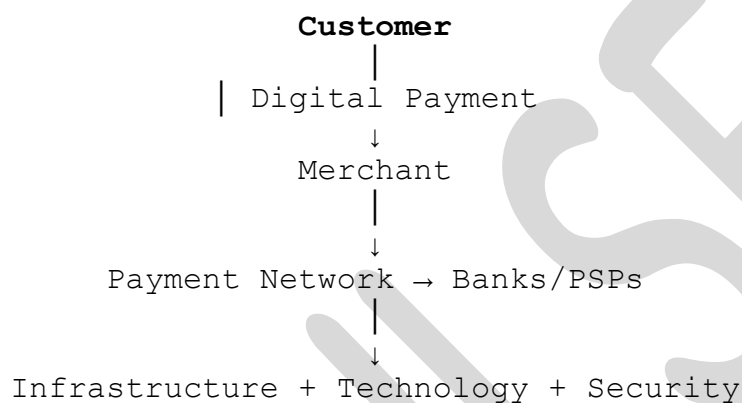
- The **Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** proposes changes to the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**, creating a possible framework for charging fees on **UPI and RuPay debit-card transactions**.
- Since 2020, **zero MDR (Merchant Discount Rate)** has applied to UPI and RuPay debit-card transactions.

- The debate is between **affordable digital payments** and **financial sustainability of the payment ecosystem**.

What is MDR?

MDR = Merchant Discount Rate

It is the **fee associated with processing a digital payment**, generally paid by the merchant and distributed among participants in the payment ecosystem.



Zero MDR → cheaper transactions → faster adoption

But:

Zero MDR → limited transaction revenue → sustainability concerns

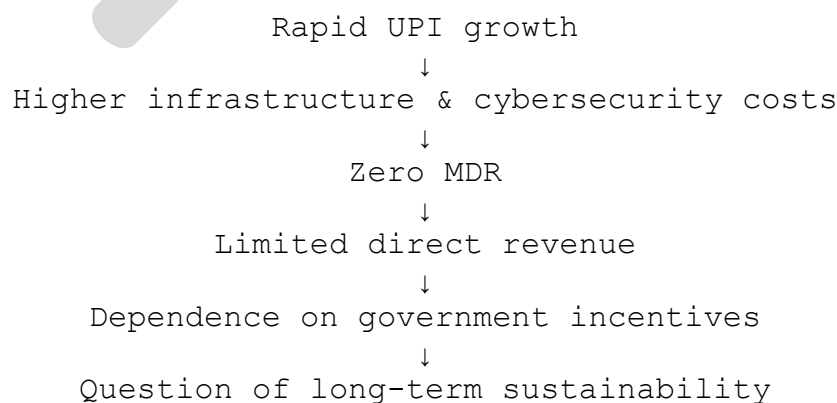
Why is MDR being reconsidered?



Growing scale of UPI

- **23.6 billion UPI transactions** were processed in July.
- Government provided around **₹8,730 crore** in incentives between 2021-22 and 2024-25.
- The Standing Committee on Finance observed that incentive support covers only about **11% of industry costs**.

Financial sustainability problem



Why may ordinary users be protected?

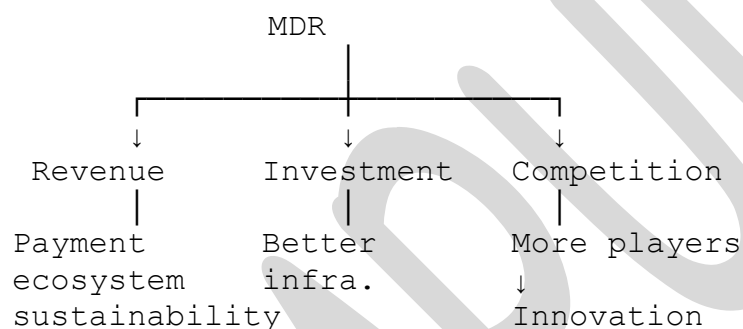
The government has indicated that any MDR would potentially apply **above a specified threshold and to limited merchant transactions.**

P2M = Person-to-Merchant

- P2M transactions constituted **63% of transaction volume** but only **29% of value** in H1 2025.
- In 2025-26, only **4% of P2M transactions exceeded ₹2,000.**
- These higher-value transactions represented about **two-thirds of P2M value.**

➡ Therefore, a threshold-based MDR could potentially raise revenue while keeping most small-value transactions free.

Potential benefits of MDR



- Sustainable payment infrastructure
- Better cybersecurity and technological capacity
- Reduced dependence on government subsidies
- Potential entry of new players
- Greater competition in a concentrated market

Market concern: PhonePe and Google Pay together account for roughly **80% of UPI transactions.**

Challenges

⚠ Affordability

Charging fees could discourage small merchants or consumers.

⚠ Financial inclusion

UPI's success has partly been driven by its **low-cost and frictionless nature.**

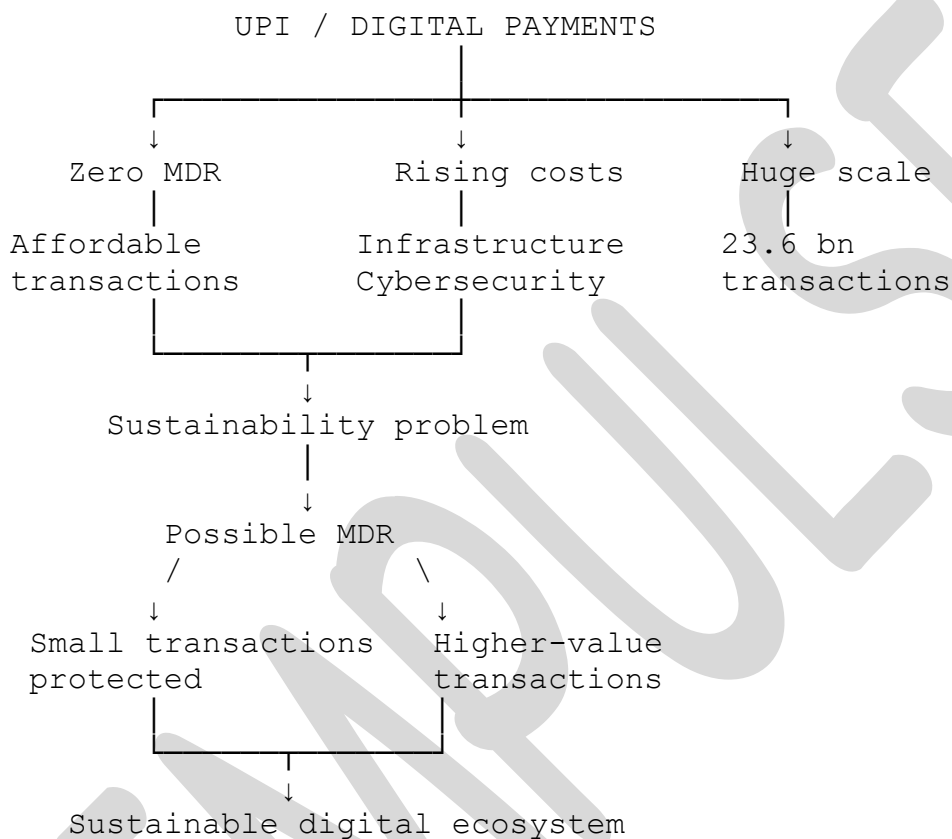
⚠️ Competition

If charges are structured poorly, smaller payment providers could struggle to compete.

⚠️ Merchant burden

MDR ultimately represents a transaction cost for merchants and may indirectly affect consumers.

🧠 UPSC Mind Map



🔵 UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), consider the following statements:

1. MDR is associated with the cost of processing digital transactions.
2. Zero MDR was introduced for UPI and RuPay debit-card transactions to encourage digital payments.
3. MDR is necessarily paid directly by the consumer to the payment network.
4. A threshold-based MDR can potentially protect small-value transactions from additional charges.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 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.....MDR is a processing-related merchant charge; it is not necessarily paid directly by the consumer. A threshold-based system could protect low-value transactions.

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “India's success in digital payments has created a paradox: the greater the adoption of UPI, the greater the need for a financially sustainable payment ecosystem.” Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction:

India's UPI ecosystem has transformed digital payments through convenience, low cost and interoperability. However, zero MDR raises questions regarding the long-term financial sustainability of payment infrastructure.

Body:

- **Advantages of zero MDR:** affordability, financial inclusion, digitalisation of small merchants and reduced cash dependence.
- **Problems:** infrastructure and cybersecurity costs, dependence on government incentives and limited direct revenue.
- **Possible MDR:** can generate sustainable revenue, attract investment and encourage competition.
- **Risks:** higher merchant costs, possible pass-through to consumers and reduced adoption among small businesses.
- **Way forward:**
 - Threshold-based MDR
 - Keep small-value transactions free
 - Transparent fee-sharing mechanism
 - Targeted government support for small merchants
 - Strengthen competition and interoperability
 - Continuous monitoring of impact on financial inclusion

Conclusion:

India should pursue “affordable digital payments + sustainable payment infrastructure”, rather than treating zero MDR as an end in itself. A carefully calibrated MDR can make UPI financially sustainable without undermining its role as a tool of financial inclusion.

Mecca Agreement: What India must watch out for

Although details of the trilateral defence pact are yet to be made public, the principal implication for India is Saudi Arabia's greater strategic integration with the Pakistan-Turkey-China axis

SMDA's record

Since the Saudi-Pakistan pact was signed last September, Saudi Arabia has faced unprecedented missile and drone barrages on its vital infrastructure from Iran and the Houthis.

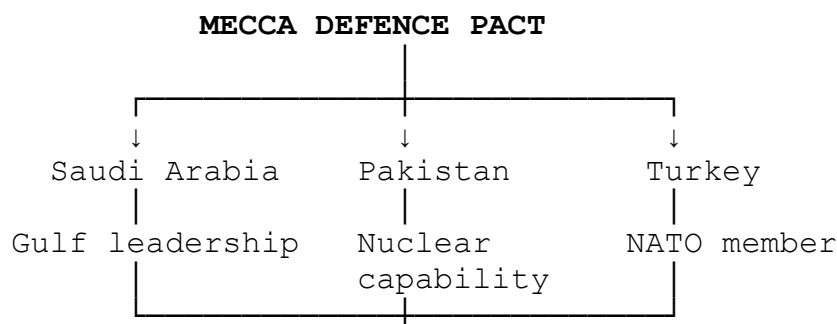
Pakistan has not fired a single shot at either party thus far, just as Riyadh has not acted against Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Turkey Defence Pact: A Pact Without a Common Threat

Context

- Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey have signed the **MECCA Joint Defence Agreement**.
- It follows a **collective-defence principle**: an armed attack against one member is treated as an attack against all.
- However, unlike NATO, the three countries **do not share a clearly defined common adversary**.

Strategic significance



↓
Defence + Intelligence + Joint weapons production
↓
Emerging West Asian security architecture

Key objectives

- Collective defence
- Defence cooperation
- Intelligence sharing
- Joint production of weapons
- Greater strategic coordination
- Reduction of dependence on uncertain external security guarantees

Why is it NOT another NATO?

NATO model

Common threat
↓
Shared strategic interests
↓
Institutionalised military cooperation
↓
Credible collective defence

MECCA pact

Saudi Arabia → Gulf security
|
— Complex relationship with Iran
|
Pakistan → South Asian security
|
Turkey → West Asian influence
↓
Different regional priorities
↓
No single, universally accepted threat

Major contradiction

- Saudi Arabia has faced Iranian missile attacks, yet **Pakistan did not respond militarily**.
- Pakistan and Turkey have their own relationships with Iran.
- Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also have divergent interests regarding regional conflicts.

- Therefore, **formal collective defence does not automatically guarantee collective military action.**

Why now?

Changing West Asian order

Iranian military capabilities + Israeli military actions + uncertainty in US security commitments



Gulf states seek greater strategic autonomy



New regional security partnerships

The pact can therefore be understood as a **hedging strategy** rather than a conventional military alliance.

Individual strategic calculations

<i>Country</i>	<i>Main objective</i>
Saudi Arabia	Assert regional leadership + strengthen security autonomy
Pakistan	Greater role in Gulf security architecture + defence cooperation
Turkey	Expand strategic influence in West Asia
All three	Defence cooperation and diversification of security partnerships

Implications for India

Opportunities

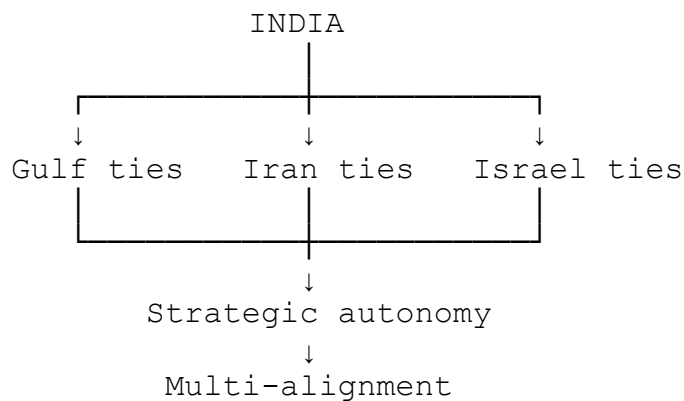
- Deepen economic ties with Gulf countries.
- Expand defence and strategic cooperation.
- Strengthen connectivity and energy partnerships.
- Maintain relations with **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, Iran and Israel** despite their rivalries.
- Use India's growing diplomatic importance to promote regional stability.

Risks

- Greater military competition in West Asia.
- Possible instability affecting **oil prices and energy security.**

- Pakistan's enhanced strategic role in the Gulf could have implications for India's regional diplomacy.
- Increased geopolitical fragmentation.

India's approach

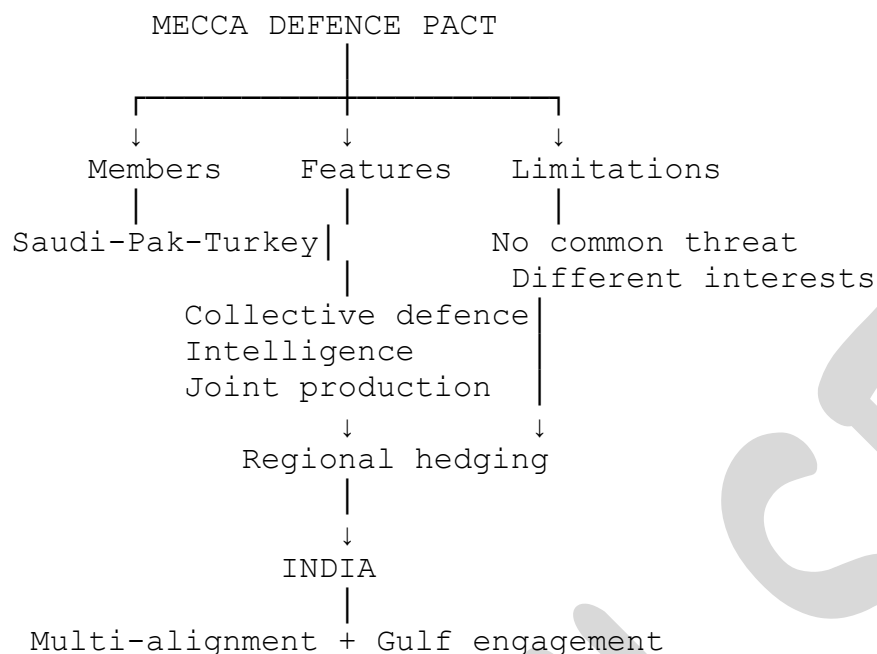


Implications for India

For India, the principal implication is Saudi Arabia's greater strategic integration with the Pakistan-Turkey-China axis. Ankara has historically been geopolitically antagonistic to New Delhi and has already demonstrated the maturity of its military co-operation with Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia, however, has been investing in strategic ties with India, especially over the last decade, despite Riyadh being a close partner to Islamabad. Riyadh's economic leverage over Pakistan and the investment appeal of the Indian economy allowed Riyadh to blindside Islamabad's diplomatic needs vis-a-vis India. Now, with Saudi security needs gradually allowing Pakistan more agency or leverage in that relationship, it is India's long-term strategic ties with Saudi Arabia that will face tests, if not obstacles.

Mind Map



UPSC Prelims Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Saudi Arabia-Pakistan-Turkey defence arrangement:

1. It incorporates a principle of collective defence.
2. It provides for greater defence and intelligence cooperation.
3. All three countries are members of NATO.
4. The agreement necessarily implies that the three countries have an identical threat perception.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

✓ Answer: (A).....Turkey is a NATO member, but Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are not. The pact's major limitation is the absence of a clearly shared threat perception.

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Turkey defence pact represents strategic hedging rather than a NATO-style military alliance.” Discuss its significance for West Asian geopolitics and India's strategic interests. (250 words)

Introduction:

The trilateral defence agreement introduces a collective-defence principle and seeks greater military, intelligence and defence-industrial cooperation among three strategically important states.

Significance:

- Reflects **fragmentation of the West Asian security architecture**.
- Indicates declining confidence in exclusive dependence on external security guarantees.
- Strengthens Saudi Arabia's regional leadership ambitions.
- Enhances Turkey's role in West Asian security.
- Gives Pakistan a deeper role in Gulf security.
- However, divergent relations with Iran, Israel and other regional actors limit the prospects of a NATO-like alliance.

For India:

- Energy security and diaspora interests make Gulf stability crucial.
- India should expand economic, defence and connectivity cooperation with Gulf states.
- Maintain balanced relations with **Iran, Israel, Turkey and Arab countries**.
- Avoid being drawn into regional rivalries.
- Continue its policy of **strategic autonomy and multi-alignment**.

Conclusion:

The pact is best viewed as a **hedging mechanism in an uncertain regional order**, rather than a fully integrated collective-security alliance. For India, the appropriate response is deeper engagement with all major regional actors while preserving strategic flexibility.

Creamy Layer for SC/STs —

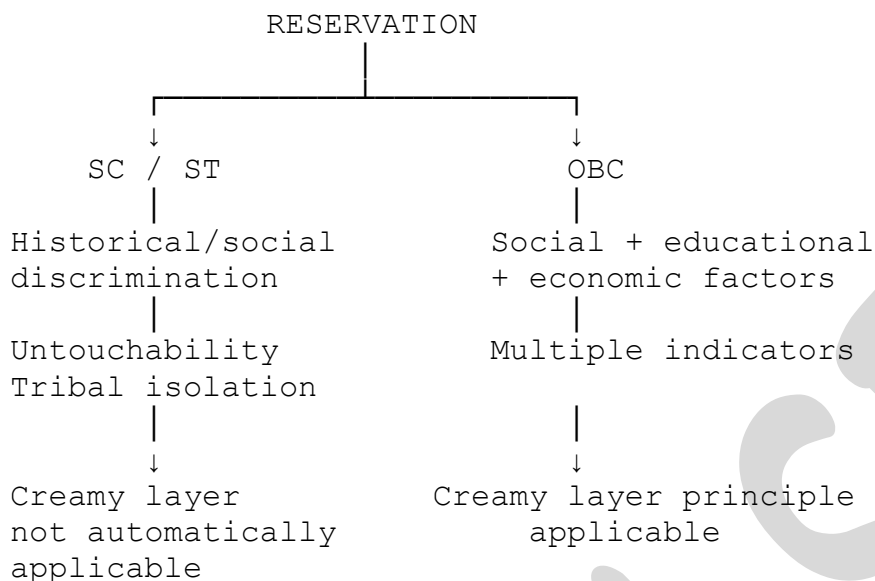
What the Government Argued

Context

- The Centre, in an affidavit before the **Supreme Court**, opposed extending the “**creamy layer**” principle to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- The issue arose from a PIL arguing that relatively affluent SC/ST families are repeatedly benefiting from reservations, resulting in “**elite capture**”.
- The debate gained importance after the **2024 Supreme Court judgment permitting sub-classification within SC/ST categories**.

Core argument of the Government

Different basis of backwardness



SCs

- Historical disadvantage rooted in **untouchability and caste discrimination**.
- Such discrimination, according to the Centre, **does not disappear merely because an individual becomes economically prosperous**.

STs

- Identified through factors including:
 - Distinct culture
 - Geographical isolation
 - Backwardness

OBCs

- Their backwardness is assessed through a combination of:
 - **Social**
 - **Educational**
 - **Economic** disadvantages.

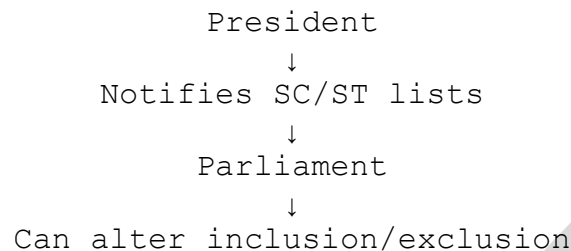
Why Centre opposes creamy layer for SC/ST

Argument 1 — *Historical discrimination ≠ economic poverty*

- SC/ST reservation is primarily intended to address **structural and historical exclusion**, not merely low income.
- An economically well-off SC/ST individual may still face **caste-based discrimination**.

Argument 2 — Constitutional scheme

Articles 341 & 342



➡ Therefore, the Centre argues that courts should not independently restructure the constitutional reservation framework.

Argument 3 — Separation of powers

- Reservation policy is fundamentally a matter of **legislative/public policy**.
- Courts should not direct governments to adopt a particular policy simply because it appears “better” or “fairer”.

Important Supreme Court judgments

● Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)

- Upheld the **creamy layer principle for OBCs**.
- According to the Centre's interpretation, the judgment expressly confined the principle to OBCs and said it had no relevance to SC/STs.

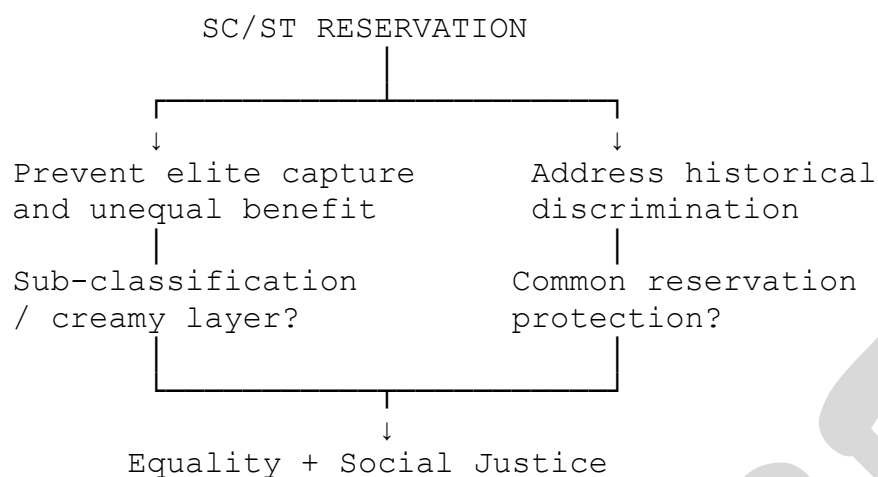
● E.V. Chinnaiah v. State of Andhra Pradesh (2005)

- The Centre cited the judgment to argue that if exclusion of a creamy layer among SC/STs were ever considered necessary, **Parliament would have to make the legislative change**.

● State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024)

- A seven-judge Constitution Bench permitted **sub-classification within SC/ST categories** to ensure benefits reach relatively more disadvantaged groups.
- Some judges also discussed the possibility of applying a creamy-layer principle to SC/ST reservations.

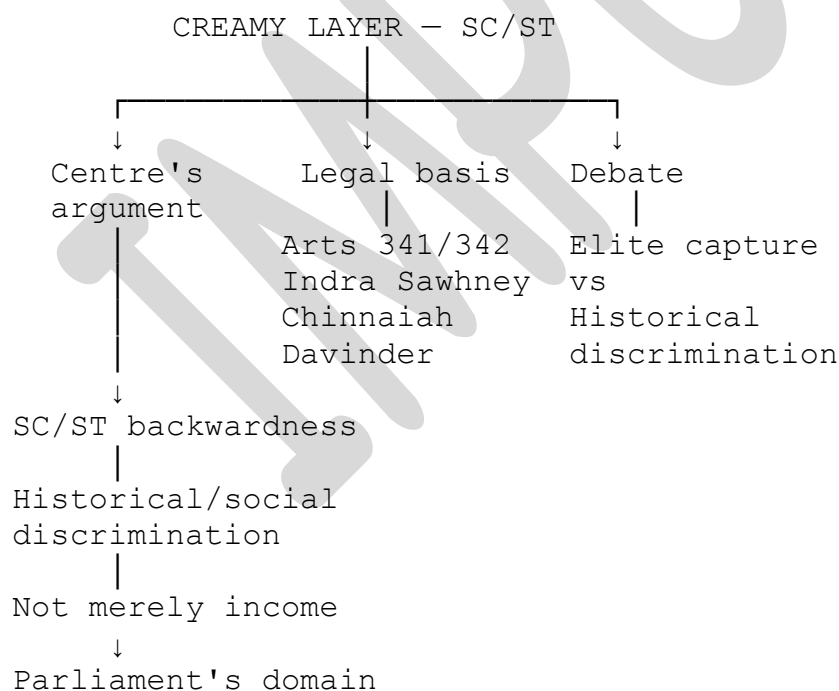
The central constitutional dilemma



Key tension

- ☞ Formal equality → similarly placed beneficiaries should be treated alike.
- ☞ Substantive equality → historically disadvantaged groups may require differentiated treatment to achieve real equality.

UPSC Mind Map



UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs, consider the following statements:

1. The creamy layer principle was developed in the context of OBC reservations in *Indra Sawhney*.
2. Articles 341 and 342 provide the constitutional framework for specification of SCs and STs.
3. The 2024 Supreme Court judgment permitted sub-classification within SC/ST categories.
4. The creamy layer principle automatically applies to SC/ST reservations in the same manner as it applies to OBCs.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

✓ **Answer: (B).....**The Centre's present position is that the OBC creamy-layer principle cannot automatically be extended to SC/ST reservations.

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The debate over creamy layer within SC/ST reservations reflects the tension between substantive equality and the need to address historical discrimination.” Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction:

Reservation for SCs and STs is rooted in the constitutional objective of correcting historical exclusion and ensuring substantive equality. The question of excluding economically advanced members therefore raises a complex constitutional debate.

Arguments supporting creamy layer:

- Prevents concentration of benefits among relatively advanced families.
- Enables greater representation of the most disadvantaged sections.
- Promotes equitable distribution of affirmative-action benefits.

Arguments against:

- Caste-based discrimination is not necessarily eliminated by economic advancement.
- SC/ST backwardness has a distinct historical and social basis.
- Income alone may not capture social discrimination and exclusion.
- Constitutional changes in SC/ST lists involve Parliament under Articles 341 and 342.

Way Forward:

- Use reliable socio-economic data.
- Improve targeting without reducing constitutional protection.

- Consider **sub-classification** where evidence establishes unequal access.
- Maintain judicial oversight while respecting legislative competence.

Conclusion:

The objective should be to ensure that reservation reaches those who remain genuinely disadvantaged while preserving its fundamental purpose of **annihilating historical exclusion and achieving substantive equality**.

82 dead after 7.4 magnitude quake strikes Colombia



Colombia's Pacific region around the quake's epicentre lies along the "Ring of Fire", the line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes occur.

[illegible]

Milk Pouches → Furniture:
Turning Difficult Plastic Waste into Resources

- Milk pouches are generally made of **polyethylene (PE)** and constitute a significant source of plastic waste in India.
- A 2025 study estimated consumption at around **100–120 million milk pouches every day**.
- Researchers at the **Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru**, have developed a method to combine recycled milk-pouch plastic with **polypropylene (PP)** to create stronger recycled material.

- The material can potentially be used for **3D-printed podiums, benches and outdoor furniture**.

Why are milk pouches difficult to recycle?

◆ Low economic value

- Plastic bottles are generally more valuable to waste collectors.
- Milk pouches therefore often remain in **roadsides, dustbins and landfills**.

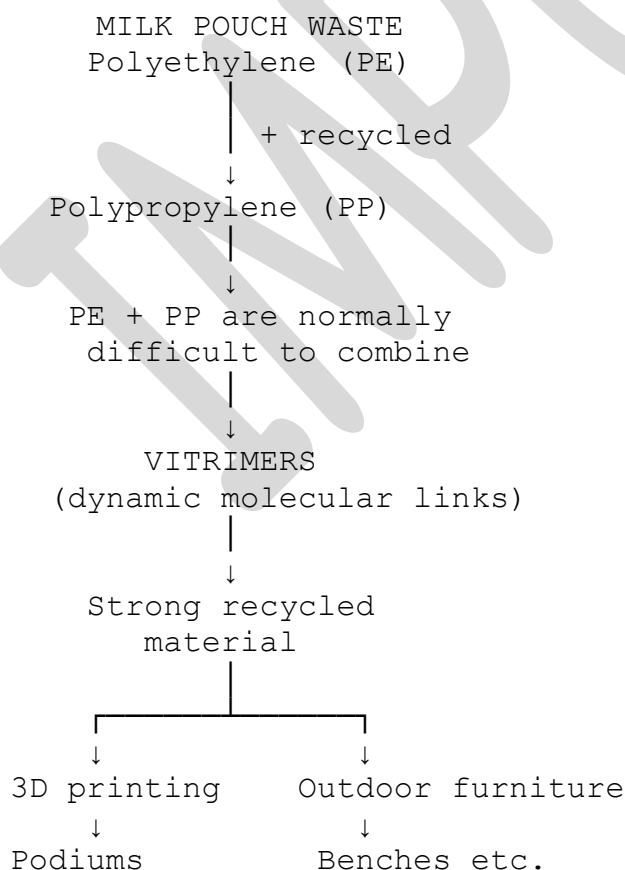
◆ Dark-coloured plastic

- Some milk pouches contain a dark inner layer to block **UV and visible radiation**, thereby extending shelf life.
- Such dark plastics are less preferred by conventional recycling industries.

◆ Material compatibility

- Milk pouches → primarily **polyethylene (PE)**
- Other packaging waste → often **polypropylene (PP)**
- PE and PP have different molecular structures, making conventional blending difficult.

How does the IISc technology work?



Vitrimers

- Vitrimers are a class of polymer materials with **dynamic chemical bonds**.
- These bonds can rearrange under suitable conditions, helping otherwise incompatible polymers form a useful composite material.
- This improves the possibility of **high-value recycling** rather than simply sending difficult plastics to landfill.

Another innovative solution: Multi-layer plastic

Problem

Multi-layer packaging → chips, snacks etc.

Plastic layer
+
Barrier layer
+
Other polymer layer
↓
Difficult to separate
↓
Conventional recycling impractical

Thermo-fusion approach

Multi-layer plastic
↓
Collection + Cleaning
↓
Shredding
↓
Thermo-fusion
↓
Strong panels
↓
Honeycomb structure
↓
Building walls

- Such recycled panels can be used in **construction**, including interior applications.
- They may offer:
 - Lower water consumption
 - Faster construction
 - High mechanical strength

Environmental significance

Circular Economy

Linear Economy

Take → Make → Use → Discard

↓
Landfill

Circular Economy

Waste → Process → New Material

↑ Reuse ↓

Potential benefits

- Reduces plastic entering **landfills and the environment**.
- Converts low-value waste into **higher-value products**.
- Reduces dependence on virgin plastics.
- Encourages **resource efficiency**.
- Supports India's **circular economy** and sustainable manufacturing goals.
- Creates opportunities for **waste-to-resource entrepreneurship**.

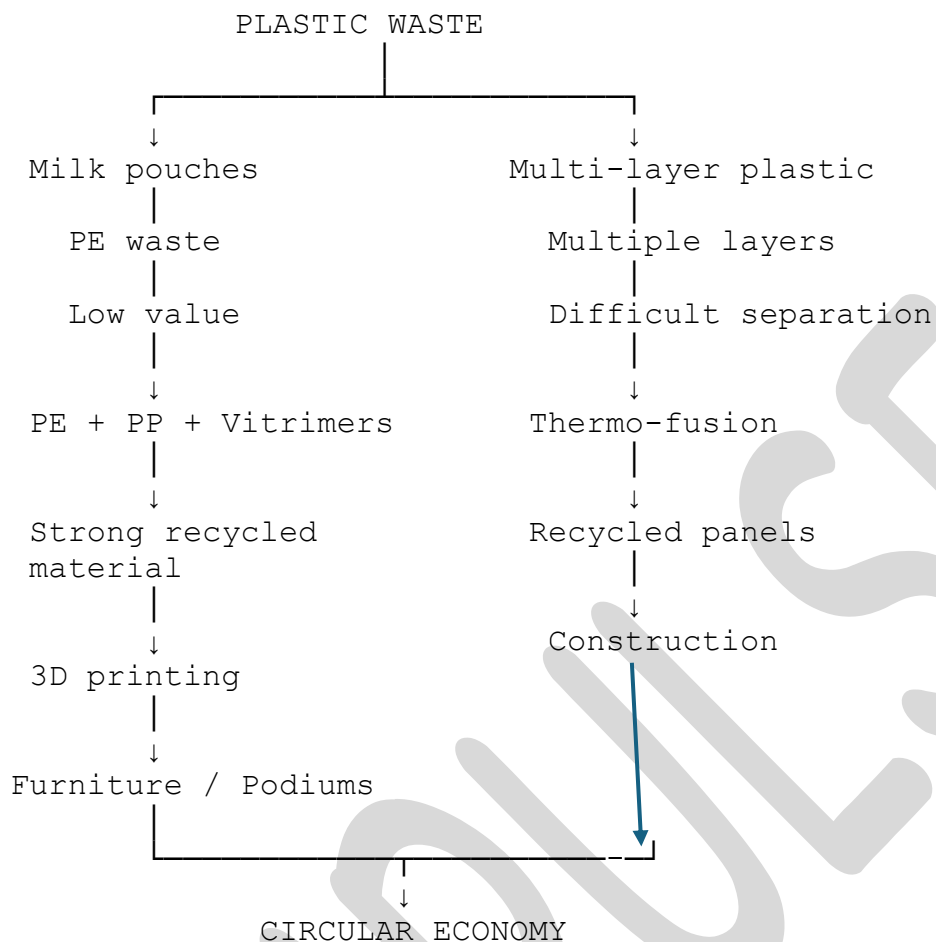
Key challenges

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Implication</i>
Collection	Low-value milk pouches have weak recycling incentives
Segregation	Mixed plastics complicate processing
Standards	New materials lack established construction standards
Safety	Fire resistance and mechanical strength need certification
Cost	Recycled alternatives may initially cost more
Scaling	Laboratory success must translate into mass production

Policy requirement

Innovation + EPR + waste segregation + certification + market incentives

UPSC Mind Map



UPSC Prelims Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the recycling technology described above:

1. Milk pouches are primarily associated with polyethylene waste.
2. Vitrimers can facilitate the combination of otherwise difficult-to-blend polymers.
3. Multi-layer plastics are easily recycled through conventional mechanical separation because their layers can be readily peeled apart.
4. Conversion of plastic waste into durable products represents an application of the circular economy.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 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).....**Multi-layer plastics are difficult to recycle precisely because separating their different layers is generally impractical.

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Technological innovation can transform plastic waste from an environmental liability into an economic resource.” Discuss with reference to emerging recycling technologies in India. (250 words)

Introduction:

India's expanding consumption of plastic packaging has created challenges of collection, segregation and recycling, particularly for low-value and multi-layer plastics.

Body:

Technological solutions

- IISc technology uses **vitrimers** to facilitate PE–PP recycling.
- 3D printing can convert recycled material into podiums and furniture.
- **Thermo-fusion** can transform multi-layer plastics into construction panels.

Environmental benefits

- Reduces landfill burden.
- Limits plastic leakage into ecosystems.
- Promotes resource efficiency and circular economy.
- Reduces dependence on virgin raw materials.

Challenges

- Collection and segregation.
- Economic viability.
- Absence of standardisation and certification.
- Fire safety and structural testing.
- Scaling laboratory innovations to commercial levels.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**.
- Develop standards for recycled construction materials.
- Provide incentives for waste collection and recycling.
- Promote public procurement of certified recycled products.
- Integrate informal waste workers into formal recycling chains.

Conclusion:

India's plastic-waste challenge requires a shift from “**waste disposal**” to “**waste as a resource**.” Combining technological innovation with effective EPR, segregation, certification and market incentives can make plastic recycling environmentally and economically sustainable.

13.08.2026

GS - III

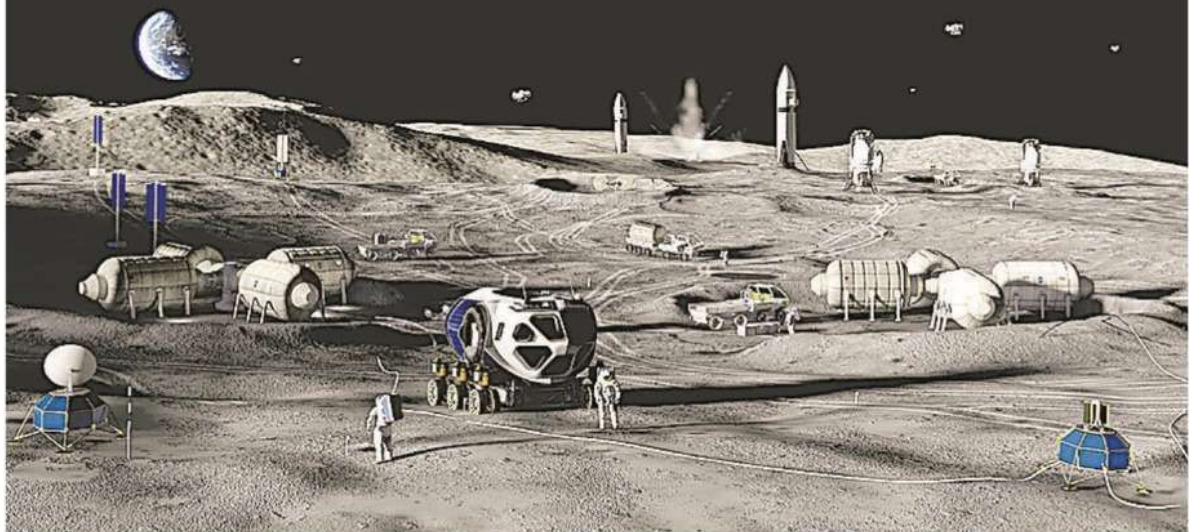
• SPACE

NASA's Moon Base: What India will gain by joining

India's relationship with the US of late has been volatile, but this initiative aims to bring them closer. ISRO also needs to ensure that its targets are met

MOON BASE: A THREE-PHASE PROGRAMME

The Moon Base is humanity's first lunar outpost, a place where astronauts will live, work, and explore near the Moon's South Pole.



PHASE ONE (NOW-2029): Focus will be on gaining reliable access to the lunar surface and building a deeper understanding of the environment. Robotic missions will explore the lunar South Pole, demonstrate new technologies, and gather the knowledge needed to guide future development.

PHASE TWO (2029-2032): NASA will begin deploying the first infrastructure needed to support long-term operations on the Moon. Early power systems, cargo transportation, logistics, and communications capabilities will expand humanity's footprint and enable increasingly complex missions.

PHASE THREE (2032 AND BEYOND): NASA will begin assembling a permanent lunar outpost where astronauts can live and work for extended periods. Habitats, power systems, communications, transportation, and other critical capabilities will support an enduring human presence.

SOURCE: NASA

Artemis Accords

The Accords, introduced by NASA and the US Department of State in 2020, are a set of principles that countries agree to follow in space activities.

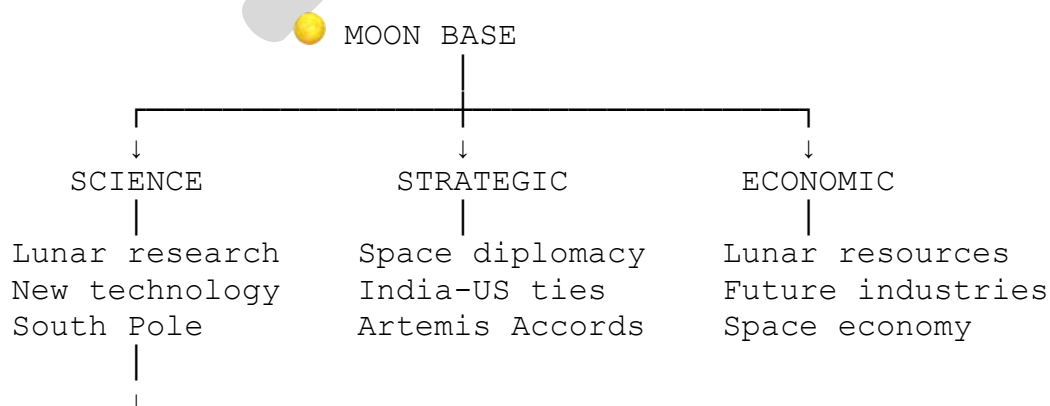
The 70 signatories include Japan, India, Israel, and South Korea.

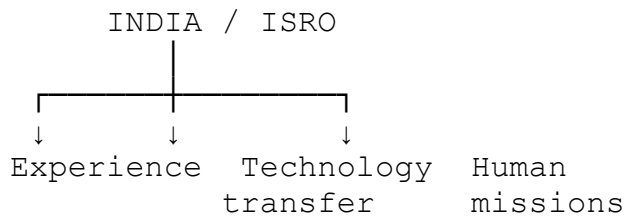
The Next Step to the Moon

Why is the Moon Base significant?

- **NASA's Moon Base programme** aims to establish a **permanent lunar research outpost**, particularly near the **Moon's South Pole**.
- It follows the **Artemis programme**, which seeks a sustained human presence on the Moon.
- India has already joined the **Artemis Accords** and has agreed with the US on a **strategic framework for human-spaceflight cooperation**.
- ISRO's own long-term objectives include:
 - Human spaceflight
 - **Bharat Antariksh Station**
 - Human Moon landing
 - Lunar exploration

Mind Map





What can India gain?

Technological

- Experience in complex **crewed and robotic missions**.
- Access to advanced technologies and international expertise.
- Faster development of India's own lunar and human-spaceflight capabilities.

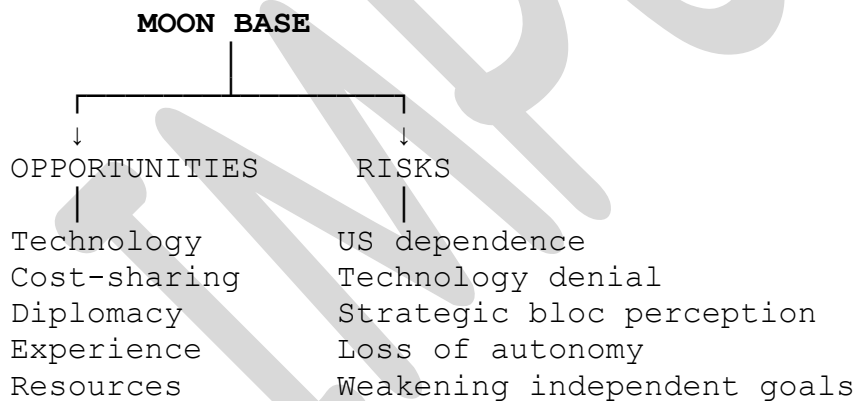
Economic

- Sharing enormous costs of lunar exploration.
- Potential **spin-offs** in robotics, materials, communications and advanced manufacturing.

Diplomatic

- Strengthens **India-US strategic partnership**.
- Enhances India's role in emerging **space governance**.
- Greater collaboration with other Artemis partners such as Japan and South Korea.

Concerns for India



- Technology dependence: India should avoid becoming locked into NASA/US technological ecosystems.
- Strategic autonomy: Artemis is increasingly perceived as a **US-led grouping**; China and Russia are outside it.
- International law: Concerns exist regarding the relationship between the **Artemis Accords** and the **1979 Moon Agreement**.
- India must preserve its independent space cooperation, including with **Russia**.

Way Forward

India should adopt a “**cooperate without becoming dependent**” approach:

- ☆ Artemis cooperation + Indigenous capability + Strategic autonomy + Multilateral space governance

UPSC takeaway: India's participation should be used to **fast-track indigenous capabilities**, not substitute for them.

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding India's space cooperation with the United States:

1. India is a signatory to the Artemis Accords.
2. The Artemis Accords constitute a military alliance similar to NATO.
3. India's participation can facilitate cooperation in human spaceflight and lunar exploration.
4. India must discontinue its space cooperation with countries outside the Artemis framework.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

✓ **Answer: A.....**The Artemis Accords are principles governing cooperation in peaceful space exploration, **not a military alliance**. India can participate while maintaining space cooperation with other countries. Its participation can provide technological and operational benefits for human-spaceflight and lunar missions.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “India's participation in the Artemis-led lunar exploration architecture presents both an opportunity for technological leapfrogging and a challenge to strategic autonomy.” Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction:

India's growing cooperation with NASA reflects the increasing importance of international partnerships in expensive and technologically complex space missions.

Opportunities

- Access to advanced technologies and expertise.
- Experience in crewed lunar missions.
- Cost-sharing and international scientific collaboration.
- Strengthening India-US strategic partnership.
- Development of indigenous capabilities through technology and knowledge spillovers.
- Potential future economic opportunities from lunar resources.

Challenges

- Risk of excessive technological dependence.
- Possibility of Artemis becoming perceived as a US-led strategic grouping.
- Concerns regarding fragmented **global space governance**.
- Need to preserve India's strategic autonomy and independent space programme.
- Balancing cooperation with the US while maintaining partnerships with Russia and other space powers.

Way Forward

International Cooperation
+
Indigenous R&D
+
Strategic Autonomy
+
Multilateral Governance
↓
Sustainable Indian Space Power

India should **join international lunar initiatives selectively**, while strengthening domestic launch systems, human-spaceflight capabilities, life-support technologies, robotics and space infrastructure.

Conclusion:

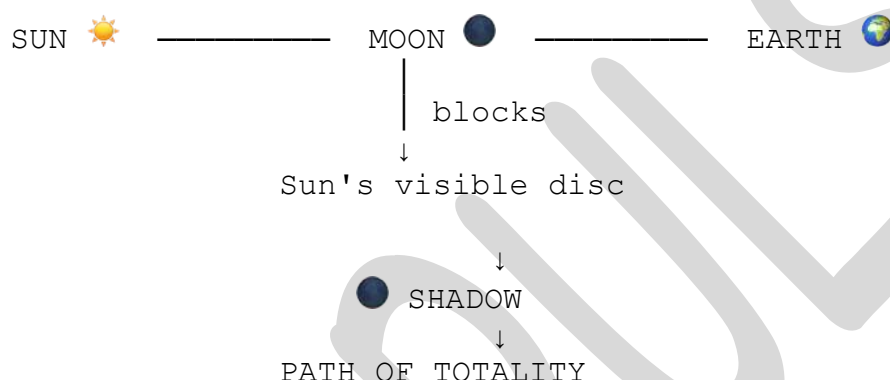
The Moon Base opportunity should become a **force multiplier for India's indigenous space ambitions**, rather than a substitute for them.

Total Solar Eclipse —

Best Time to Study the Sun's “Invisible” Part

What is a Total Solar Eclipse?

- A **solar eclipse** occurs when the **Moon** comes between the **Sun** and **Earth**, blocking some or all of the Sun's light.
- **Total solar eclipse:** Moon completely covers the Sun's visible disc.
- It requires a near-perfect alignment of **Sun → Moon → Earth**.
- The narrow region on Earth from which totality is visible is called the **Path of Totality**.



Why is a Total Solar Eclipse scientifically important?

Study of the Solar Corona

Corona = Sun's outermost atmosphere

- Extends **millions of kilometres** into space.
- The **inner corona** lies closest to the Sun's surface.
- It is extremely faint compared with the Sun's bright disc.
- Normally, the bright solar disc makes studying the inner corona difficult.

During totality:

Normal Sun

 Bright disc
↓
Corona difficult to observe

During Total Eclipse

 Moon blocks disc
↓
Faint CORONA visible as a halo

Thus, an eclipse provides a **natural coronagraph**, allowing scientists to observe the inner corona from Earth.

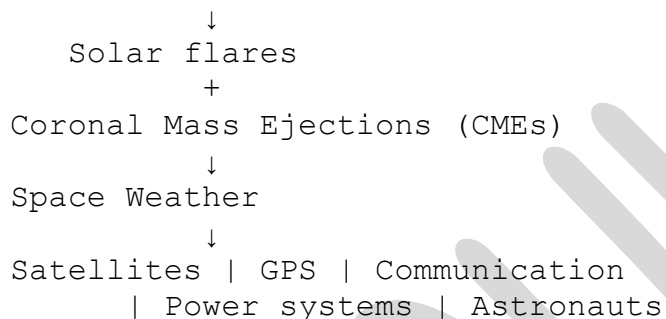
What do scientists study?

Solar Magnetic Fields

- The corona contains complex **magnetic-field structures**.
- These structures can appear as large-scale **streamers**.
- Observing them helps scientists understand the Sun's magnetic activity.
-

Solar Flares & CMEs

Solar magnetic activity

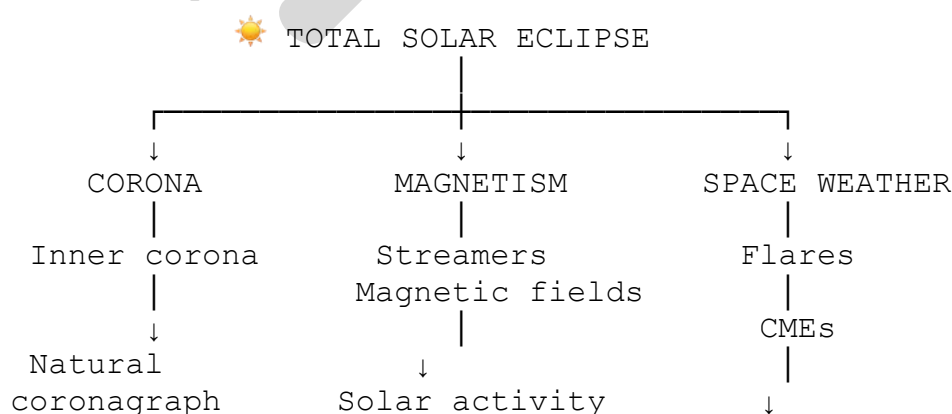


CMEs can disturb Earth's **space-weather environment** and affect technological systems.

Importance of the Solar Cycle

- The Sun follows an approximately **11-year solar activity cycle**.
- Activity varies between **solar minimum** → **maximum** → **minimum**.
- **Sunspots, solar flares and other phenomena** increase around solar maximum.
- Studying the corona during different phases helps scientists understand changing solar activity.

Mind Map



|
↓
Solar research

GPS/Satellites/
Communication

India's Scientific Contribution

- Researchers at **CESSI, IISER Kolkata** have predicted the possibility of observing multiple large-scale **coronal streamers** during the eclipse.
- Such observations can provide clues about the **magnetic structure of the solar corona**.
- Total eclipses therefore remain valuable even in the era of sophisticated solar spacecraft because they allow **ground-based observations of the inner corona** without the problem of instrumental scattered light.

★ UPSC Prelims Facts

<i>Term</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Corona	Sun's outer atmosphere
Totality	Period during which Moon completely covers Sun's disc
Path of Totality	Narrow region from which total eclipse is visible
Solar Cycle	Approximately 11-year variation in solar activity
Solar Flare	Sudden energetic eruption from Sun
CME	Large eruption of magnetised plasma from Sun
Coronagraph	Instrument that artificially blocks the solar disc to observe corona

Probable UPSC Prelims Question

Q. With reference to total solar eclipses, consider the following statements:

1. The corona is the outermost atmosphere of the Sun.
2. A total solar eclipse provides an opportunity to observe the inner corona because the Moon blocks the bright solar disc.
3. Solar activity follows an approximately 11-year cycle.
4. The path of totality covers the entire surface of the Earth experiencing the eclipse.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

✓ Answer: B.....The **path of totality** is only a **narrow strip on Earth's surface**, not the entire region experiencing an eclipse.

● Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “A total solar eclipse is not merely an astronomical spectacle but also a natural laboratory for understanding space weather.” Explain. (250 words)

Introduction:

A total solar eclipse occurs when the Moon completely obscures the Sun's visible disc, creating a rare opportunity to study the otherwise faint solar corona.

Scientific significance:

- Reveals the **inner corona** by blocking intense solar-disc light.
- Enables ground-based observation of coronal structures.
- Helps scientists study **solar magnetic fields and streamers**.
- Improves understanding of solar flares and **coronal mass ejections**.
- These phenomena constitute **space weather**, which can affect satellites, GPS, communications and power infrastructure.
- Observations during different phases of the approximately **11-year solar cycle** help understand changing solar activity.

Conclusion:

Despite advanced space-based solar observatories, total solar eclipses remain an important **natural coronagraph**, complementing spacecraft observations and improving humanity's ability to understand and predict space weather.

14.08.2026

GS - III

SC & Environmental Law

Core argument

- The Supreme Court has historically been the “**parent**” of **Indian environmental jurisprudence**, developing doctrines such as **absolute liability**, **public trust**, **precautionary principle**, **polluter pays** and **sustainable development**.

- However, the recent judicial approaches appear **inconsistent**, especially when environmental challenges involve large infrastructure projects.

Evolution of environmental jurisprudence

Constitutional foundation

- 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976
 - **Article 48A**: State must protect and improve the environment, forests and wildlife.(DPSP)
 - **Article 51A(g)**: Fundamental duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment.
- Environmental protection became part of India's broader constitutional commitment to **sustainable development**.

Major SC doctrines

1. Absolute Liability

- *M.C. Mehta / Oleum Gas Leak case*
- Enterprises engaged in inherently hazardous activities have an **absolute and non-delegable liability** for harm caused.
- No traditional exceptions available under strict liability.

2. Public Trust Doctrine

- *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath* — Span Motel case.
- Natural resources are held by the State **in trust for the public**.
- Government cannot permit their misuse for private interests.

3. Polluter Pays Principle

- Polluter must bear the cost of **environmental damage and restoration**.
- Applied in cases such as *Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union of India*.

4. Precautionary Principle

- *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India*
- State should:
Anticipate → Prevent → Address environmental degradation.
- Where serious environmental risks exist, absence of complete scientific certainty should not justify inaction.

5. Sustainable Development

- Development and environmental protection are **not inherently contradictory**.
- The objective is to maintain a balance between:
Development + Environment + Inter-generational equity

The present concern

The Court has generally supported environmental causes, particularly petitions by environmental groups, but appears **less consistent when environmental objections concern major infrastructure projects.**

Key question:

Should courts reject environmental challenges merely because development projects are important?

Answer: NO.

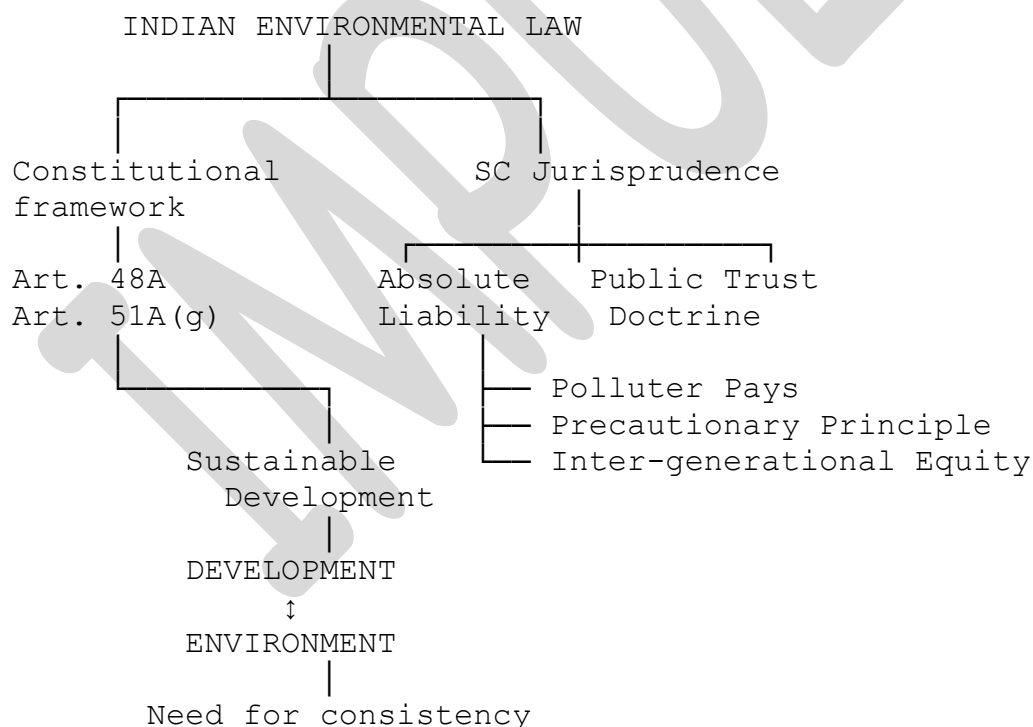
Instead, courts should ask:

Has the project complied with environmental laws and norms?

Not:

Is this another development project being challenged?

Mind Map



🎯 Probable UPSC Mains question

Q: “The Supreme Court has transformed environmental protection in India through judicial doctrines, but its approach towards development projects raises concerns of jurisprudential inconsistency.” Discuss. (250 words)

Conclusion:

Environmental protection should not mean opposing development. **Sustainable development requires development within environmental limits**, and judicial review should ensure that every project—large or small—complies with environmental norms.

● **WORDLY WISE**

Technology is a useful servant
but a dangerous master.

— *Christian Lous Lange*

GS - II

Punjab's Digital Universities Bills

Brief

- The **Punjab Assembly** has passed three Bills, 2026, to establish private **Digital Open Universities** that will primarily provide education through **online, distance and open-learning modes**.
- The move is based on the **Punjab Private Digital Open Universities Policy, 2026**, notified in January.

Three proposed universities

<i>University</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Promoter</i>
Cloud University	Hoshiarpur	Rayat & Bahra Group
MS Digital University	Patiala	Balraj Singla Education Society
Physicswallah Digital University	Patiala	NextSeed Foundation linked to Physics Wallah

Key features

- Fully/primarily **digital education**
- UG, PG and professional programmes
- Online classes + live sessions
- Digital assessments
- Virtual laboratories
- AI-enabled learning pathways
- AI-proctored examinations
- Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- Digital content studios & cloud hosting
- Mentoring and **24×7 student support**
- Students can study from home.

Funding & governance

- **Self-financed private universities**
- No Punjab government grant/financial assistance.
- Minimum **₹20 crore corpus fund** for each university.
- **Governor = Visitor**, with inspection powers.
- Chancellor nominated by sponsoring body.
- Student grievance **Ombudsman** mandatory.
- Penalties up to **₹25 lakh** for violations of applicable norms.

Why the controversy?

Government's argument

The Punjab government argues that digital universities can:

Expand access → attract private/edtech investment → increase flexibility → promote digital higher education

The government also says the Bills require compliance with:

- **UGC (Open and Distance Learning & Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020**
- **National Credit Framework**
- **Credit Framework for Online Learning**
- **Academic Bank of Credits**

Opposition's concerns

1. Practical education

- Engineering, medicine and sciences require laboratories, clinical exposure and hands-on training.
- Question: Can these requirements genuinely be fulfilled through digital education?

2. Private-sector dominance

- Critics argue that the government is facilitating private/edtech institutions instead of strengthening public universities.

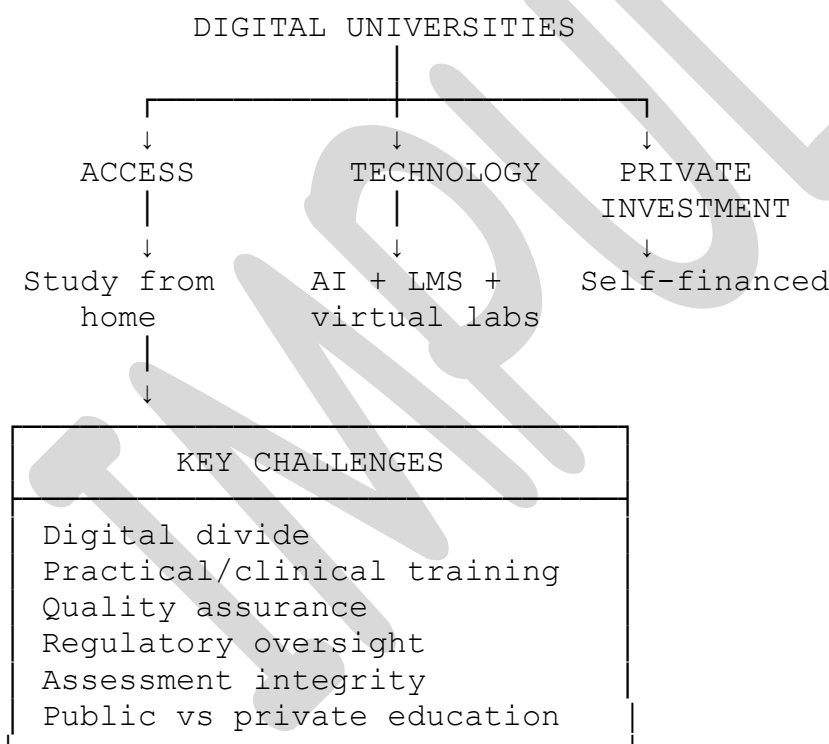
3. Regulatory concerns

- Questions have been raised regarding the extent of government/UGC oversight.

4. Quality assurance

- Online expansion can create risks involving:
 - assessment integrity
 - faculty quality
 - student interaction
 - practical training
 - digital inequality.

UPSC Concept Map



UPSC Mains question

Q. “Digital universities can democratise access to higher education, but their expansion raises concerns regarding quality, practical training and digital inequality.” Discuss in the context of Punjab’s Digital Universities Bills, 2026. (250 words)

Prelims takeaway

Digital University ≠ merely online classes.

The proposed model combines online/open learning + LMS + AI tools + digital assessment + virtual laboratories + regulatory frameworks.

Core debate:

Access and innovation vs quality, practical training and regulatory accountability.

15.08.2026

GS - III

Record Heat Fuels Wildfires in Europe

What is happening?

- Europe is witnessing **multiple large wildfires amid record-breaking heat and severe drought**. Countries such as **France, Spain, Germany, the UK, Croatia, Albania, Greece, Belgium and the Netherlands** have been affected.
- The extreme temperatures to **human-induced climate change**, which is increasing heat and drying landscapes, thereby making wildfires more frequent and difficult to control.

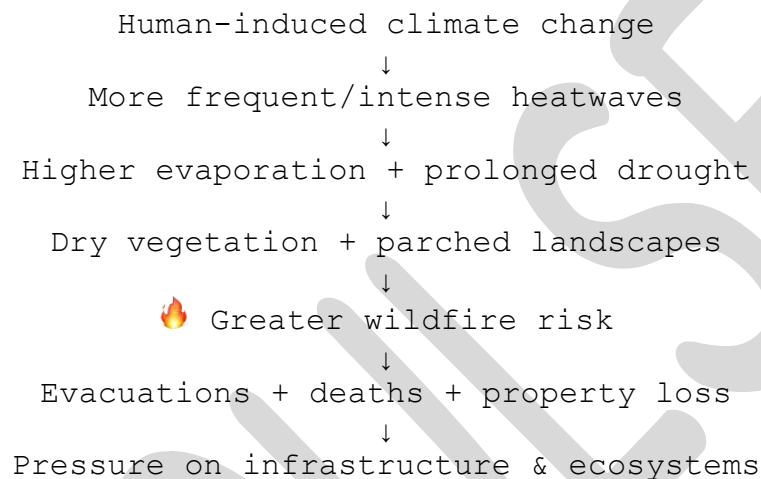


Major impacts

France:	Extremely dry conditions; hundreds evacuated in Landes. Six nuclear reactors were shut due to a combination of heat, drought and jellyfish-related problems .
UK:	Fire in Stourbridge destroyed around 20–30 homes ; temperatures reached 38.1°C in west London .
Spain:	Large fires caused evacuations; a wildfire in Huelva affected more than 300 sq km .
Germany:	Around 1,800 residents evacuated from Gey due to a wildfire.
Croatia:	One death and 14 hospitalisations; more than 1,000 people evacuated near Omiš.

Albania	&	Multiple active fires led to evacuations, including evacuations by sea in Greece.
Greece:		
Belgium	&	Temperatures expected to reach around 37°C , accompanied by drought and water shortages.
Netherlands:		

Climate-change connection



Why are wildfires becoming harder to control?

Extreme heat + drought → low soil moisture → dry vegetation → rapid fire spread

This creates a positive feedback loop:

 Fire → vegetation loss → carbon emissions → climate warming → hotter/drier conditions → greater fire risk.

Wider significance

The episode demonstrates that **climate change is not simply a temperature problem.**

It has cascading effects on:

- Disaster management
- Agriculture and water availability
- Tourism
- Biodiversity
- Human health
- Energy infrastructure
- Nuclear power generation
- Emergency services

Prelims Facts

<i>Term</i>	<i>Key point</i>
Heatwave	Period of unusually high temperatures
Drought	Prolonged deficiency of precipitation leading to water stress
Wildfire	Uncontrolled fire affecting vegetation and ecosystems
Climate change	Can increase heat extremes and drying conditions
Compound risk	Heat + drought can amplify wildfire danger

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Extreme heatwaves and drought are transforming wildfire risks in regions traditionally considered less vulnerable to extreme heat.” Discuss the relationship between climate change, drought and wildfire intensity, with reference to recent European events. (250 words)

UPSC takeaway:

- Europe's wildfires illustrate how climate change can convert extreme heat and water stress into a multidimensional disaster, requiring both climate mitigation and stronger adaptation/disaster-management systems.



Kerch Strait Warning

Brief

- Renewed attacks around the **Black Sea, Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov** threaten the movement of Russian and Ukrainian agricultural commodities. This could revive the **global food-supply shock witnessed in 2022** after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Why is the region important?

Russia + Ukraine are major global agricultural exporters:

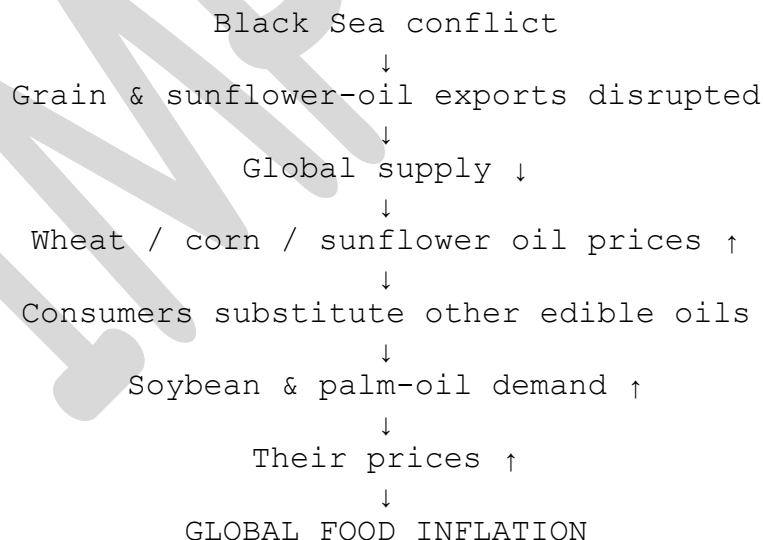
- **>25% of global wheat exports**
- Around **15% of corn and barley exports**
- **60%+ of sunflower-oil exports**
- Greater Odesa port complex handles around **90% of Ukraine's agricultural exports**.
- **>80% of Russia's grain exports** move through Black Sea and Sea of Azov ports.

Therefore:

Port disruption → export paralysis → global supply shortage → food-price inflation

Commodity shock can spread

A shortage doesn't remain confined to one commodity.



This is called a **spillover/substitution effect** in commodity markets.

⚠️ Why the current situation could be worse

The article highlights interaction among multiple shocks:

Geopolitical shocks

- Russia–Ukraine conflict
- US–Iran/West Asia conflict

Climate shocks

- El Niño
- European heatwaves
- Drought-related agricultural stress

👉 Combined effect

War + disrupted trade routes + extreme weather = compound supply shock

This could create a situation resembling a “**perfect storm**” in global food markets.

🇮🇳 Implications for India

India may face:

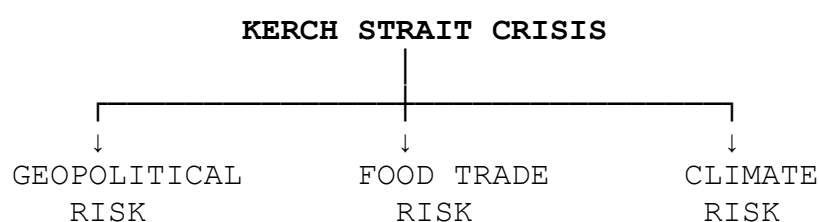
- Higher international wheat and edible-oil prices
- Fertiliser supply/price pressures
- Higher food inflation
- Pressure on agricultural input costs
- Increased import bills
- Risks to food security

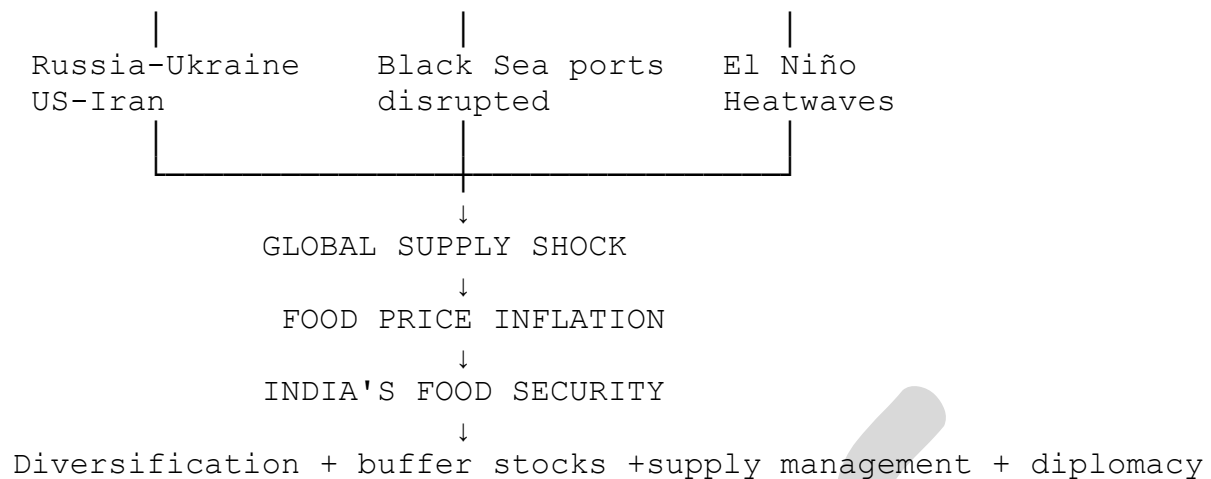
However, India has some buffers:

Strategic reserves + diversified imports + domestic production + supply-side intervention

The government previously managed to insulate Indian consumers and farmers from disruptions involving **transport fuels, LPG, LNG and urea**.

🧠 UPSC Mind Map





Prelims takeaway

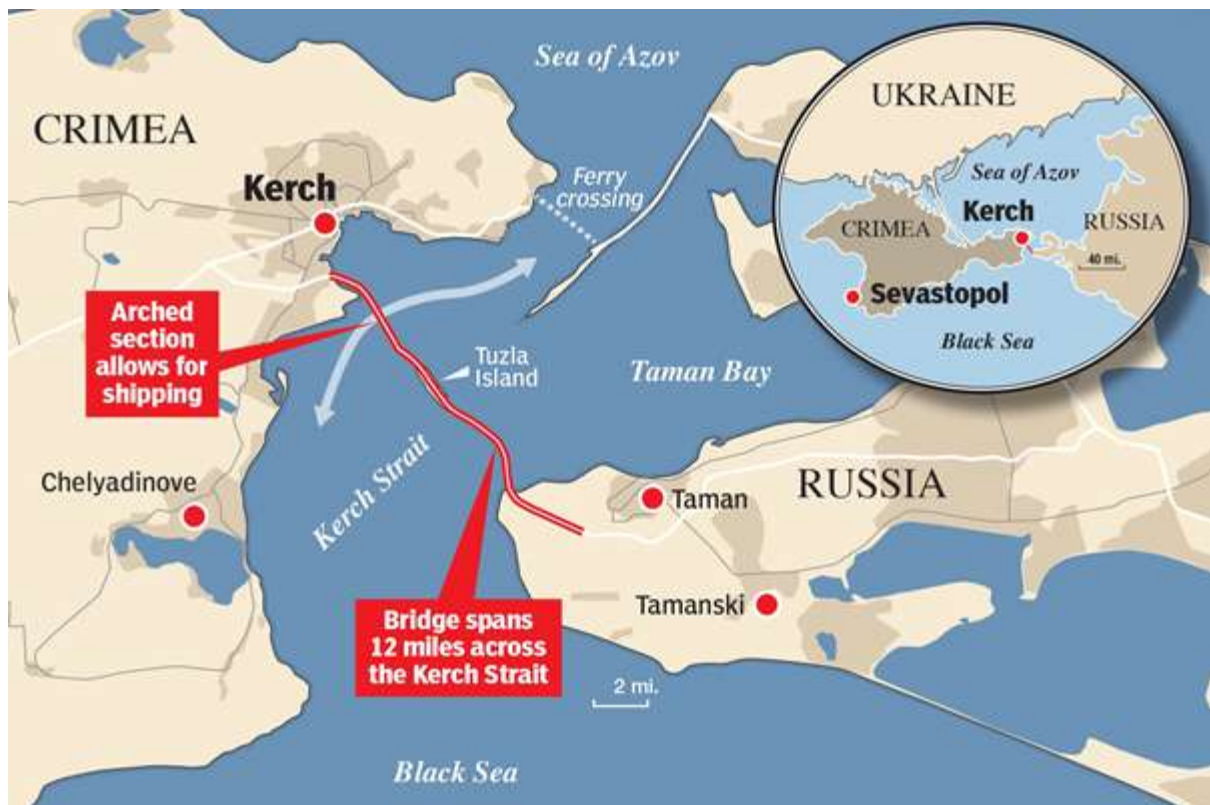
Kerch Strait connects the **Black Sea and Sea of Azov** and is strategically important for regional maritime movement.

Key chain to remember:

Black Sea disruption → grain/oil shortage → commodity substitution → global food inflation → India's food-security challenge.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

“Geopolitical conflicts are increasingly interacting with climate shocks to threaten global food security.” Examine the implications of renewed disruption in the Black Sea-Kerch Strait region for India. (150 words)



17.08.2026

Odisha's Coastal Erosion

Brief

- A recent reply in the **Rajya Sabha**, citing the **National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR)**, reported significant shoreline change along Odisha's **564-km coastline**.
 - **28.3%** → undergoing **erosion**
 - **17.6%** → stable
 - **54.1%** → accretion/growth
 - Assessment period: **1990–2022**
- **Important:** Coastal erosion and accretion can occur simultaneously along different stretches of the same coastline.

Most erosion-prone districts

<i>District</i>	<i>Approx. coastline under erosion</i>
Jagatsinghpur	47.6%
Ganjam	45.7%
Kendrapara	45%
Balasore	23.8%
Puri	10.2%
Bhadrak	4.6%

Human impact

Coastal erosion is not merely an environmental issue—it affects **land, houses, livelihoods and settlements**.

- Around **16 villages in Kendrapara** have reportedly been submerged, displacing residents.
- **Podampeta in Ganjam**, once home to nearly 500 households, has been abandoned as the sea advanced inland.
- Other villages such as **Ramayapatna** are also experiencing shoreline retreat.

What causes coastal erosion?

Natural factors

- Waves and tides
- Cyclones and storm surges
- Tsunamis
- Sea-level rise
- Sediment movement along the coast

Human-induced factors

- Port and harbour construction
- Breakwaters, jetties and seawalls
- Unplanned coastal infrastructure
- Sand mining
- Alteration of natural sediment flows

Climate change connection

Global warming → sea-level rise + stronger/extreme coastal hazards → greater vulnerability of low-lying coastal settlements

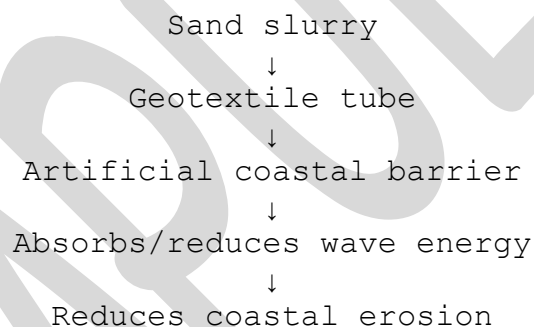
Measures being adopted

1. Geotextile tube embankments



A **geotextile tube** is a large cylindrical structure made of high-strength porous synthetic fabric and filled with **sand slurry**.

Function:



Odisha is developing such an embankment at **Pentha village in Kendrapara**.

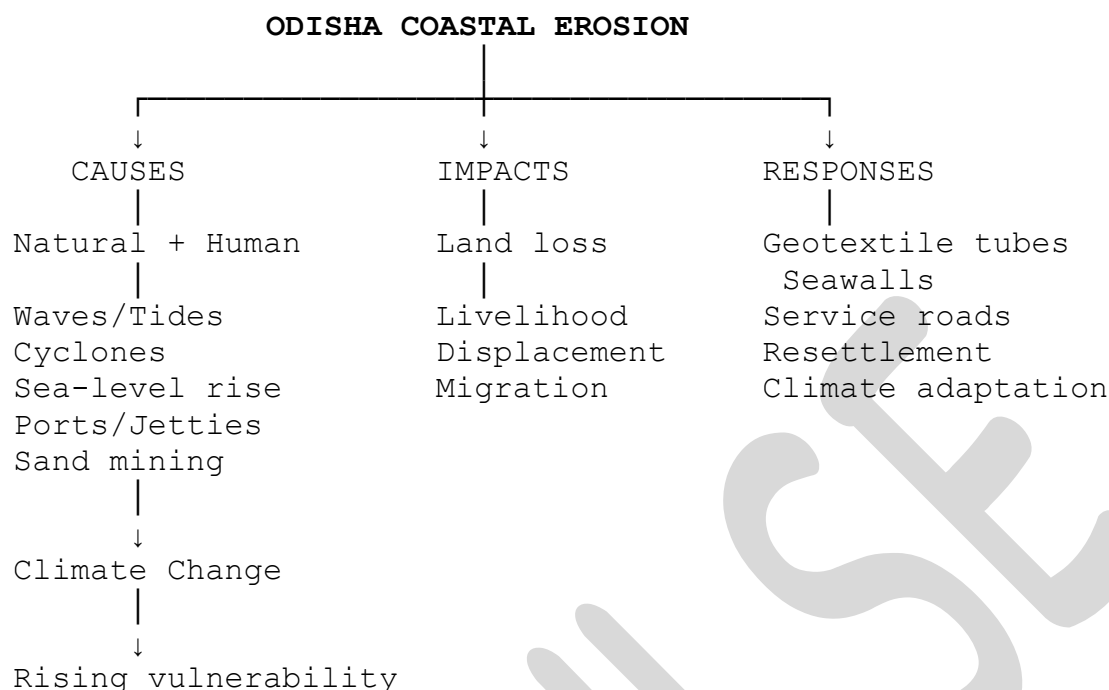
2. Seawall-cum-service roads

- Being developed in parts of **Balasore** and at **Ramayapatna, Ganjam**.
- They perform two functions:
 - **Outer barrier** → protects coast from waves/erosion
 - **Inner road** → provides transport/service access

3. Climate-resilient rehabilitation

- Odisha has developed a **resettlement colony at Kendrapara** for people displaced by coastal erosion, described in the article as India's first climate resettlement colony.

UPSC Mind Map



UPSC Mains Question

“Coastal erosion is a multidimensional challenge involving environmental degradation, climate change, disaster risk and livelihood insecurity.” Discuss the causes and evaluate Odisha’s measures to address it. (250 words)

Mains conclusion

Odisha's experience demonstrates that **coastal protection cannot rely exclusively on hard engineering structures**. A sustainable strategy should combine **scientific shoreline monitoring, ecosystem-based approaches such as mangrove restoration, carefully designed coastal infrastructure, disaster preparedness and climate-resilient resettlement**.

Prelims takeaway

NCCR → monitors long-term shoreline changes along India's coast.

Key distinction:

- Erosion = landward retreat of shoreline
- Accretion = seaward growth/advance of shoreline

Exam chain:

Climate change + cyclones + human interference → shoreline change → land/livelihood loss → coastal protection + adaptation + planned resettlement.

1946 Royal Indian Navy Uprising —

How it Hastened Independence

● Historical significance

- The **Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Uprising of February 1946** was one of the final major challenges to British authority in India. It began as a protest by Indian naval ratings in **Bombay** but quickly spread to naval establishments and received civilian support.
- Its greatest significance was psychological and strategic: **the British began to fear that Indian armed forces could no longer be relied upon to defend colonial rule.**

Background: Why did the sailors revolt?

- During World War II, the RIN expanded dramatically:
 - <2,000 personnel → nearly 30,000
- After the war, Britain planned to reduce the force to around 11,000.
- This created:
 - Loss of status and pride
 - Job insecurity
 - Disappointment over wartime expectations
 - Poor food and living conditions
 - Racial discrimination
 - Harsh treatment by British officers
- Additional political factors
 - ☞ The atmosphere was already charged by:
 - **INA trials**
 - Growing nationalist sentiment
 - Memories of the **Quit India Movement**
 - Post-war economic difficulties
 - Discontent within the armed forces

Immediate trigger

- At **HMIS Talwar, Bombay**, sailors had earlier protested against poor conditions and displayed anti-British slogans.
- The immediate confrontation came when **Commander Arthur Frederick King** allegedly abused Indian ratings, including calling them “**sons of coolies.**”
- Their complaint produced no satisfactory action.

- On 18 February 1946, more than 1,000 ratings went on strike.

Their demands included:

Service-related

- Better food
- Improved service conditions
- Action against Commander King

Political/nationalist

- Withdrawal of British-Indian troops from Indonesia
- Fair/free trials for INA prisoners
- Wider nationalist demands

Thus, a **labour/service grievance transformed into a political revolt.**

How did it spread?

The uprising rapidly expanded:

78 ships + 20 shore establishments → nearly 20,000 personnel

The sailors:

- Took control of naval installations
- Called themselves the **Indian National Navy**
- Removed British flags
- Hoisted **Congress and Muslim League flags**
- Received substantial civilian support, particularly in **Bombay and Karachi**

On **22 February**, police firing in Bombay killed hundreds according to contemporary estimates, with the article putting the minimum at around **400**.

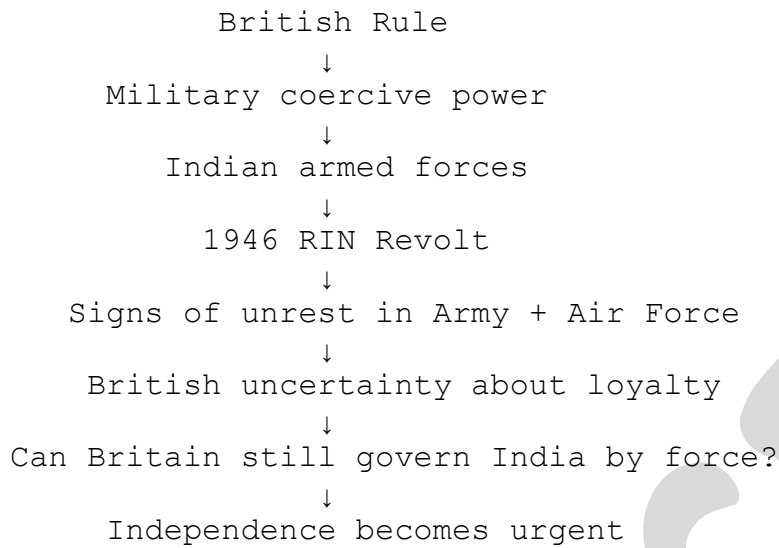
The revolt also coincided with signs of unrest in sections of the **Royal Indian Air Force and Army**.

Why did it alarm the British?

This was the crucial point.

- British colonial rule ultimately depended upon:
A small British ruling establishment + Indian military and police forces to enforce authority.
- If Indian soldiers stopped obeying British commands, the entire colonial structure became vulnerable.

▪ The strategic equation



This was more important than the **size of the naval revolt itself**.

Why was it a turning point?

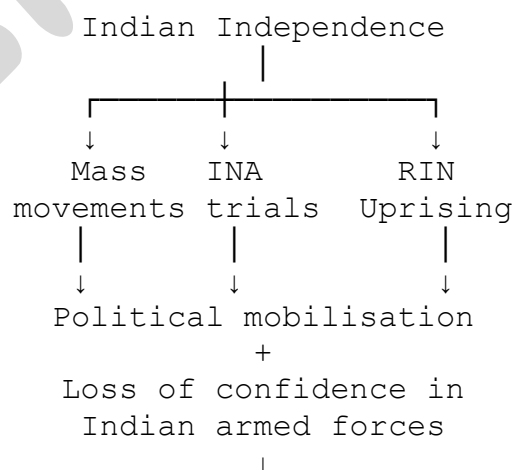
The uprising demonstrated that:

British could no longer assume unconditional loyalty of Indian armed forces.

This mattered enormously because Britain had just emerged from **World War II**, was financially exhausted and faced the challenge of maintaining a vast empire.

Therefore, the RIN revolt **accelerated the British decision to transfer power**, although it was **not the sole cause of independence**.

Broader context: Multiple pressures on British rule



British authority weakened



Transfer of power

Important distinction

RIN Uprising ≠ sole cause of independence

Rather, it was the **final psychological and military shock** added to:

- Decades of nationalist mobilisation
- Quit India Movement
- INA activities and trials
- Post-war economic crisis in Britain
- Growing popular unrest
- Increasing difficulty of sustaining colonial rule

UPSC Mains perspective

Q: “The Royal Indian Navy Uprising of 1946 was less significant for its military strength than for its impact on British confidence in the loyalty of Indian armed forces.” Discuss. (250 words)

Introduction:

The RIN Uprising began in Bombay on **18 February 1946** as a naval ratings' strike but soon developed into a wider anti-colonial mobilisation.

Body:

- Immediate causes: poor conditions, racial discrimination, abusive treatment.
- Political background: INA trials and nationalist mobilisation.
- Spread: naval ships/establishments and civilian participation.
- Wider significance: signs of unrest in other armed forces.
- British concern: colonial rule depended heavily on Indian military cooperation.
- Limitation: lacked central leadership and did not directly force independence.

Conclusion:

The uprising did not independently cause India's independence, but it **hastened the end of British rule by demonstrating that the coercive foundations of the colonial state were becoming unreliable.**

One-line revision

1946 RIN Uprising → Indian military loyalty questioned → British coercive capacity weakened → transfer of power accelerated.

• ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As AI agents get popular, questions of control, onus

Unlike an AI assistant, an AI agent can independently take actions to achieve a goal. How much of the process does a user hand over, and to what end?

• How an AI agent is different from a chatbot

For the average person, an AI chatbot assistant can ease many tasks: seeking a recommendation, getting answers to online search queries, or translating text.

But an AI agent goes a step further. It can independently take a series of actions to achieve a user-defined goal, and can even access other software and navigate websites. For example, a user can command it to plan a holiday, and it can find suitable flights, draw up an itinerary and make reservations on their behalf.

At their core, both assistants and agents share the same underlying principle. AI assistants like ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude are Large Language Models or LLMs, which are systems trained on large amounts of



data to recognise meaningful patterns. They predict an answer for a user query based on this information.

Some early evidence of what users are actually willing to delegate comes from Perplexity's Comet browser. A study examined hundreds of millions of interactions between July and

According to OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, creating an agent requires three main components:

1. The model, which is the LLM powering the agent's reasoning and decision-making;
2. Tools, which are the external functions that the agent can use to take action, and
3. Instructions, or the explicit guidelines and guardrails defining how the agent behaves.

October 2025 and revealed tasks ranging from researching to searching for products. A majority of the work involved personal use.

19.08.2026

GS - II

Minerals & Mines — Strike a Federal Balance

Core Issue

- Parliament has passed the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026**, seeking to restrict States' ability to impose additional levies on **mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands**.
- The debate is essentially between:
Investment & uniformity ⚖ vs ⚖ State fiscal autonomy

Why did the Centre amend the law?

Centre's arguments:

- Greater **certainty and predictability** for mining investors.
- Prevent multiple/higher levies from increasing **infrastructure and industrial costs**.
- Attract greater **domestic and foreign investment**.
- Bring greater **uniformity in mineral taxation**.
- Support India's **critical mineral security** and industrial growth.

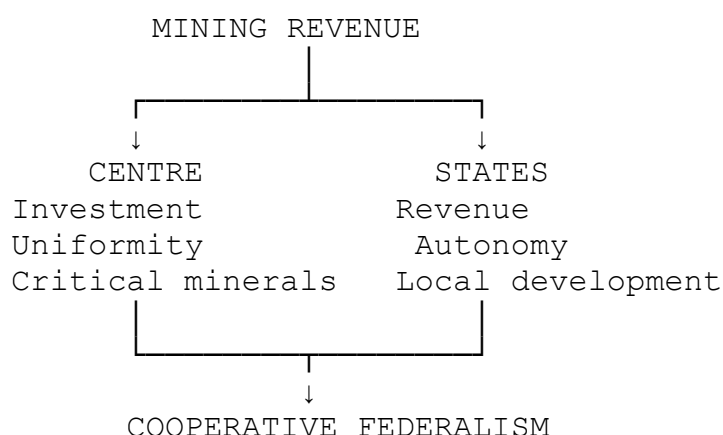
Economic concern:

- India's effective mining tax burden is reportedly **>50% of revenues**, compared with around **35–40% in some other countries**.

Why are States opposing it?

- The issue became particularly important after the **Supreme Court upheld States' power to tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands** and permitted recovery of certain past dues.
- Mineral-rich States such as:
 - Odisha + Jharkhand + Chhattisgarh
 - depend significantly on mining-related revenue.
- States fear:
 - ↓ **Revenue mobilisation capacity**
 - ↓ **Fiscal autonomy**
 - **Greater Centre–State dependence**
 - **Weakening of cooperative federalism**
- Some States had already introduced additional mineral-bearing land taxes, e.g. on **iron ore and limestone**.

Federalism Dimension



- ⊗ The challenge is to prevent **regulatory fragmentation** without unnecessarily weakening the **constitutional fiscal space of States**.

Why mining matters for India

Mining is strategically important for:

- Critical minerals
- Renewable-energy technologies
- Batteries & EVs
- Defence manufacturing
- Infrastructure
- Semiconductor and high-tech industries
- India's energy transition

The Centre's **Critical Mineral Mission** makes a predictable mining regime even more important.

Way Forward

A balanced approach should include:

1. **Consultation with States** before major changes in mineral taxation.
2. A transparent mechanism for **revenue-sharing/compensation**.
3. Rationalisation rather than arbitrary suppression of State levies.
4. Greater **transparency in royalty and auction revenues**.
5. Use mining revenues for **local-area development and environmental restoration**.
6. Strengthen the **GST Council-like cooperative mechanisms** for Centre-State dialogue on resource taxation.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The recent changes in mineral taxation highlight the tension between ease of doing business and fiscal federalism.” Discuss. (150 words)

UPSC takeaway:

- The objective should not be **Centre vs States**, but **predictable mining regulation + adequate State fiscal autonomy + sustainable resource governance**.

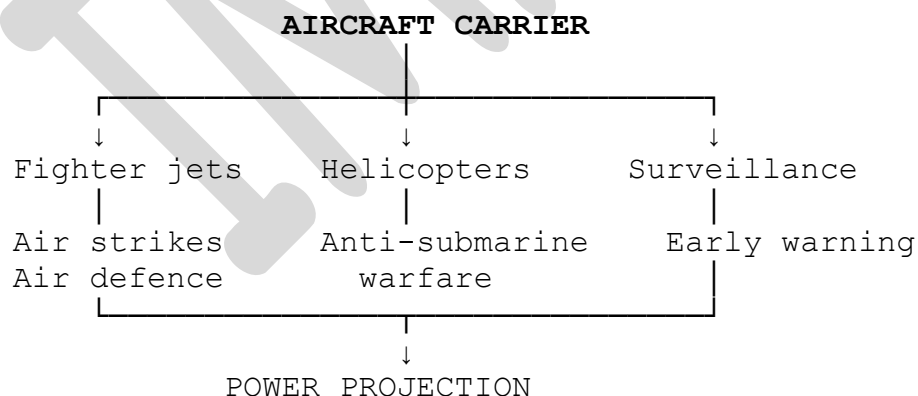
USS Abraham Lincoln — Aircraft Carriers & Naval Power

Brief

- The **USS Abraham Lincoln**, a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, has reportedly remained at sea for **over 260 days**, creating concerns about crew morale, supplies and prolonged deployment.
- The episode also highlights a larger question: **Are aircraft carriers still indispensable in modern naval warfare?**

What is an Aircraft Carrier?

An aircraft carrier is essentially a **mobile airbase at sea**.



It carries:

- Fighter aircraft
- Helicopters
- Surveillance/early-warning aircraft
- Fuel and ammunition

- Maintenance facilities
- Thousands of personnel

Thus, it can **project air power far from a country's territory**.

India's Aircraft Carriers

India currently operates **two aircraft carriers**:

<i>Carrier</i>	<i>Significance</i>
INS Vikramaditya	Former Soviet <i>Admiral Gorshkov</i> , refurbished and inducted into Indian Navy
INS Vikrant	India's first indigenously designed and built aircraft carrier

Why carriers matter for India

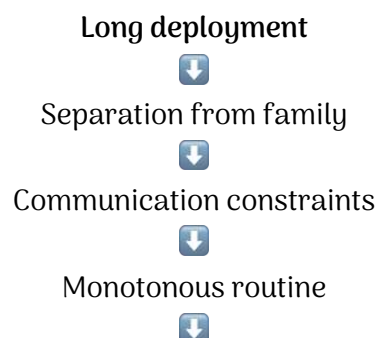
India's long coastline and **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** position make naval aviation important for:

- Sea-lane security
- Maritime surveillance
- Power projection
- Protection of trade routes
- Humanitarian assistance/disaster relief
- Deterrence

Why is prolonged deployment dangerous for morale?

- **Human endurance can become a limiting factor** even when a warship remains technically operational.

Major stress factors



Limited recreation



Fatigue + psychological stress



Lower morale

☞ For submariners, the problem can be even greater because of prolonged absence of **sunlight and open space**.

Key UPSC concept:

Military effectiveness depends not only on platforms and weapons but also on human resilience, logistics and morale.

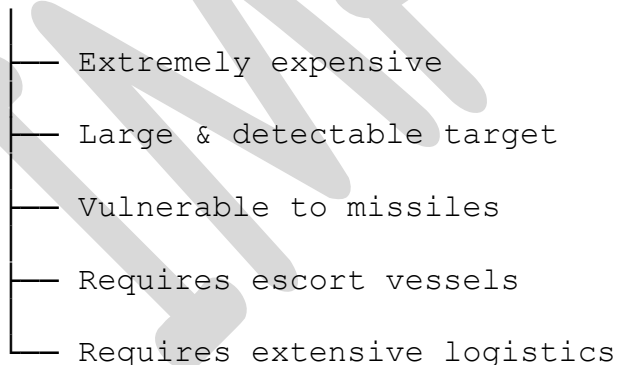
Why are aircraft carriers still important?

Advantages ✓

- **Mobile airbase** without dependence on foreign territory.
- Enables **power projection** over distant regions.
- Supports air defence of naval formations.
- Provides surveillance and maritime security.
- Useful for humanitarian assistance and evacuation.
- Acts as a visible instrument of **strategic deterrence**.

But carriers have vulnerabilities

Aircraft Carrier



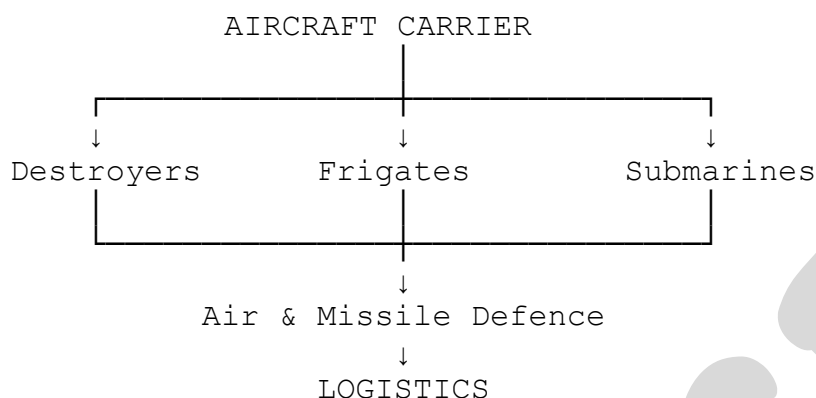
Modern threats include:

- Anti-ship ballistic missiles
- Hypersonic weapons
- Submarines
- Long-range drones
- Saturation attacks
- Cyber/electronic warfare

Therefore, a carrier **cannot operate alone**.

Carrier Strike Group

A carrier normally operates as the centre of a **Carrier Strike Group (CSG)**.



The surrounding warships provide:

- Air defence
- Missile defence
- Anti-submarine warfare
- Surface warfare
- Radar and surveillance
- Protection against enemy threats

UPSC Significance for India

The USS Lincoln episode provides a broader lesson for India's maritime strategy.

India must balance:

Aircraft carriers



Submarines + destroyers + frigates + drones + maritime aircraft + missiles

The future Indian Navy is likely to require a **balanced fleet**, rather than relying excessively on any single platform.

Probable Mains Question

Q. "Aircraft carriers remain powerful instruments of maritime power, but their survivability is increasingly contested by modern anti-access/area-denial weapons." Discuss in the context of India's maritime strategy. (250 words)



Prelims Quick Facts

- Aircraft carrier = mobile airbase at sea
 - Carrier Strike Group = carrier + escort/support vessels
 - INS Vikramaditya = refurbished former Soviet carrier
 - INS Vikrant = indigenous aircraft carrier
 - Major modern threats → submarines, anti-ship missiles, drones, hypersonic weapons
 - Carrier effectiveness depends on air power + escorts + logistics + crew endurance.
-

20.08.2026

GS - II / III / IV

Dignity in Death & “Humane” Execution

Brief

- The **Supreme Court has declined to strike down hanging as India's method of execution**, holding that, based on the material presently before it, the method remains constitutionally valid.
- *The debate raises a fundamental question:*
Can the State impose a death sentence while still respecting the constitutional requirement of dignity under Article 21?

Constitutional & Legal Framework

➤ **Article 21 — Right to Life and Personal Liberty**

- ⊗ The Supreme Court has expanded Article 21 to include the principle of **dignity**.
- ⊗ In **Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996)**, the Court recognised that the right to life includes the right to live with dignity, including dignity associated with the end of life.
- ⊗ However:
Right to die ≠ unrestricted right to die.
The jurisprudence concerning **dignity in death** has to be distinguished from a general constitutional right to suicide.

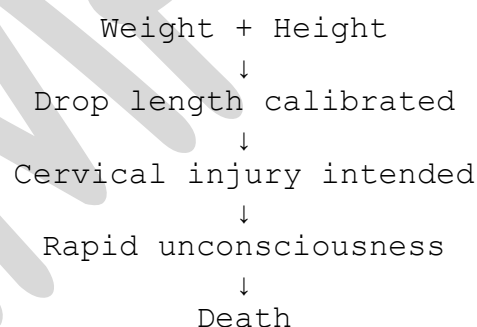
Why is hanging constitutionally valid?

- Under Section 393(5) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS):
 - A death sentence is to be carried out by hanging by the neck until death.
 - The provision substantially continues the position that existed under the colonial-era CrPC, 1861.
- **Important precedent —**
Deena v. Union of India (1983)
The Supreme Court **upheld hanging as a constitutional method** after considering:
 - Medical evidence
 - Expert opinion
 - Comparative methods of execution
 - Whether hanging involves excessive pain or degradation
- ✧ The Court concluded that **properly administered hanging was a quick and certain method** and did not violate Article 21.

The scientific controversy

The petitioners challenged the assumption that hanging necessarily causes **instant unconsciousness and death**.

Long-drop method



But an improperly calibrated drop may produce different outcomes:

- **Too short** → possible prolonged strangulation
- **Too long** → risk of severe injury/decapitation

The petitioners relied on historical medical evidence suggesting that the assumed “hangman's fracture” does **not necessarily occur in every case**.

Therefore, the central scientific question is:

Is hanging sufficiently predictable and consistently capable of producing a rapid, minimally painful death?

Why did the Supreme Court reject the challenge?

The Court identified two major obstacles:

1. Binding precedent

- The 1983 *Deena* judgment had already upheld hanging.

2. Legislative choice

- Parliament has retained hanging in the **BNSS**.
- The Court found that the new scientific material placed before it did not sufficiently displace the assumptions underlying *Deena*.
- However, importantly, the Court **did not permanently close the door**.
- If future medical/scientific evidence fundamentally changes the understanding of hanging, the constitutional question can potentially be reconsidered.

Methods of execution around the world

<i>Method</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Major concern</i>
Hanging	India, Japan, Singapore	Risk of prolonged suffering if improperly administered
Lethal injection	Several US jurisdictions, China	Botched executions, difficulty obtaining venous access
Shooting	Some countries including China, North Korea	Violent and traumatic
Beheading	Saudi Arabia	Depends heavily on executioner's precision
Nitrogen hypoxia	Some US jurisdictions	Scientific and ethical controversy

Global trend

- ☞ More than **two-thirds of countries** have abolished the death penalty either in law or practice, although executions have continued in several countries.

Key UPSC Constitutional Concepts

Article 21

- Life + personal liberty
- Expanded through judicial interpretation
- Includes **human dignity**

Death penalty

- Not completely unconstitutional in India
- Permissible under the “**rarest of rare**” doctrine

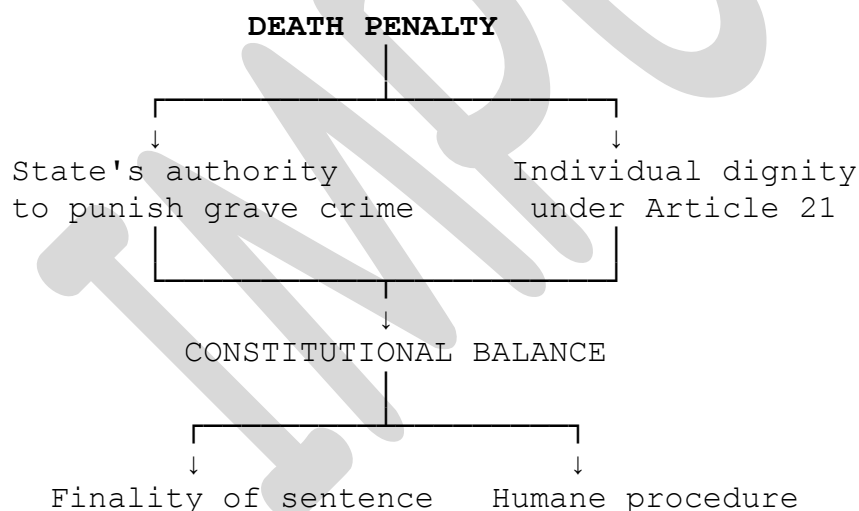
Method of execution

- Must satisfy constitutional requirements of **decency, dignity and absence of unnecessary brutality**

Judicial review

- Scientific evidence can potentially justify reconsideration of an earlier precedent.

The larger constitutional dilemma



The controversy demonstrates that **even where capital punishment itself remains legally permissible, the State's manner of carrying it out is subject to constitutional scrutiny.**

UPSC Prelims: Possible Question

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court in *Deena v. Union of India* upheld hanging as a constitutionally valid method of execution.
2. Article 21 has been interpreted to include the principle of dignity.
3. The BNSS permits the execution of a death sentence through lethal injection.
4. The Supreme Court can never reconsider the constitutionality of hanging once upheld by an earlier Constitution Bench.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

Answer: 1 and 2 only.

Why?

- 1  *Deena* upheld hanging.
- 2  Dignity has been read into Article 21.
- 3  BNSS Section 393(5) provides for hanging.
- 4  Constitutional precedent can be reconsidered where compelling new legal/scientific material emerges.

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The constitutional validity of capital punishment cannot be examined independently of the manner in which it is executed.” Discuss in the context of Article 21 and the Supreme Court's jurisprudence on dignity. (250 words)

One-line takeaway

The issue is no longer merely whether the State can execute, but whether it can do so in a manner consistent with Article 21's constitutional promise of dignity.

India's Arctic Policy —

From Science to Geopolitics

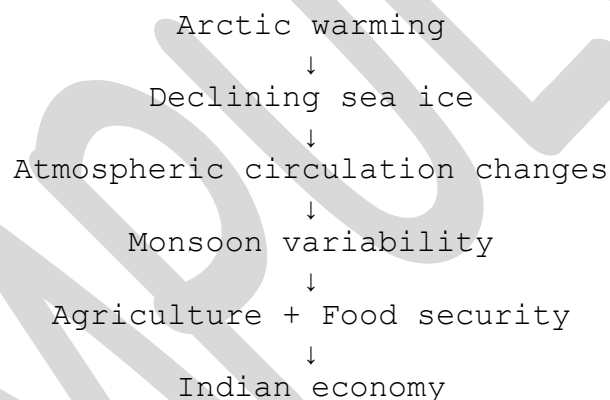
Core Issue

- India's engagement with the **Arctic** has traditionally been centred on **scientific research**, but rapid Arctic warming is transforming the region into a space where **climate change, maritime routes, energy, critical minerals and great-power competition** intersect.
- The key challenge is therefore:
- **India has an Arctic policy, but does it have the institutional capacity and resources to implement it at the scale required?**

Why is the Arctic important for India?

1. Arctic-Indian Monsoon Link

- The Arctic influences atmospheric circulation, which can affect the **South Asian monsoon**.



- India is particularly vulnerable because agriculture supports a large share of the population and the **southwest monsoon contributes around 70% of India's annual rainfall**.

2. Sea-level rise

- Rapid Arctic warming and melting of ice contribute to global sea-level rise.
- Potential consequences:
 - **Arctic warming → Sea-level rise → Coastal flooding → Displacement → Food & livelihood insecurity**
- This matters enormously for India because of its **long coastline**, while neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and the Maldives are particularly vulnerable.

3. Geopolitical importance

The Arctic is increasingly becoming a theatre of strategic competition.

Major interests:

- New maritime routes
- Oil & gas resources
- Critical minerals
- Strategic connectivity
- Space and satellite infrastructure
- Military presence

Major players

- **Russia** 🇷🇺 → Largest Arctic coastline + major infrastructure
- **USA** 🇺🇸 → Arctic security and strategic interests
- **China** 🇨🇳 → Research, infrastructure and shipping investments
- **Nordic countries** → Regional governance and security

✂ **For India**, the importance increases because **Russia and the US are both important Indian strategic partners**, while China is India's principal strategic competitor.

India's Arctic Presence

Himadri Research Station

- ⊗ India operates the **Himadri research station at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard.**
- ⊗ India is among the developing countries with a permanent scientific presence in the Arctic.
- ⊗ India was also an original signatory to the **1920 Svalbard Treaty**, which provides certain rights to participating countries regarding access and economic activities in Svalbard.

India's Arctic Policy – 2022

India's Arctic policy provides the broad framework for engagement.

Its major objectives include:

Climate & Environmental Protection



Scientific Research



Economic & Human Development



Transportation & Connectivity



Governance & International Cooperation



National Capacity Building

India's major capability gap

Lack of a Polar Research Vessel

- India's Arctic research remains heavily concentrated around Svalbard.
- A dedicated **Polar Research Vessel (PRV)** would allow India to undertake wider Arctic Ocean research.

No indigenous PRV



Dependence on foreign/chartered vessels



Limited access to wider Arctic



Restricted research capability



Weak strategic presence

The Parliamentary Standing Committee has highlighted this capability gap.

Funding problem

- One of the most striking concerns is the relatively low financial allocation.
- The article notes that India spent only around **₹17.53 crore on Arctic activities in 2024–25**, substantially less than its expenditure on Antarctica.

This creates a mismatch:

Strategic importance ↑

but

Institutional capability + funding ↓

China: A useful comparison

China has aggressively developed polar capabilities despite not being an Arctic state.

It has:

- Invested in Arctic research
- Developed polar-capable vessels
- Expanded Arctic infrastructure

- Pursued shipping opportunities
- Developed indigenous icebreaking capability

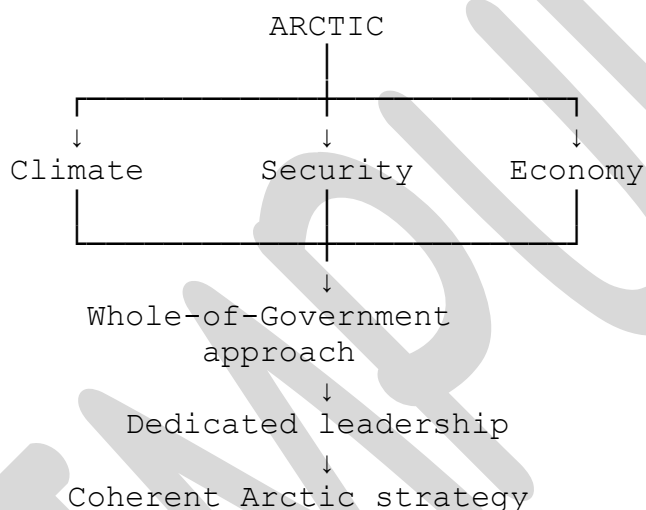
UPSC concept:

China's Arctic engagement demonstrates how a non-Arctic state can build strategic influence through science, infrastructure and economic engagement.

Institutional challenge

- India's Arctic responsibilities are **fragmented across multiple divisions of the Ministry of External Affairs.**
- This creates a problem of:
Fragmentation → weak coordination → slow decision-making → inadequate strategic focus

Suggested solution



A dedicated senior official/coordination mechanism could provide greater policy coherence.

Way Forward

India should move from “presence” → “capability” → “strategic influence.”

1. Strengthen funding

Increase Arctic research expenditure.

2. Expedite Polar Research Vessel

Reduce dependence on foreign vessels.

3. Expand scientific research

Study Arctic–monsoon linkages, sea-level rise, oceanography and climate systems.

4. Build institutional coordination

Create a stronger whole-of-government mechanism.

5. Engage Arctic states

Deepen cooperation with Russia, US, Nordic countries and other Arctic partners.

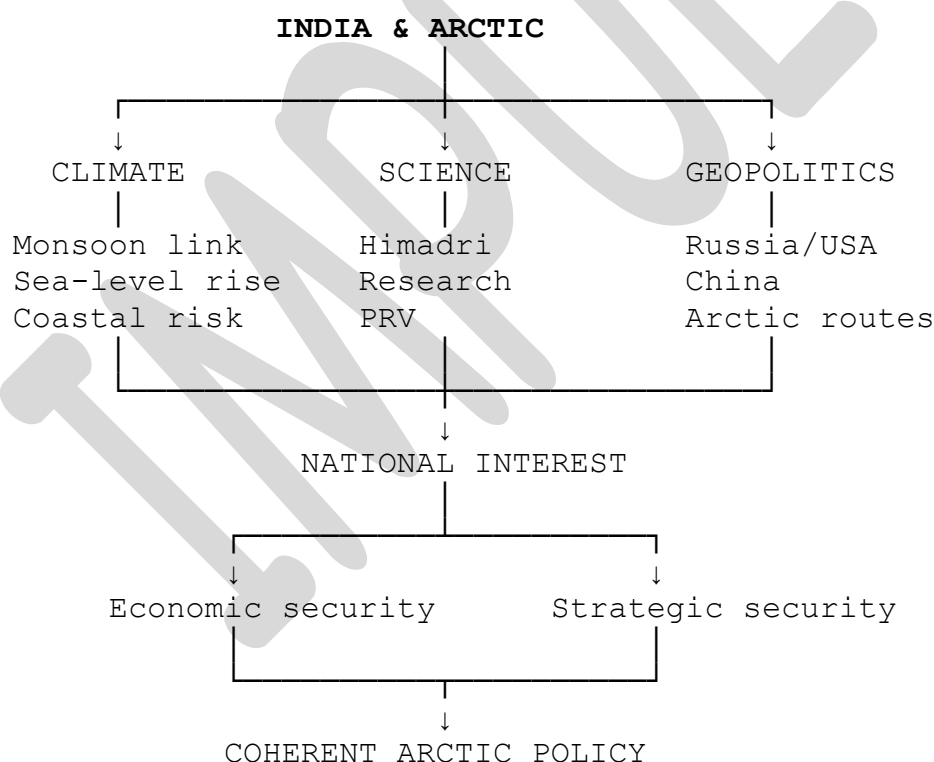
6. Protect strategic autonomy

Maintain cooperation with multiple powers rather than becoming aligned with any one bloc.

7. Link Arctic policy with India's climate strategy

Arctic developments have direct implications for India's agriculture, coastline and food security.

UPSC Mind Map



UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The Arctic is no longer merely a scientific frontier; it is emerging as a zone of climate, economic and geopolitical significance. Examine the importance of the Arctic for India and suggest measures to strengthen India's engagement.” (250 words)

One-line takeaway

- ⊗ India needs to transform its Arctic engagement from a predominantly scientific presence into a comprehensive strategy combining climate security, scientific capability, economic interests and strategic autonomy.

22.08.2026

GS - III

Retail F&O Trading in India

Brief

- According to the latest **SEBI** study, retail participation in **Futures & Options (F&O)** declined sharply in 2025-26, but losses among individual traders remain extremely high.

Key Data

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2024-25</i>	<i>2025-26</i>
Retail F&O traders	98.1 lakh	78.6 lakh ↓20%
Traders making losses	91%	88%
Total retail losses	₹1.12 lakh crore	₹91,685 crore
Under-30 traders	44.1 lakh	32.83 lakh
Under-30 traders making losses —	89%	29.07 lakh (89%)
Women among retail traders	15.6%	17.1%
Women making losses	88%	85%



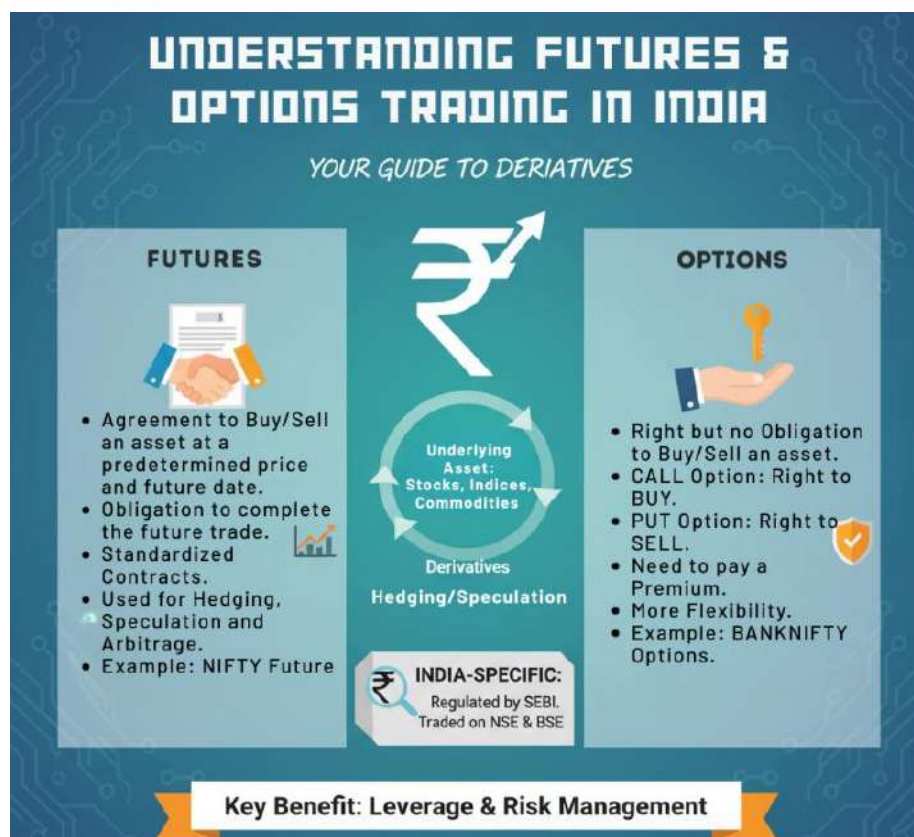
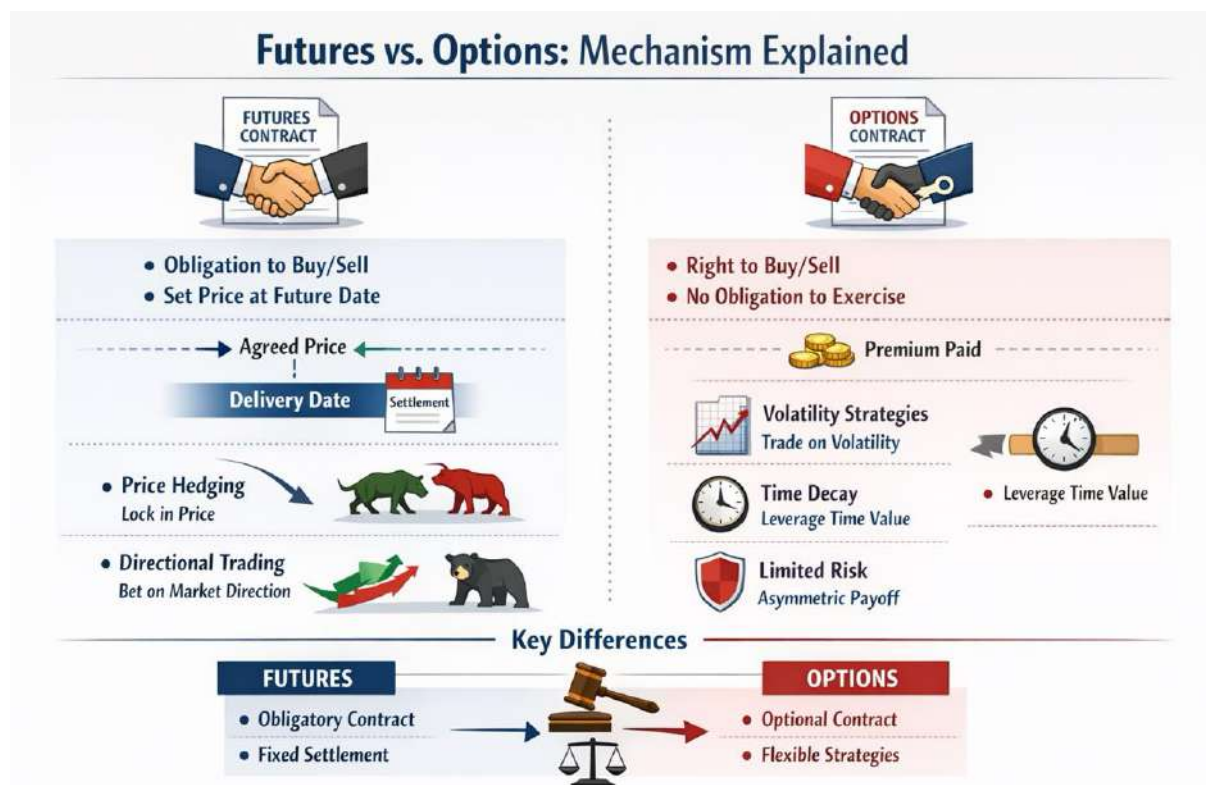
Important finding

- ⊗ **73% of retail F&O traders earned less than ₹5 lakh annually** in 2025-26.



This indicates that derivatives participation remains heavily concentrated among **lower-income individuals**.

What are Futures & Options?





UNDERSTANDING FUTURES AND OPTIONS

FUTURES CONTRACTS

- **Definition** A contract to buy or sell an asset at a predetermined future date and price.

KEY FEATURES

- **Obligation** Both the buyer and seller are obligated to fulfill the contract.
- **Leverage** Higher potential for both profit and loss.
- **Expiration** Contracts have a set expiration date.

INDIA TODAY

OPTIONS CONTRACTS

- **Definition** A contract giving the buyer the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell an asset at a specific price before a certain date.

KEY FEATURES

- **Choice** The buyer can choose whether to execute the option.
- **Premium** The buyer pays a premium for this right.
- **Expiration** Contracts have a set expiration date.

Futures and Options (F&O)

F&O stands for Futures and Options—types of derivatives used for trading in the stock market.

Futures:

- A futures contract is an agreement to buy or sell an asset at a future date for a fixed price.

Example: You agree to buy Reliance shares at ₹2,500 on a contract expiring in a month.

Options:

- An options contract gives the buyer the right (but not the obligation) to buy or sell the asset at a fixed price before expiry

Example: You buy a call option for Infosys at a ₹1,400 strike price



Derivatives

financial instruments whose value is derived from an underlying asset such as a **stock** or **stock index**.



Futures

Agreement to buy/sell an underlying asset at a **predetermined price on a future date**.

Options

Give the buyer the **right, but not the obligation**, to buy/sell an asset at a predetermined price.

Purpose:

- Hedging against price fluctuations
- Price discovery
- Speculation

Leverage

makes it possible to earn large returns but also magnifies losses.

Why is SEBI concerned?

1. Extremely high loss rate

88% of retail traders lost money in 2025-26.

2. Youth participation

Under-30 traders constituted **43%** of retail F&O participants.

➡ **29.07 lakh out of 32.83 lakh** young traders lost money.

3. Lower-income concentration

Nearly **three-fourths** of traders earn below ₹5 lakh annually.

➡ Raises concerns about household financial vulnerability and speculative behaviour.

4. Information & technology asymmetry

Institutional/proprietary traders have access to:

Algorithms → High-frequency trading → Faster internet → Real-time information → Advanced risk-management systems

Retail traders generally lack these advantages.



SEBI's regulatory response

➤ SEBI tightened the equity derivatives framework in **October 2024** to reduce excessive speculation.

➤ *Measures included tightening the framework around:*

- Position limits
- Contract sizes
- Expiry-related trading
- Options trading conditions

➤ The **Union Budget 2026-27** also increased **Securities Transaction Tax (STT)** on F&O transactions.

📌 However, SEBI itself cautions that the available data **does not establish a causal relationship** between its measures and the decline in retail participation.



Who makes money?

An important contrast emerges:

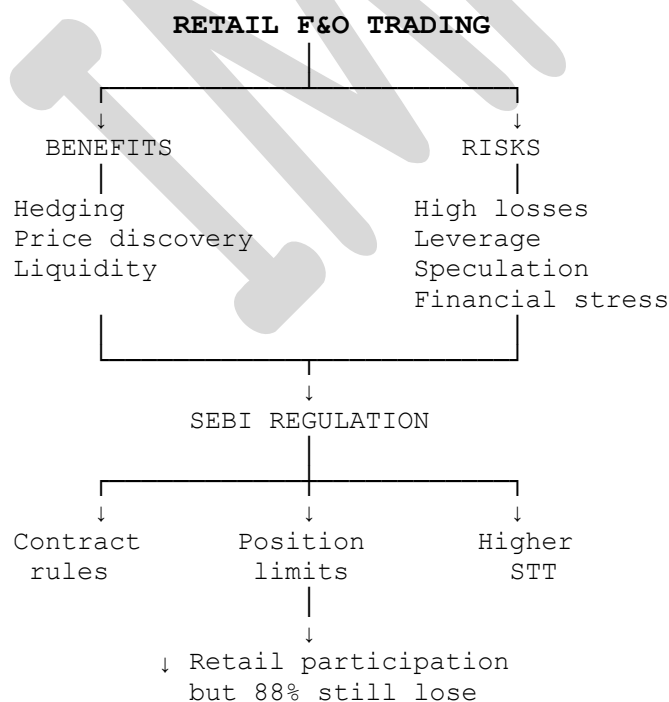
Retail traders → 88% lost → ₹91,685 crore net loss	Proprietary trading firms → ₹44,483 crore gross profit
This illustrates the significant information, technology and expertise advantage enjoyed by sophisticated market participants.	

F&O market transformation



*Thus, volumes have **recovered somewhat but** remain well below the **October 2024 peak**.*

UPSC Concept Map





Prelims Facts to Remember

- F&O = Derivatives
- SEBI regulates securities markets in India.
- **Futures:** obligation to transact at predetermined terms.
- **Options:** right, but not obligation.
- **STT:** Securities Transaction Tax.
- **Prop firms:** trade primarily using their **own capital**.
- **2025-26:** 88% of retail F&O traders incurred losses.
- **Under-30:** 43% of retail F&O traders.
- **73%:** retail traders earning below ₹5 lakh/year.
- **₹91,685 crore:** total retail net losses in 2025-26.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The high incidence of losses among retail participants in India's equity derivatives market highlights the risks of financialisation without adequate financial literacy. Discuss the need to balance investor protection with market efficiency.” (150 words)

Answer approach:

Intro: F&O improves liquidity, hedging and price discovery.

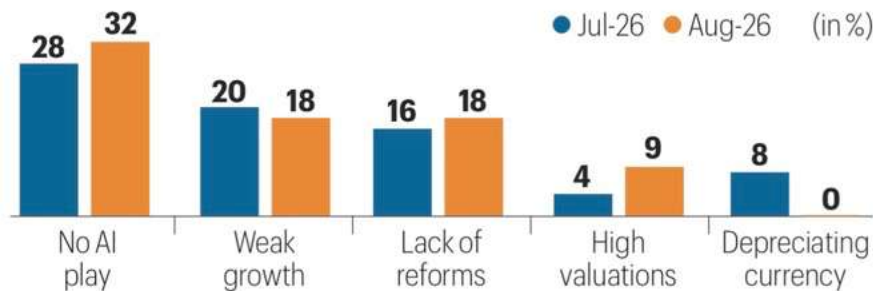
Body: High retail losses, leverage, youth participation, information asymmetry and technology advantage of institutional players. Explain SEBI's regulatory response and financial-literacy needs.

Conclusion: Regulation should discourage reckless speculation without undermining legitimate risk management and market development.

• Money is where the AI is

Global fund managers remain cautious on Indian equities due to lack of direct AI exposure and macro growth concerns, according to the BofA August 2026 Fund Manager Survey.

Fund managers' key concerns for Indian market:

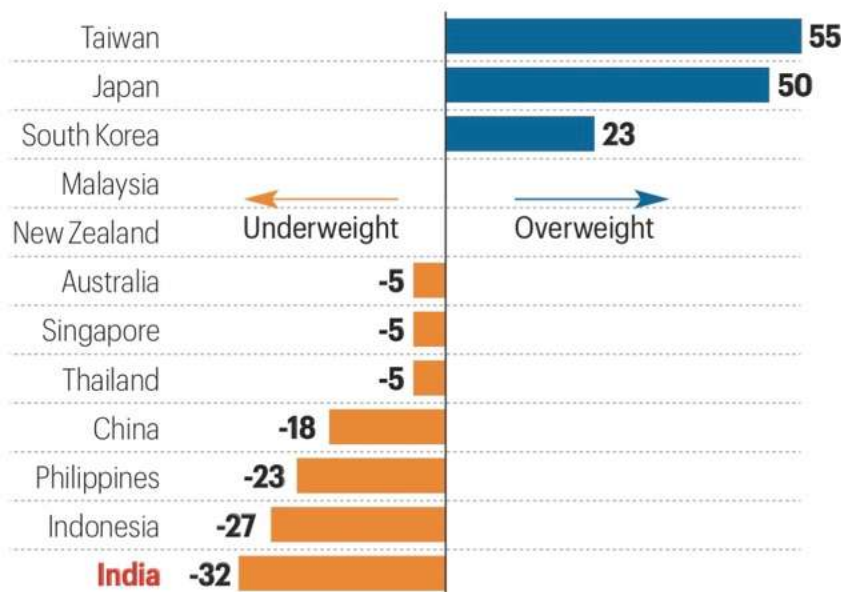


SOURCE: BOFA ASIA FUND MANAGER SURVEY.

NOTE: VOTES FOR 'DON'T KNOW' ARE NOT SHOWN ABOVE

Meanwhile, due to their exposure to the AI and semiconductor technology sectors, Taiwan and Japan and South Korea were the favourites of global investors.

Asia Pacific market sentiment: Net % overweight
(% saying overweight - % saying underweight)



SOURCE: BOFA ASIA FUND MANAGER SURVEY

24.08.2026

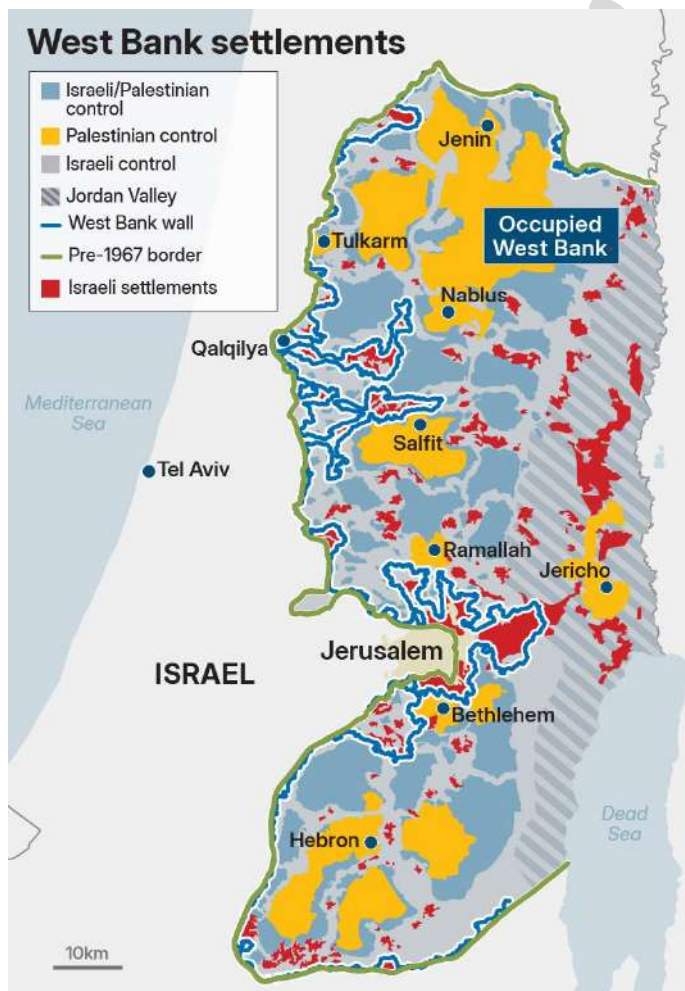
GS - II

West Bank Settlements & the Israel–Palestine Conflict

Core Issue

- While international attention remains focused on **Gaza**, Israeli settlement expansion and settler violence in the **West Bank** are intensifying.
- The central concern is that continued settlement expansion could make a **contiguous and viable Palestinian state** increasingly difficult, thereby weakening prospects for a **two-state solution**.

West Bank – Why is it important?



Israel's approved E1 settlement plan in the West Bank

The expansion of Israeli settlement areas near Jerusalem potentially limits Palestinians' access to major roads

Planned bypass for Palestinian-plated vehicles

Existing roads that may become inaccessible to Palestinian-plated vehicles*

Routes of the separation barrier:

Constructed

Planned



- The **West Bank** has been under Israeli occupation since 1967.
- It is the **larger of the two Palestinian territories**, alongside Gaza.
- It is geographically important for the viability of a future Palestinian state.
- Expansion of Israeli settlements fragments Palestinian-controlled areas.

🔑 Geography → Politics

Expansion of settlements

↓

Palestinian displacement

↓

Fragmentation of West Bank
↓
Reduced territorial contiguity
↓
Less viable Palestinian state
↓
Two-State Solution weakened
↓
Long-term regional instability

Current situation: highlighted

- According to the UN briefing cited:
 - **76 Palestinians** were killed in 2026 by Israeli forces or settlers.
 - Around **3,800 Palestinians** were displaced.
 - Nearly **half of those displaced were children**.
 - Israel planned tenders for around **1,200 settlement homes**.
- Five countries — **UK, France, Germany, Italy and Canada** — called the settlement tenders unacceptable and urged Israel to withdraw them.
- Several Muslim-majority countries also criticised the plans.
- The **US opposed the plans**, but stopped short of condemnation.

What are Israeli settlements?

- Israeli settlements are civilian communities established by Israel in territories captured during the **1967 Arab-Israeli War**, including the West Bank.

Why controversial?

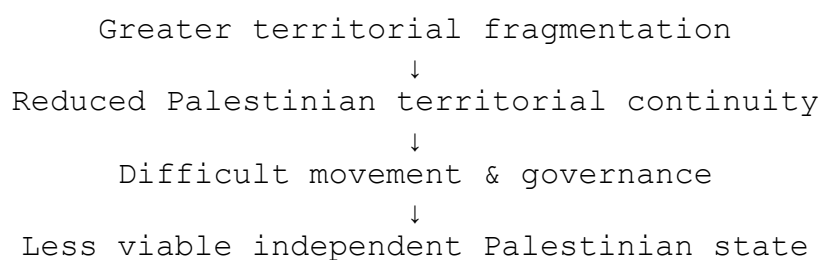
- They are widely regarded by the international community as contrary to international law, particularly **UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016)**, which reaffirmed that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory have “**no legal validity**” under international law.
- The settlement issue is therefore not merely about housing.
- It involves:
Land + demographics + security + territorial contiguity + sovereignty

Why is the **E1 project particularly significant?**

The **E1 area**, east of Jerusalem, is strategically important because development there could further divide the northern and southern parts of the West Bank.

Potential consequence:

E1 settlement expansion
↓



Hence, critics argue that such projects can undermine the **two-state solution**.

Security vs Statehood

A balanced UPSC answer should acknowledge **both dimensions**.

Israel's perspective

- Security concerns became particularly prominent after the **October 7, 2023 Hamas attack**.
- Israel argues that security is essential to protect its citizens.

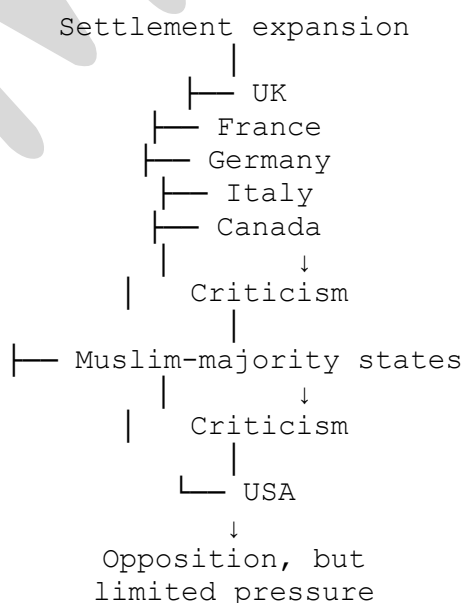
Palestinian/international concern

- Security cannot justify indefinite occupation or systematic displacement.
- Settlement expansion can undermine Palestinian self-determination.
- Demographic and territorial changes may make a negotiated settlement increasingly difficult.

UPSC analytical point:

Security and Palestinian statehood need not be treated as mutually exclusive objectives; sustainable peace requires addressing both.

International response



The major diplomatic problem

- ❑ The US possesses substantial leverage over Israel, but its willingness to use that leverage remains limited.

Therefore:

International condemnation without effective diplomatic/economic pressure → limited ability to change facts on the ground.

Why does this matter for India?

India needs a **balanced West Asia policy**.

India's interests include:

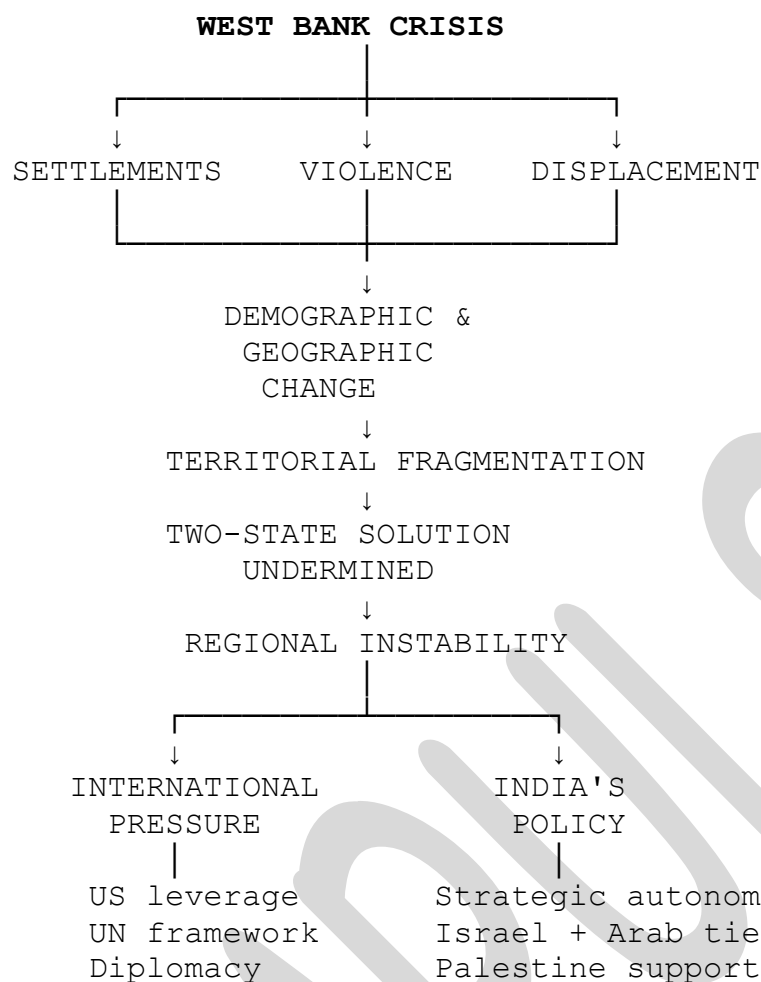
- Strong relations with **Israel**
 - Defence
 - Technology
 - Agriculture
 - Innovation
- Strong relations with **Arab/Gulf countries**
 - Energy security
 - Trade
 - Investment
 - Indian diaspora
- Support for **Palestinian self-determination**
- Regional stability
- Protection of Indian nationals in West Asia
- Maritime and supply-chain security

India's traditional position

India has generally supported:

- **Two-State Solution + negotiated settlement + peaceful resolution + Palestinian aspirations for statehood**
- Therefore, India must maintain **strategic autonomy** rather than becoming part of either geopolitical camp.

UPSC Mind Map



Prelims Pointers

West Bank

- One of the principal Palestinian territories.
- Captured by Israel in the **1967 war**.
- Distinct from the **Gaza Strip**.

E1

- Strategically important area **east of Jerusalem**.
- Settlement development there raises concerns over Palestinian territorial contiguity.

UNSC Resolution 2334

- Addresses Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- Reaffirmed that settlements have **no legal validity under international law**.

Two-State Solution

→ Israel + an independent Palestinian state coexisting peacefully.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Settlement expansion and demographic changes in the West Bank pose a challenge to the viability of the two-state solution. Examine the implications for West Asian peace and India's strategic interests.” (250 words)

Introduction:

The West Bank remains central to the territorial question underlying the Israel-Palestine conflict. Continued settlement expansion and displacement threaten its territorial continuity.

Body:

- Settlement expansion and fragmentation
- Palestinian displacement
- EI's strategic significance
- Israeli security concerns after October 7
- International-law concerns
- Weakening of two-state solution
- Limits of international diplomatic pressure
- US leverage

India:

- Maintain strategic autonomy
- Support Palestinian statehood and negotiated two-state solution
- Preserve Israel defence/technology ties
- Deepen Gulf engagement
- Support humanitarian assistance
- Promote dialogue and rules-based international order

Conclusion:

Lasting security for Israel and meaningful statehood for Palestinians are complementary, rather than competing, foundations of durable peace.

GS - III

Elephant Conflict

What are Elephant Corridors?

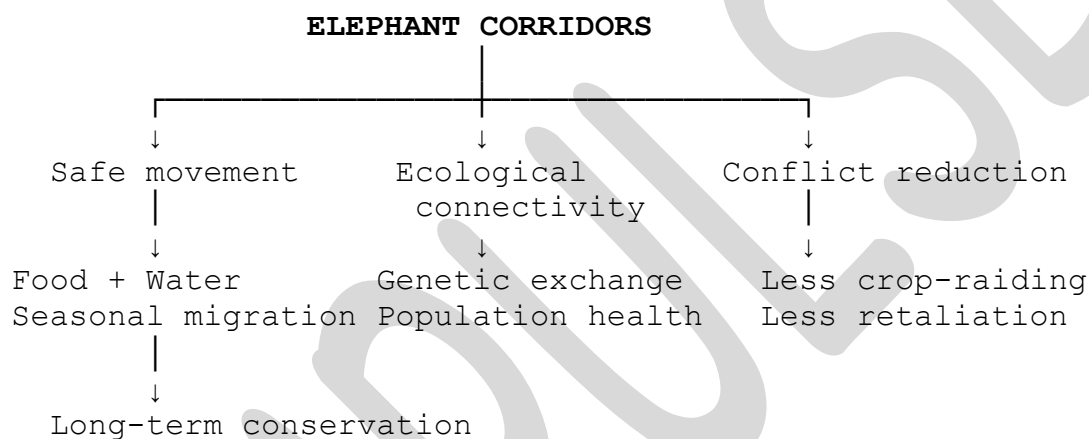
- **Elephant corridors** are natural movement pathways connecting **two or more elephant habitats**, allowing elephants to move between feeding, watering, breeding and shelter areas.
- **Key idea:** 🐘 **Connected habitat → Safe movement → Less crop-raiding → Less human-elephant conflict**
- India's 2023 mapping exercise identified **150 elephant corridors across 15 States**.

Why do elephants need corridors?

Asian elephants are **highly mobile and social** animals.

- 🗺️ **Large home range:** Male elephants may use around **50–300 sq km**.
- 🌧️ **Seasonal movement:** Availability of food and water determines movement.
- 💧 During dry periods, elephants may migrate towards relatively water-rich habitats.
- 🌡️ **Climate change and drought** can alter traditional movement patterns.
- 🧬 Corridors facilitate **genetic exchange and dispersal**, maintaining population diversity.

Mind Map



Why are corridors getting fragmented?



Human activities

- Highways
- Railway lines
- Canals
- Power transmission lines
- Mining
- Industrial projects
- Urbanisation
- Farmland expansion
- Plantation development
- Fencing

These obstacles can **divert elephants into agricultural fields and human settlements**, increasing conflict.

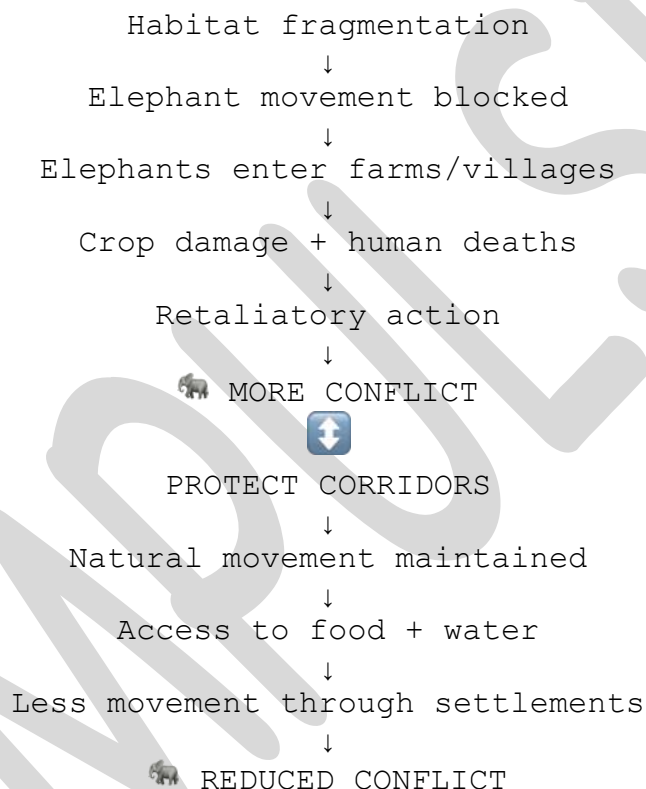
Habitat loss

India has **four major elephant landscapes**:

1. **Western Ghats**
2. **North-Eastern Hills & Brahmaputra floodplains**
3. **Shivalik Hills & Gangetic plains**
4. **Central India & Eastern Ghats**

The **Western Ghats** are particularly affected by land-use change, plantations and fencing.

How corridors reduce human-elephant conflict



Important: The solution is not simply to drive elephants away. Maintaining their **natural movement routes** addresses the ecological cause of repeated conflict.

Supreme Court intervention

The Supreme Court, in a case concerning **human-elephant conflict**, directed the Centre to:

- conduct a **fresh survey of elephant corridors**;
- indicate measures to prevent their obstruction;
- prohibit coercive methods used to divert elephants;
- recognise that elephants naturally travel long distances.

The Court's approach emphasises **conservation of movement pathways rather than forced diversion of elephants**.

Way Forward

Conservation + Development = Balanced approach

- **Scientific corridor mapping** using GIS, satellite imagery and field surveys.
- Declare critical corridors as **ecologically sensitive/protected areas** where appropriate.
- Build **wildlife crossings/underpasses/overpasses** across highways and railways.
- Regulate mining and infrastructure projects in critical corridors.
- Remove or redesign dangerous fencing.
- Develop **early-warning systems** for communities.
- Strengthen compensation for crop and property losses.
- Encourage **community participation** in conflict management.
- Incorporate **climate projections** into corridor planning.

UPSC Prelims Facts

Fact

Elephant corridors

2023 mapping

Asian elephant

Male home range

Major threats

Major landscapes

Major ecological benefit

Conflict mechanism

Remember

Connect natural habitats

150 corridors in 15 States

Highly mobile & social

50–300 sq km

Roads, railways, mining, industry, fencing

4

Movement + genetic exchange

Fragmented habitat → settlement/crop entry

UPSC

Probable

Question:

Q. “Elephant corridors are critical ecological infrastructure rather than merely wildlife pathways.” Examine their role in mitigating human-elephant conflict in India. (150 words)

Conclusion:

“Corridor conservation represents a shift from managing elephants as a problem to managing landscapes in which humans and elephants coexist.”

5 years on, how India has warmed up to the Taliban

In August 2021, the last US plane flew out of Kabul. The years since have been marked by India's deepening engagement with the Afghan regime

India–Taliban Relations: From Evacuation to “Cautious Engagement”

India's approach towards the Taliban has undergone a **major strategic shift** since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. New Delhi has moved from diplomatic distance to **pragmatic engagement without formal recognition**.

Evolution of India's approach

2021 Taliban takeover

↓
India evacuates Kabul Embassy

↓
Aug 2021 – First official contact

↓
2021–22 – Humanitarian assistance + Technical team

↓
2024–25 – Diplomatic engagement increases

↓
Oct 2025 – Taliban FM visits India

↓
Diplomatic missions upgraded

↓
2026 – Cautious strategic engagement

↓
✗ Formal recognition still absent

Key milestones

<i>Period</i>	<i>Development</i>
Aug 2021	India evacuated its embassy after Taliban takeover
Aug 31, 2021	First official India–Taliban contact in Doha
Dec 2021	India sent medicines to Afghanistan
June 2022	India sent a technical team to Kabul
Jan 2025	Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Amir Khan Muttaqi
Apr 2025	Joint Secretary M. Anand Prakash visited Kabul
May 2025	EAM S. Jaishankar spoke with Muttaqi
Oct 2025	Muttaqi visited India; missions upgraded to embassy level

Why is India engaging with the Taliban?

A. Security interests

India's fundamental concern:

Afghan territory must not be used for anti-India terrorist activities.

Afghanistan continues to host several terrorist organisations. The UN Security Council sanctions-monitoring assessment noted continuing terrorist threats from groups operating in Afghanistan, including **ISIL-K and Al-Qaeda**.

India therefore needs a channel of communication with the de facto authorities.

B. Pakistan factor

A major geopolitical change is the deterioration of **Taliban–Pakistan relations**.

Taliban-Pakistan tensions
↓
Pakistan loses some influence
↓
Strategic space for India
↓
India increases engagement with Kabul

India sees an opportunity to prevent Afghanistan from becoming exclusively dependent on Pakistan.

C. China's growing influence

China has been expanding its economic and strategic engagement with Afghanistan, including interest in its **natural resources and connectivity**.

Russia has also developed relations with the Taliban.

Therefore:

China + Russia engagement → Indian strategic recalibration

India does not want to leave Afghanistan entirely to other regional powers.

India's economic and humanitarian stake

India had invested approximately **\$2–3 billion** in Afghanistan after 2001 through:

- infrastructure projects;
- development assistance;
- education;
- healthcare;
- humanitarian assistance;
- capacity building.

Humanitarian assistance since the Taliban takeover has included:

- **50,000 tonnes of wheat**
- **445+ tonnes of essential medicines**
- vaccines
- disaster-relief material.

Thus, India distinguishes between **the Taliban regime and the Afghan people**.

Why India has NOT formally recognised the Taliban

India's engagement remains **pragmatic rather than ideological**.

Major concerns include:



Women's rights

Taliban restrictions include:

- exclusion of girls from higher levels of education;
- restrictions on women's mobility;
- requirement of male accompaniment in various circumstances;
- broader restrictions on women's participation in public life.



Human rights & minorities

India historically emphasised:

Human rights + women's rights + inclusive governance

But these concerns have become less prominent in India's publicly stated conditions for engagement.

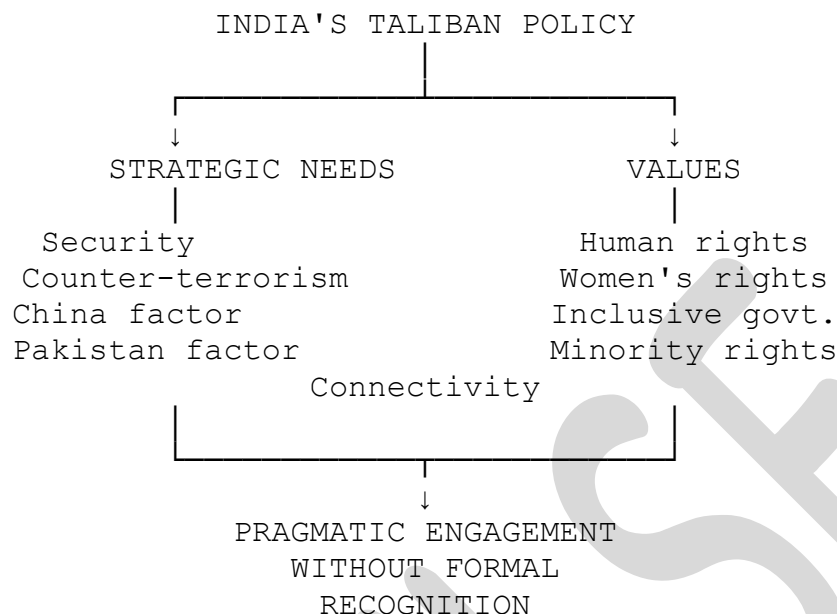
Hence:

Engagement ≠ Recognition

India can deal with the **de facto government** without granting full **de jure diplomatic recognition**.

The major contradiction

India's strategic interests vs values



What does India want from the Taliban?

India's broad expectations are:

1. **No anti-India terrorism from Afghan soil.**
2. Protection of Indian diplomats and assets.
3. Continued humanitarian cooperation.
4. Access for Afghans seeking **medical treatment, education and business opportunities** in India.
5. Support for regional connectivity and trade.
6. Prevention of excessive Chinese/Pakistani strategic influence.
7. Greater political stability in Afghanistan.

UPSC Prelims Pointers

- Taliban returned to power → **August 2021**
- India initially evacuated its Kabul embassy.
- India established contact with Taliban **without immediately recognising it**.
- **Technical team** sent to Kabul → June 2022.
- India's policy → **engagement without formal recognition**.
- Major strategic concerns → **terrorism, Pakistan, China, connectivity**.
- India remains concerned about Taliban's treatment of **women and minorities**.
- Afghanistan's geography makes it important for **regional connectivity**.

Q. “India's engagement with the Taliban represents a shift from value-based diplomacy towards pragmatic strategic engagement.” Examine. (150 / 250 words)

Introduction:

The Taliban's return in 2021 forced India to recalibrate its Afghan policy from diplomatic isolation to cautious engagement.

Body:

- Security and counter-terrorism requirements.
- Protection of India's earlier investments.
- Pakistan's declining relationship with Taliban.
- Growing Chinese and Russian influence.
- Humanitarian responsibilities.
- Regional connectivity and trade.

Challenges:

- Terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan.
- Women's and minority rights.
- Lack of inclusive governance.
- Risk of legitimising an authoritarian regime.
- Balancing relations with Pakistan, China, Russia and the West.

Conclusion:

India's optimal strategy is “**principled pragmatism**”—maintaining communication with the de facto authorities while retaining calibrated pressure for an inclusive, stable and non-terrorist Afghanistan.

Eroding rights

Since taking control, the Taliban has been eroding the rights of Afghanistan's 22 mn women.

It barred access to school for girls over 12, curbed travel without a male chaperone and brought a law implying legal approval for child marriage.

• ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

AUGUST 31, 2021: Hours after the last US military aircraft flies out of Kabul to mark the end of its 20-year war in Afghanistan, India makes its first official contact with the Taliban. Its ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, meets head of the Taliban political office in Doha, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, at the embassy.



SEPTEMBER 2021: India recognises the Taliban as "those in positions of power and authority across Afghanistan", the first clear acknowledgement of the group as a state actor.

DECEMBER 2021: India sends its first consignment of medicines to Afghanistan under the new Taliban regime.

JANUARY 2025: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri holds a substantive meeting with Muttaqi in Dubai.



JANUARY 2024: Muttaqi (pictured to the left) meets diplomats from 11 regional nations. India is among them.

LATE JUNE 2022: In an incremental step, the Indian government sends a 'technical team' to the embassy in Kabul to coordinate delivery of humanitarian aid.



MAY 2025: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks to Muttaqi on the phone on May 15, days after India and Pakistan agree to stop military strikes. The Taliban condemned the Pahalgam terror attack that had triggered the conflict.



APRIL 2025: India sends M Anand Prakash, Joint Secretary in charge of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran division in the Ministry of External Affairs, to Kabul.

OCTOBER 2025: Muttaqi makes a high-profile visit to India. The two sides decide to upgrade their missions to the level of embassies, and appoint charge d'affaires.

25.08.2026

GS - II / III

Canada-US Trade Tensions: Middle Powers vs Great Powers

Brief

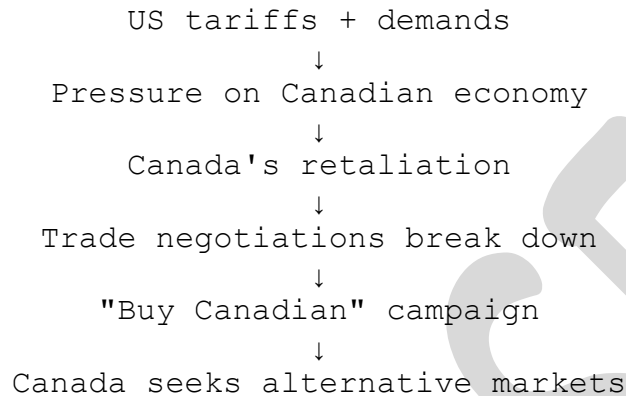
- The article highlights Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney's decision to resist US President Donald Trump's trade pressure**, particularly the use of tariffs as a geopolitical instrument.
- The larger theme is the **strategic autonomy of middle powers in an increasingly transactional global order**.

What is the issue?

- The US imposed **50% tariffs on around \$20 billion worth of Canadian goods**.

- Canada responded with “**dollar-for-dollar**” **retaliation**, while Carney instructed Canadian negotiators to walk away from US trade talks because of Washington's reportedly unacceptable demands.

US demands → Canadian response



Why did Canada reject the US demands?

- One major concern was reportedly a US demand that would **restrict Canada's ability to negotiate trade agreements with other countries.**
- Canada viewed this as:
 - **An erosion of its economic sovereignty.**
 - For Carney, therefore, the issue is not merely tariffs but the **terms of the relationship between a great power and a neighbouring middle power.**

Why is Canada vulnerable?

- Canada's economy is deeply integrated with the US economy.
- Affected products include:
 -  Wine
 -  Dairy
 -  Furniture
 -  Clothing
 -  Cement
 -  Hockey equipment

➤ Therefore, prolonged confrontation could hurt:
Canadian businesses + workers + consumers
 while also imposing costs on American businesses dependent on Canadian supplies.

The “Middle Power” dimension

This is the most important UPSC angle.

What is a middle power?

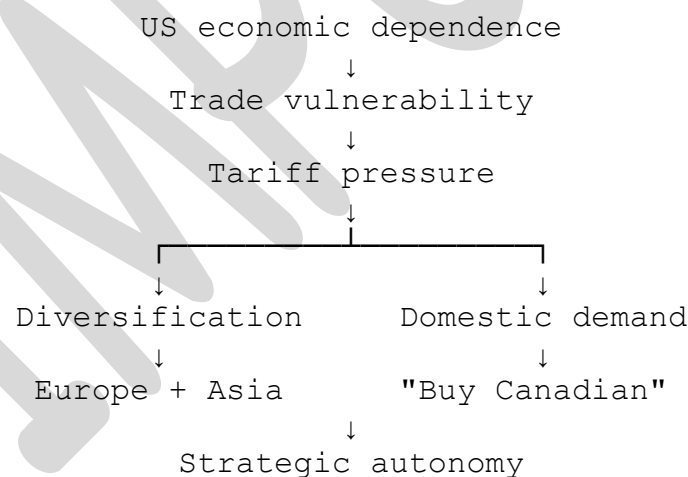
- ⊗ A **middle power** is a country that lacks the overwhelming economic/military capabilities of a great power but possesses sufficient economic, diplomatic and institutional capacity to influence international affairs.
- ⊗ Examples include:
🇨🇦 Canada | 🇦🇺 Australia | 🇰🇷 South Korea | 🇯🇵 Japan | 🇮🇳 India
- ⊗ Carney's approach reflects the argument that:
Middle powers should collectively diversify their partnerships rather than remain excessively dependent on a single great power.

Canada's diversification strategy

Instead of relying overwhelmingly on the US market, Canada is attempting to strengthen economic relationships with:

- 🇪🇺 **Europe**
- 🌐 **Asia**
- other international partners.

Strategic diversification



Rules-based international order

- Carney had earlier argued that the **rules-based order is fading**.
- The dispute illustrates a broader concern:
Traditional system
Rules → institutions → predictable trade
- **Emerging trend**

Power → tariffs → bargaining → transactional relationships

This raises questions about the effectiveness of institutions and rules governing international trade.

Risks for Canada

Carney's decision is politically attractive but economically risky.

Economic risks

- Reduced exports to the US
- Higher costs for businesses
- Supply-chain disruptions
- Inflationary pressures
- Employment losses in affected sectors

Political risks

- Sustaining public support for confrontation
- Managing economic nationalism
- Demonstrating that alternative markets can compensate for US losses

UPSC Prelims Pointers

- Mark Carney → Prime Minister of Canada.
- Canada and the US have **highly integrated economies**.
- Tariffs can function not only as economic instruments but also as **geopolitical leverage**.
- **Middle powers** increasingly seek diversification and strategic autonomy.
- “Buy Canadian” represents **economic nationalism** in response to external trade pressure.
- Trade diversification towards **Europe and Asia** can reduce excessive dependence on one market.
- The issue illustrates challenges to the **rules-based international economic order**.



UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Growing protectionism and tariff weaponisation are compelling middle powers to rethink economic dependence on great powers.” Discuss with reference to Canada-US trade relations. (150 words)

Introduction:

The Canada–US tariff dispute demonstrates how economic interdependence can become a source of strategic vulnerability when great powers use trade measures as geopolitical leverage.

Body:

- Canada's dependence on the US market.
- Tariffs affecting businesses and workers.
- Canadian retaliation.
- Concerns over economic sovereignty.
- Diversification towards Europe and Asia.
- Rise of economic nationalism.
- Declining predictability of the rules-based order.

Way forward:

- Diversification of export markets.
- Stronger middle-power coalitions.
- WTO-based dispute settlement.
- Regional trade agreements.
- Resilient and diversified supply chains.

Conclusion:

The episode demonstrates that **economic diversification is increasingly becoming an instrument of strategic autonomy**, particularly for middle powers operating in a more transactional global order.

• WHAT'S HIT BY NEW 50% TARIFFS?

From plywood and dairy to Christmas ornaments and dog collars, new 50% duties cover \$20 billion in Canadian exports, with Ottawa vowing dollar-for-dollar retaliation.

Wood: Plywood and other forest products

Alcohol: Wine, spirits and unusual beverage mixtures

Industrial: Egg graders, marine buoys, derricks and sandblasters

Clothing: Anoraks, jackets, T-shirts, dresses, gloves and more

Dairy: Canadian dairy products

Festive goods: Christmas ornaments, toys and carnival items

Household: Bedroom furniture, safes and sun blinds

Other: National flags, jewelry and honey



THE ODD ONES

National flags, Christmas ornaments, Painting canvas, Dog muzzles, Hockey sticks, Bookbinding machines, Base metal statuettes, wigs (partial), false beards, eyebrows

Andhra Pradesh's "Right to Walk" Policy

Brief

- Andhra Pradesh has become the **first Indian State to formulate a dedicated pedestrian safety policy** after the Supreme Court recognised the **right to walk on footpaths as a fundamental right**.
- The **Andhra Pradesh Pedestrian Safety and Universal Accessibility Policy, 2026** was notified on **August 7, 2026**.

Why is pedestrian safety important?

In 2024:

-  India recorded about **1.77 lakh road deaths**.
- **36,526** were pedestrians.
- About **31% of pedestrian deaths occurred on National Highways**.
- In Andhra Pradesh, **1,739 of 8,346 road accident deaths** were pedestrians.

Core concern

Poor footpaths
+
Encroachments
+
Unsafe crossings
+
High-speed traffic
↓
Pedestrian vulnerability
↓
Deaths & injuries
↓
Need for "Right to Walk"

Three-pillar framework

The Andhra Pradesh policy adopts a **three-step approach**:

1. Road Safety Audits

Existing pedestrian infrastructure will be systematically assessed.

Priority areas:

- Markets
- Railway stations
- Bus stands
- Religious institutions
- Educational institutions

- High-footfall areas

Authorities must identify at least **15–20 pedestrian “black spots”** where injuries/deaths have frequently occurred during the previous **2–3 years**.

2. Footpath Infrastructure

The policy provides detailed design standards.

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Requirement</i>
Minimum walking area	2 m
Buffer space	0.4–1 m
Multi-utility zone	1.5 m
Maximum footpath height	150 mm
Bollard height	0.5–0.7 m
Bollard spacing	0.6 m
Wheelchair access	1 m clear width

Footpaths should be:

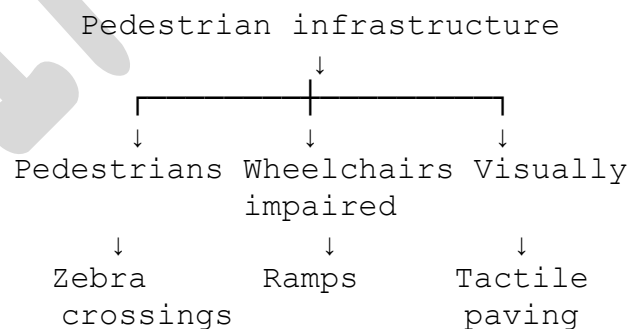
Firm + stable + even + slip-resistant

They should also have:

- tactile paving for visually impaired persons;
- curb ramps;
- pedestrian crossings;
- guardrails/bollards where necessary.

3. Universal accessibility

A major feature is the integration of **universal design**.



The policy discourages forcing pedestrians to use **foot overbridges** when a safe **at-grade zebra crossing** can be provided.

Why?

Accessibility should mean:

People should be able to use public infrastructure safely regardless of age or physical ability.

Tackling encroachments

The policy mandates removal of:

- unauthorised structures;
- illegal stalls;
- other footpath encroachments.

It also recommends:

- Camera-based monitoring
- Bollards
- Pedestrian guardrails

However, the policy **does not specify a timeline for removing encroachments**, which could affect implementation.

Accountability under Motor Vehicles Act

- A particularly important provision is **Section 198A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.**
- Officials, contractors and consultants can face a **₹1 lakh fine** where infrastructure or design failures contribute to pedestrian death or disability.
- Significance:
This shifts the approach from:
“Pedestrians must be careful”
to
“Road authorities also have a duty to create safe infrastructure.”

Behavioural change & social policing

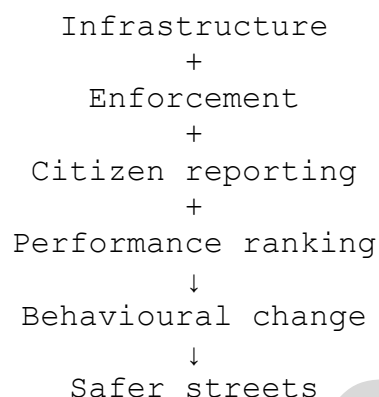
The policy goes beyond infrastructure.

Citizen participation

- A district-level grievance **mobile application/portal** will allow citizens to report violations.

Performance measurement

Urban local bodies will be **ranked on pedestrian-safety performance**.



UPSC Prelims Facts

1. **Andhra Pradesh** → first Indian State with a dedicated pedestrian safety policy.
2. Policy → **Andhra Pradesh Pedestrian Safety and Universal Accessibility Policy, 2026**.
3. Notified → **August 7, 2026**.
4. Three pillars → **Safety audit + infrastructure improvement + behavioural change**.
5. Minimum walking area → **2 metres**.
6. Black spots → priority areas with frequent pedestrian injuries/deaths.
7. **Section 198A, Motor Vehicles Act, 1988** → accountability for infrastructure/design failures.
8. Tactile paving → assists **visually impaired pedestrians**.
9. Safe at-grade crossings should be preferred where feasible over inaccessible foot overbridges.
10. Policy applies to **all local-body areas**, with initial implementation priority for cities with populations above one million.

UPSC Mains — Probable Question

Q. “The right to mobility is meaningful only when urban infrastructure is accessible, safe and inclusive.” Discuss with reference to Andhra Pradesh's Pedestrian Safety Policy, 2026. (150 words)

Introduction:

Pedestrian safety is an important component of the constitutional commitment to life, dignity and equality. Andhra Pradesh's 2026 policy seeks to institutionalise safe and universal pedestrian infrastructure.

Body:**Key provisions**

- Road-safety audits.
- Identification of pedestrian black spots.
- Removal of encroachments.
- Minimum footpath standards.
- Tactile paving and curb ramps.
- Safe at-grade crossings.
- Accountability under Section 198A.
- Citizen grievance mechanisms.
- Performance ranking of local bodies.

Significance

- Reduces road fatalities.
- Promotes accessibility for elderly and persons with disabilities.
- Encourages inclusive urbanisation.
- Makes road agencies accountable.

Challenges

- Enforcement of encroachment removal.
- Coordination between multiple agencies.
- Funding and maintenance.
- Balancing vending livelihoods with pedestrian space.

Conclusion:

“A truly smart city is not one where cars move fastest, but one where every citizen can move safely.”



[UPSC Concept Link](#)

Article 21 (life & dignity) + Article 14 (equality) + Universal Accessibility + Road Safety
+ Inclusive Urbanisation + Good Governance

27.08.2026

FLOOD ALERT IN UTTAR PRADESH AND BIHAR, ADDITIONAL NDRF TEAMS DEPLOYED

Over 100 Indians among hundreds missing in Nepal flash flood fury

• AFFECTED AREAS



Most Indians were headed to Kailash Mansarovar; death toll crosses 150, likely to climb

• WHAT TRIGGERED THE DELUGE?

WHAT HAPPENED?

Torrential floods swallowed roads, bridges, houses, and power projects in the border areas of Nepal, and triggered a mudslide that hit Gyirong Port, a major land crossing with neighbouring Tibet.

WHAT CAUSED CALAMITY?

It is suspected that an earthquake struck the region and triggered an ice-rock avalanche on the Lhende Khola river in Nepal. The river runs through both Nepal and Tibet.

ARE ANY FOREIGNERS

MISSING? Apart from many Indians, three US citizens, 12 British citizens, 8 South Koreans have been reported missing. The other missing included 17 Malaysian nationals, 4 South Africans, and one each from Australia and the Netherlands.

HAS THE DANGER PASSED?

Authorities have warned a second flood may occur since a blockage lodged upstream on the Lhende Khola river.

THE SITUATION NOW

Police and military personnel were engaged in rescue efforts, although officials have said rescue helicopters would not be able to land in the affected areas until the waters recede.

• NEPAL DISASTER

Echoes of past, warning for future

The devastating flash floods in Nepal are just the latest reminder of the vulnerability of the Himalayan region to similar natural disasters — from Kedarnath in 2013 to Dharali last year

● HIMALAYAN DISASTERS

KEDARNATH, 2013: In June, Uttarakhand received an unusually high amount of rainfall, leading to the melting of the Chorabari glacier and the Mandakini river overflowing. The floods affected large parts of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Western Nepal, causing massive flash floods and landslides. Nearly 6,000 people were presumed dead.

CHAMOLI, 2021: A large glacier broke away and set off a flood, leading to surging waters in the Rishiganga river in Uttarakhand. Over 200 people were reported dead.

SIKKIM, 2023: A glacial lake (large bodies of water that sit in front of, on top of, or beneath a melting glacier) situated in northwest Sikkim at 5,000 metres burst due to incessant rains. It led to the release of water in downstream areas and the deaths of at least 55 people.

DHARALI, 2025: The terrain of the region in Uttarakhand (6,900 metres above mean sea level), combined with continuous rain for days, triggered mudslides, debris slides and flash floods. At least 69 people were reported dead.



Himalaya Needs a Shared Early-Warning System

Core Issue

- The recent **Bhote Koshi River** flash flood in Nepal highlights the extreme vulnerability of the Himalayan ecosystem to **glacial, landslide and monsoon-related hazards**.
- Satellite analysis suggests that a massive **rock-and-glacier collapse** in **Tibet** may have temporarily blocked the river before releasing a destructive flood downstream.

Why Himalayas are Highly Vulnerable

Climate change + fragile geology + monsoon + infrastructure pressure

- Rising temperatures → **glacier melting & permafrost thaw**
- Intense rainfall → flash floods and landslides
- Glacial lake outburst floods (**GLOFs**)
- Rock–ice avalanches and landslides
- Rivers already carrying high monsoon flows → greater erosion and debris mobilisation
- Hydropower, roads, bridges and settlements located in vulnerable valleys

Major Himalayan Disasters

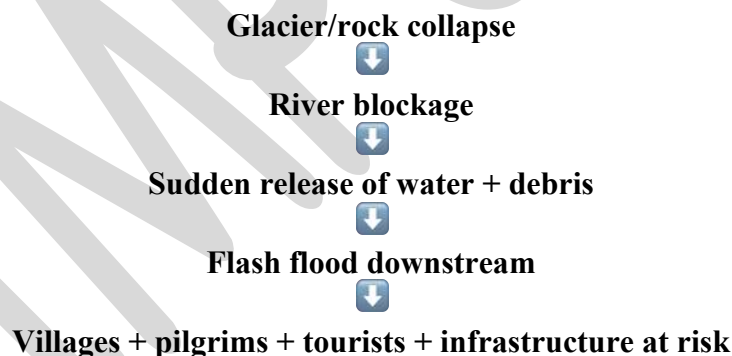
Disaster

Major impact

Kedarnath, 2013	Extreme rainfall → floods & landslides; thousands killed
Chamoli, 2021	Rock–ice avalanche → debris flow; >200 deaths
South Lhonak, Sikkim, 2023	GLOF → Teesta flooding; ≥50 deaths; infrastructure damaged
Bhote Koshi, Nepal, 2026	Flash flood/debris surge; major casualties and displacement

Why a Regional Warning System is Needed

The Himalayas are **transboundary**. A hazard originating upstream can become a disaster downstream within a short time.



Therefore, merely conducting **post-disaster rescue and relief** is inadequate.

Existing Regional Frameworks

1. South Asia Hydromet Forum

- Convened under the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**
- Brings together regional meteorological and hydrological agencies.

- Can provide a platform for better scientific cooperation.

2. South Asia Flash Flood Guidance System

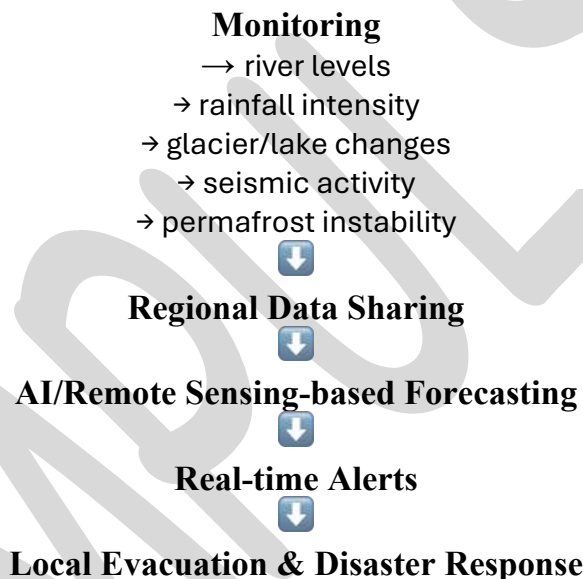
- Provides regional forecasting and guidance for flash-flood risks.
- Needs greater data sharing and technological capacity.

3. Required strengthening

- **Real-time monitoring + data sharing + forecasting + local alerts + evacuation protocols**

What India Should Advocate

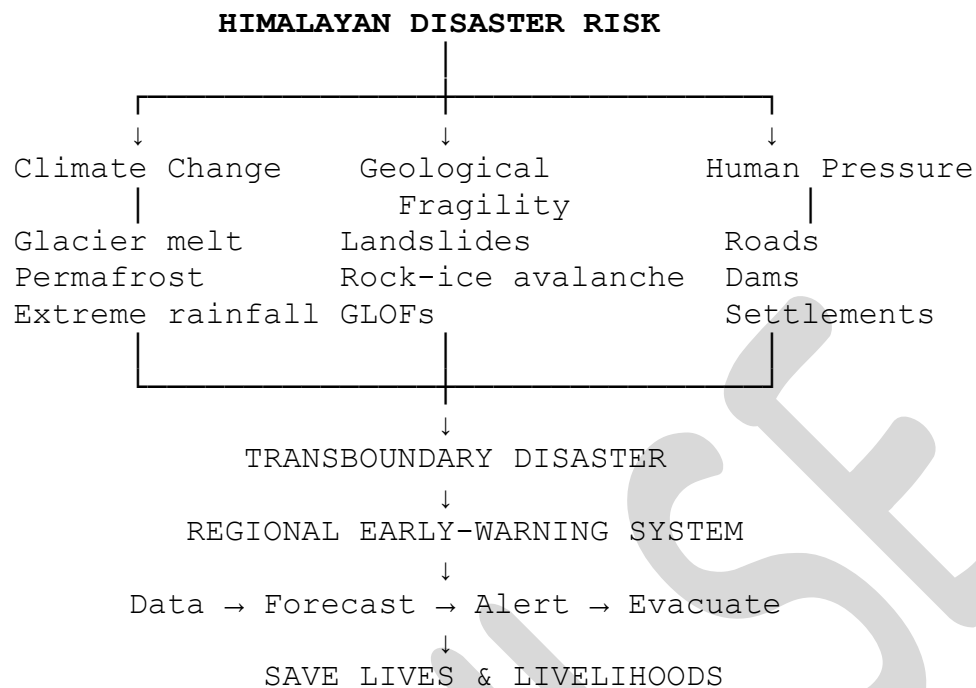
Shared Himalayan Early-Warning Architecture



Geopolitical Dimension

- India and China have significant differences on several geopolitical issues, but both recognise the importance of climate and development.
- The Himalayan ecosystem therefore provides scope for **functional cooperation despite political differences**, particularly in:
 - Hydrological data sharing
 - Glacier monitoring
 - Disaster-risk reduction
 - Scientific research
 - Early-warning systems

Mind Map



UPSC Prelims Pointers

- GLOF = Glacial Lake Outburst Flood.
- Himalayan hazards are increasingly influenced by **climate change**, but individual disasters can have multiple interacting causes.
- Flash floods can be intensified by **high monsoon river levels + debris mobilisation**.
- **WMO's South Asia Hydromet Forum** promotes regional meteorological and hydrological cooperation.
- Early-warning systems are an important component of **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**.

Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Himalayan disasters are increasingly transboundary in character.” Discuss the need for a regional early-warning and disaster-management mechanism among Himalayan countries. (150 words)

Core keywords: climate vulnerability, GLOF, flash floods, transboundary rivers, real-time data sharing, WMO, hydrometeorology, early warning, disaster resilience, regional cooperation.

Behind Nepal Floods:

Rising Risk of Glacier Collapse

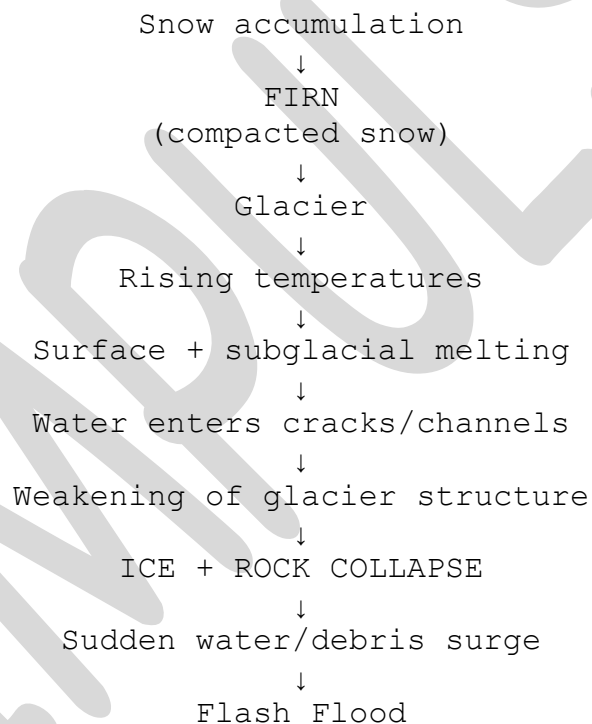
Brief

- Recent **flash floods in Nepal and Tibet** have been attributed to an **ice-and-rock/glacial collapse** near the China–Nepal border.
- The event demonstrates how instability at high altitudes can rapidly transform into a downstream disaster through the **Bhote Koshi–Lhende Khola river system**.

What is Glacial Collapse?

A **glacial collapse** is the sudden detachment of a large mass of **ice, rock and water** from a glacier, particularly on steep mountain slopes.

How does it happen?

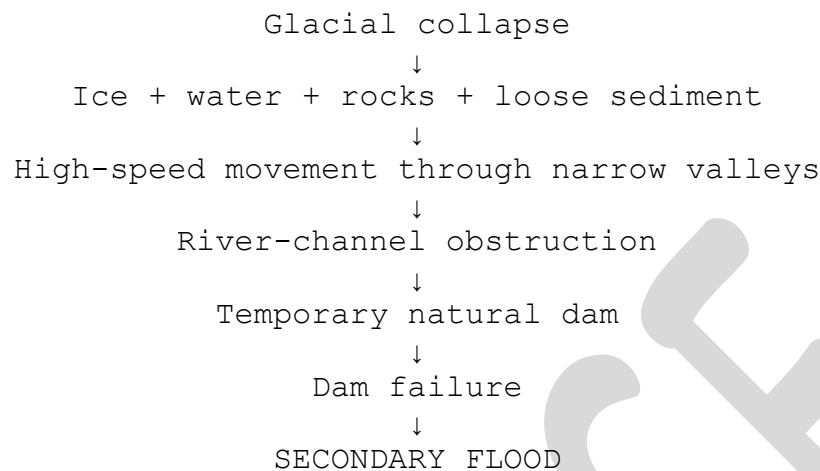


Major triggers

- 🌡️ **Rising temperature & glacier melt**
- 💧 **Accumulation of subglacial water**
- 🌍 **Earthquakes**
- 🪨 **Unstable geological structures**
- ❄️ **Freeze–thaw cycles**
- 🏔️ **Steep mountain gradients**
- ⛅️ **Extreme/erratic rainfall**

Why Does Glacial Collapse Cause Massive Flooding?

The danger is not simply the falling ice.



Thus, a single event can produce **cascading hazards**:

- **Glacier collapse → debris flow → river blockage → temporary dam → dam burst → flash flood**

Climate Change Connection

The Himalayas are warming rapidly, contributing to:

- Glacier retreat
- Increased meltwater
- Expansion of glacial lakes
- Instability of glacier structures
- Greater probability of **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**
- Increased risk from landslides and avalanches

Important distinction

Glacial collapse ≠ GLOF

Glacial Collapse

Sudden failure/detachment of glacier ice/rock

Can involve ice + rock + water

Can trigger flooding directly

May create temporary river blockage

GLOF

Sudden release of water from a glacial lake

Primarily involves lake water + debris

Usually caused by failure of lake's natural dam

Lake-dam failure causes outburst

Why is the Himalayan Risk Increasing?

◆ **Natural factors**

- Young and geologically unstable mountains
- Steep slopes
- Earthquakes
- Fragile rock formations
- Narrow valleys

◆ **Climate factors**

- Rising temperatures
- Glacier retreat
- Erratic rainfall
- Increased meltwater

◆ **Anthropogenic factors**

Road construction
+
Hydropower projects
+
Tourism infrastructure
+
Deforestation/land-use change
↓
Greater exposure & vulnerability
↓
Higher disaster risk

Key point: Infrastructure itself may not cause every disaster, but poorly planned development can **increase exposure and reduce ecosystem resilience**.

Lessons from South Asia

📌 **Kedarnath, Uttarakhand — 2013**

- Extreme rainfall triggered floods and landslides, causing massive loss of life.

📌 **Chamoli, Uttarakhand — 2021**

- An ice-rock avalanche/debris flow caused severe flooding and damaged hydropower infrastructure.

📌 **South Lhonak Lake, Sikkim — 2023**

- A glacial lake outburst triggered severe flooding in the Teesta basin, killing people and damaging infrastructure.

📌 **Nepal — Recent event**

- The Bhote Koshi/Lhende Khola disaster demonstrates the danger of **sudden high-altitude events that conventional gradual river monitoring may fail to detect.**

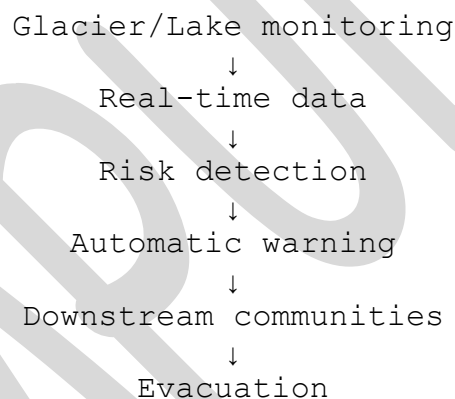
What Should India & Himalayan Countries Do?

1. Continuous glacier monitoring

Use:

- Satellites
- Remote sensing
- Drones
- Seismic monitoring
- Ground-based sensors
- Automated river-level monitoring

2. High-altitude Early Warning Systems



3. Transboundary cooperation

Himalayan rivers cross political boundaries.

Therefore:

China → Nepal → India → Bangladesh

need mechanisms for:

- Real-time hydrological data
- Glacier monitoring information
- Joint risk assessment
- Early-warning alerts
- Disaster-response coordination

4. Climate-resilient infrastructure

Hydropower plants, roads and settlements should undergo:

Cumulative + Climate-risk + Mountain-ecology assessment

rather than project-by-project assessment alone.

5. Risk-sensitive zoning

Avoid locating critical infrastructure in:

- GLOF-prone valleys
- Unstable slopes
- Floodplains
- Glacier avalanche paths
- Potential debris-flow channels

India's Strategic Importance

The Himalayan region is crucial because it:

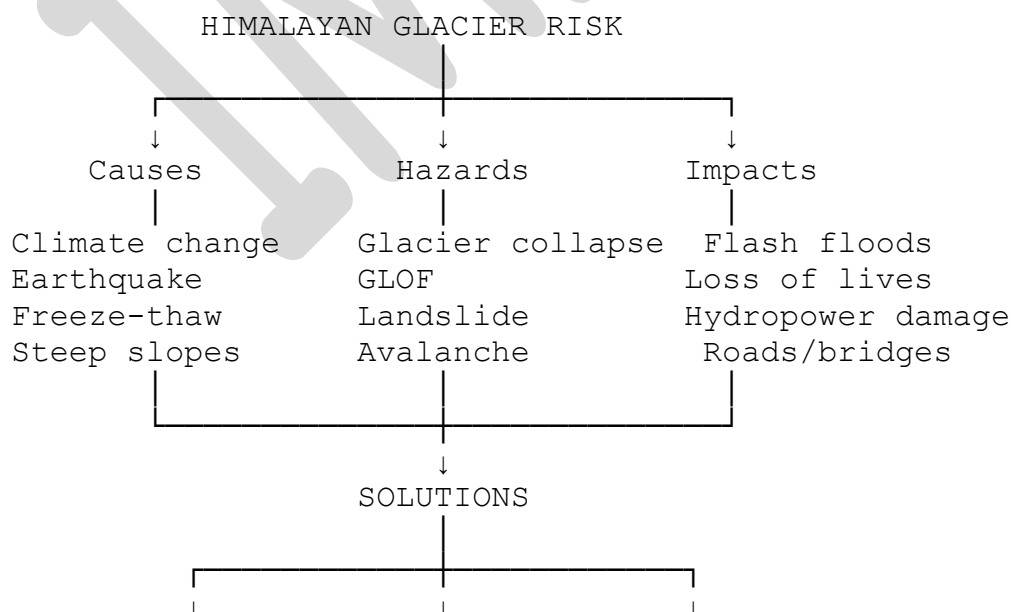
- Feeds major river systems → supports agriculture → influences monsoon → sustains biodiversity → supports hydropower → hosts tourism & pilgrimage

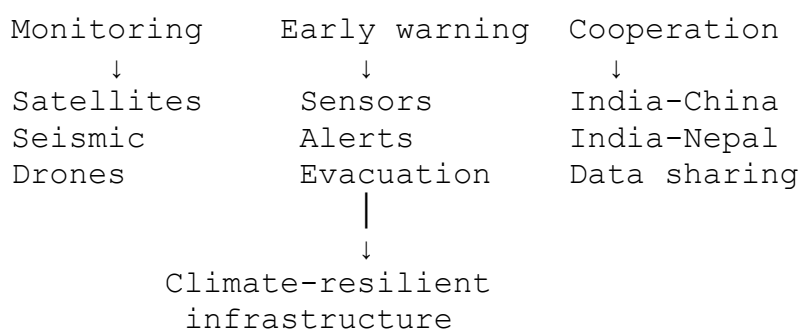
Therefore:

- Himalayan disaster management is not merely an environmental issue; it is a water, food, energy, economic and national-security issue.



UPSC Mind Map





UPSC Prelims Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Himalayan glacial hazards:

1. Glacial collapse and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) are identical phenomena.
2. Climate-induced glacier retreat can increase the risk associated with unstable glacial lakes.
3. Transboundary sharing of hydrological and glacial data can improve downstream early-warning systems.
4. Infrastructure development in Himalayan valleys can increase disaster exposure if ecological and cumulative risks are ignored.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

Answer: 2, 3 and 4 only.....Glacial collapse and GLOF are distinct phenomena. However, glacier retreat can contribute to glacial-lake formation and instability. Since Himalayan rivers cross international boundaries, timely data-sharing is essential for downstream warning and evacuation.



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Climate change is transforming Himalayan cryospheric hazards from isolated disasters into cascading, transboundary risks.” Discuss the statement and suggest measures for strengthening India's Himalayan disaster preparedness. (250 words)

US Borrowing Costs & Jackson Hole

Core Issue

The **US national debt** has crossed **\$40 trillion**, roughly **120% of US GDP**, raising concerns about:

- Rising government borrowing costs
- Higher bond yields
- Fiscal sustainability
- US dollar weakness
- Global financial-market stability

U.S. 10 Year Treasury

US10Y:Tradeweb

RT Quote | Exchange

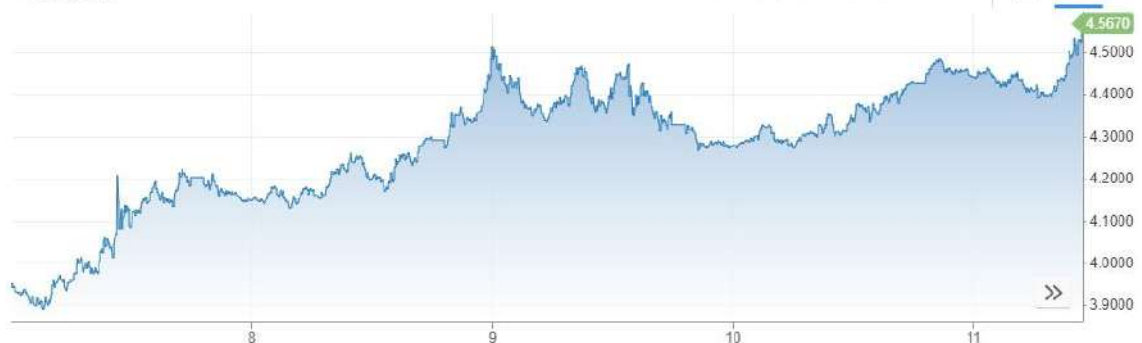
Yield | 10:24 AM EDT

4.567% ▲ **+0.175**

1D 5D 1M 3M 6M YTD 1Y 5Y ALL

+ Comparison

5m Display Studies Settings



Why has US debt risen?

Major drivers:

Tax cuts + Higher spending → Fiscal deficit → More borrowing → Higher debt

- 2017 Trump-era tax cuts reduced government revenues.
- COVID-19 led to a sharp increase in public expenditure.
- The **One Big Beautiful Bill Act** is projected to add around **\$4.7 trillion** to debt.
- Interest payments themselves now account for around **15% of federal spending**.

Why are bond yields rising?

Bond price ↔ Bond yield = Inverse relationship

When investors demand higher returns for holding US debt:

Higher borrowing → Greater supply of bonds → Lower bond prices → Higher yields

The article highlights:

- **10-year Treasury yield:** 3.97% → 4.72%
- **30-year Treasury yield:** 4.64% → 5.31%

Higher yields mean **higher borrowing costs for the US government** and can keep interest rates elevated throughout the economy.

Why is the US Treasury buying back bonds?

- ☐ Treasury bond buybacks aim to improve market liquidity.
- ☐ **Government buys bonds → Demand ↑ → Bond prices ↑ → Yields ↓**
- ☐ However, the article notes that yields subsequently rose again, suggesting that **buybacks alone cannot solve the underlying fiscal problem.**

Why Japan matters

- ⊗ Japan is a major holder of US Treasury securities.
- ⊗ Japanese Treasury holdings: around **\$1.12 trillion**
- ⊗ If Japan sells US Treasuries to support the yen:
Treasury selling → Bond supply ↑ → Prices ↓ → US yields ↑

Therefore, US financial conditions are indirectly affected by Japanese currency policy.

The deeper problem: Fiscal credibility

- ☐ The fundamental issue is **not merely bond-market management.**
- ☐ Long-term solution:
Fiscal deficit ↓ → Borrowing requirement ↓ → Debt stabilises → Investor confidence ↑ → Bond yields ↓
- ☐ Possible measures:
 - Higher taxation
 - Reduced government expenditure
 - Structural reforms
- ☐ But spending cuts are difficult because a large proportion of federal expenditure is legally mandated, while defence expenditure is also rising.

Dollar debasement dilemma

- ☐ Attempts to keep yields under control may contribute to a **weaker US dollar.**

Weaker dollar → Imports/commodities become more expensive in dollar terms → Inflationary pressure ↑

❑ At the same time:

Weaker dollar → Gold becomes relatively attractive → Gold prices may rise

❑ Thus, Washington faces a difficult trade-off:

Lower yields vs. dollar stability vs. inflation control

Why Jackson Hole matters

❑ The **Jackson Hole Economic Policy Symposium** is an important forum for central-bank policymakers and economists.

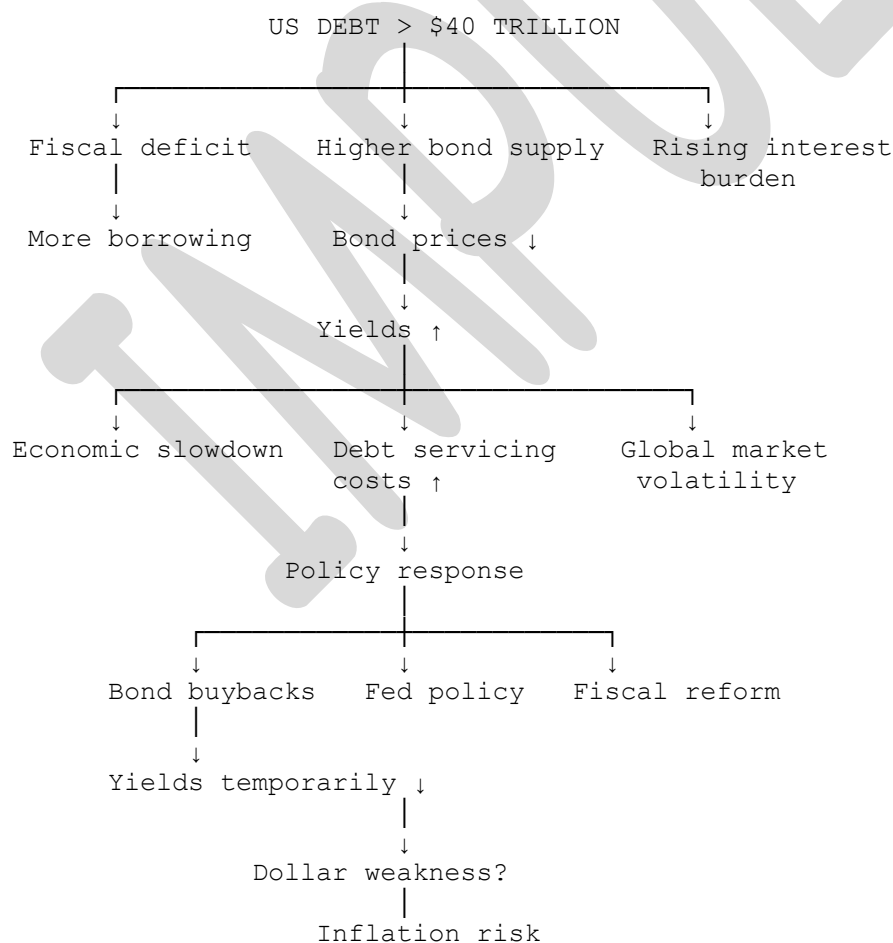
❑ The article focuses on **Kevin Warsh's first speech as Federal Reserve Chair.**

❑ Markets will look for signals regarding:

- Future interest-rate policy
- Inflation outlook
- US bond yields
- Fed independence and communication
- Response to fiscal pressures



Mind Map



UPSC Prelims Facts

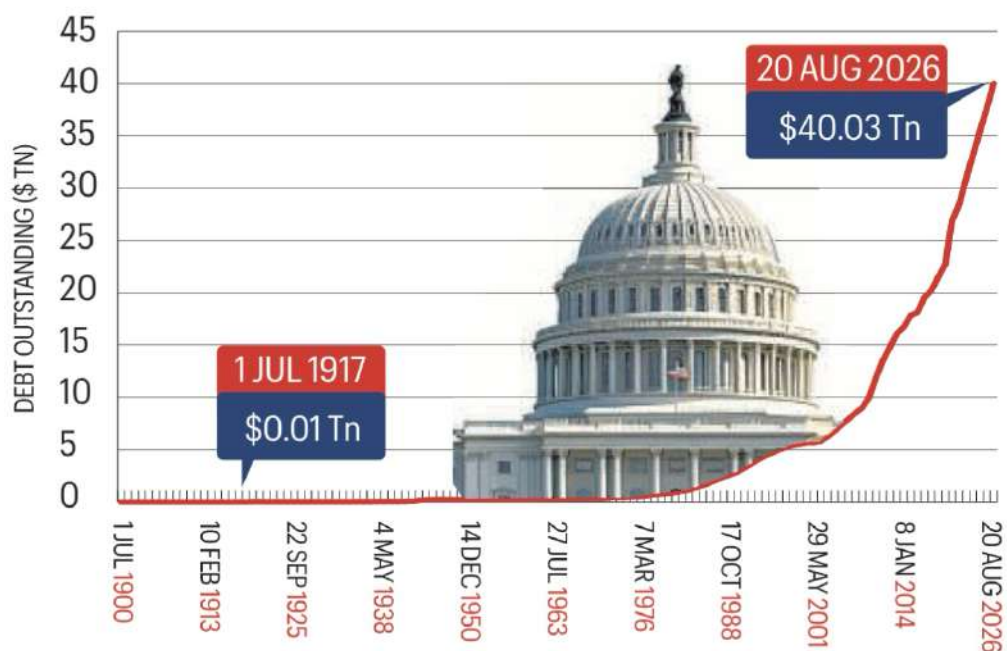
1. Bond prices and yields move inversely. ✓
2. Higher bond yields increase government borrowing costs. ✓
3. Japan is a major foreign holder of US Treasury securities. ✓
4. The Federal Reserve conducts monetary policy, while the US Treasury manages federal government debt. ✓
5. Jackson Hole symposium is hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. ✓
6. A weaker dollar can increase the dollar price of imported commodities. ✓

UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Rising public debt and borrowing costs in the United States have implications well beyond the American economy.” Examine the channels through which US fiscal stress can affect global financial stability and emerging economies. (150 words)

Keywords: Fiscal deficit • Treasury yields • Dollar • Capital flows • Exchange rates • Inflation • Gold • Global financial stability • Emerging markets

● How US' debt has spiralled



SOURCE: US DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY

Foreign Medical Graduate Exam (FMGE)

What is the issue?

The **National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS)** has defended the qualifying standards of the **Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE)** amid protests by foreign-trained Indian medical graduates over:

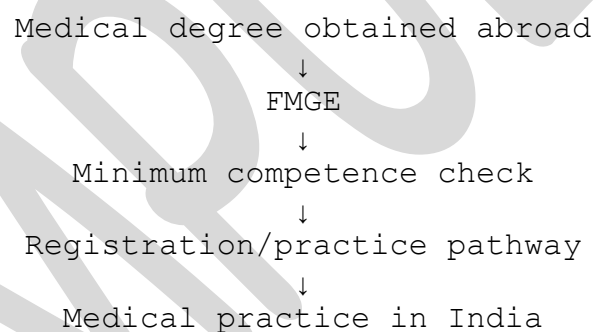
- High difficulty level
- Lack of transparency
- Problems with examination-centre infrastructure
- Low pass percentage
- Demand for grace marks

Government's position: FMGE is a **screening test, not an entrance examination**. Therefore, its minimum qualifying standard should not be diluted.

What is FMGE?

- ❑ **Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE)** is a screening examination for Indian citizens/eligible persons who obtain their primary medical qualification outside India and seek to practise medicine in India.

Purpose



- ❑ The rationale is **patient safety**: doctors must possess adequate competence to deal with emergencies such as:
 - ❤️ Myocardial infarction
 - 🧠 Stroke
 - 🦠 Sepsis
 - 🤰 Complicated pregnancy
 - 🧒 Paediatric emergencies

Key Data

Indicator

FMGE conducted

First-time pass rate

Finding

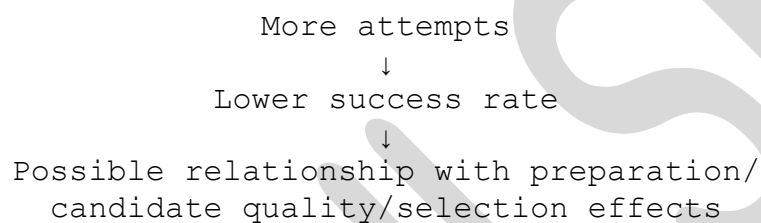
Twice a year currently

35.74%

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Finding</i>
Second-time pass rate	21.45%
Candidates with >5 attempts	3.29% pass rate
December 2025 — first timers	47.53%
December 2025 — >5 attempts	5.58%
Proposed frequency	3 examinations/year

Important inference

The government argues that the **overall pass rate alone cannot establish that the examination was unfair.**



However, this **does not by itself prove** that the examination paper was appropriately designed; transparency and independent assessment remain important.

The Core Policy Debate

Government/NBEMS

“Standards cannot be diluted.”

Reason:

- FMGE is a **competency-screening mechanism**
- Medical errors can directly threaten lives
- Passing standards should prioritise **patient safety**

Candidates

Concerns include:

- Difficult questions
- Video-based questions
- Transparency of evaluation
- Examination-centre facilities
- Low overall pass percentage
- Demand for grace marks

Expert panel

A three-member expert panel headed by Air Marshal (Dr.) Pawan Kapoor (Retd.) examined the controversy and reportedly:

- Found **no material evidence** that video-based questions or overall difficulty affected the outcome.
- **Did not recommend grace marks.**
- Recommended increasing examination frequency from **2 → 3 times annually.**



Exam-Centric Analysis

Why shouldn't standards simply be diluted?

Medical profession → High public-risk profession

Unlike many competitive examinations, failure of competence in medicine can have **immediate consequences for human life.**

Therefore:

Access to profession + quality assurance + patient safety must be balanced.

At the same time, a rigorous examination should also satisfy:

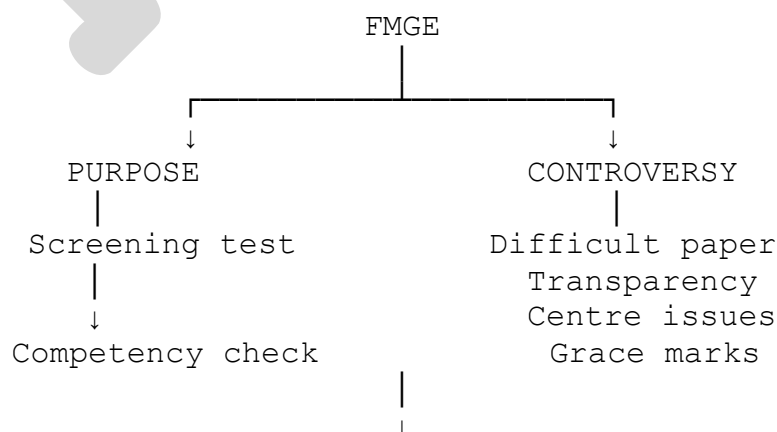
Validity + reliability + transparency + accessibility

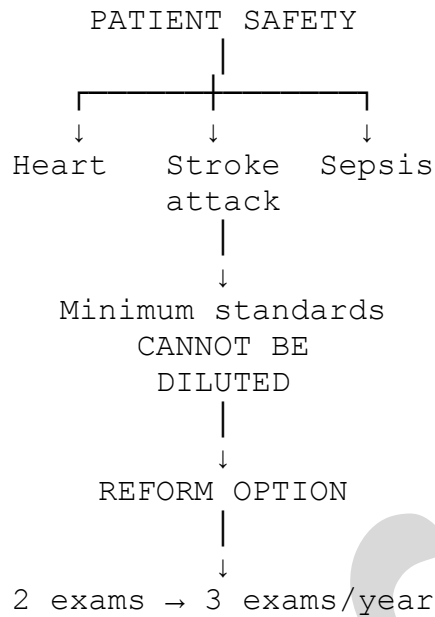
So, the better solution is **not necessarily lowering the qualifying standard**, but improving:

- Question-setting quality
- Examination transparency
- Standardisation
- Infrastructure
- Candidate feedback
- Frequency of attempts



Mind Map





UPSC Prelims Pointers

Consider the following statements:

1. FMGE is an entrance examination for admission to medical colleges in India.
2. FMGE serves as a screening test for foreign medical graduates seeking to practise medicine in India.
3. The government has proposed increasing the frequency of FMGE from two to three examinations annually.

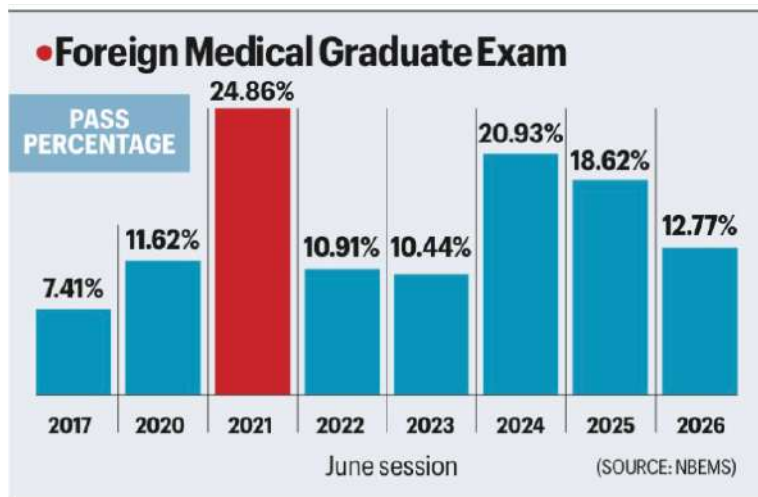
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

Answer: 2 and 3 only.....FMGE is a **screening/qualifying examination**, not an entrance examination. The expert panel has proposed **three examinations per year**.



UPSC Mains Question

Q. “Professional licensing examinations must balance accessibility with public safety.” Discuss this statement in the context of the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination in India. (150 words)



29.08.2026

India-US Javelin Deal

Brief

- The Indian Army has signed a **Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA)** with the US for procurement of the **Javelin anti-tank guided missile (ATGM)** through the **US Foreign Military Sales (FMS)** route.
- The agreement is significant because it could open the way for **co-production and deeper defence-industrial cooperation** between India and the US.

What is the Javelin?

The FGM-148 Javelin is a:

- **Man-portable anti-tank guided missile**
- **Medium-range weapon**
- **Fire-and-forget system**
- Primarily designed against **armoured vehicles/tanks**
- Also usable against **bunkers, fortifications and certain other targets**
- Entered US service in **1996**
- Produced by the **Javelin Joint Venture — Raytheon/RTX and Lockheed Martin**

Key specifications

Feature	Javelin
Type	Anti-Tank Guided Missile
Guidance	Infrared
Range	~2.5 km effective range
Operation	Man-portable
Guidance principle	Fire-and-forget
Main targets	Tanks/armoured vehicles
Attack modes	Direct attack + Top attack
Launch	Shoulder/vehicle-based platforms
Service entry	1996

How does Javelin work?

Step 1 — Target acquisition

The soldier uses the **Command Launch Unit (CLU)** and infrared sight to identify the target.



Step 2 — Target lock

The target is designated and information is transferred to the missile's onboard guidance system.



Step 3 — Fire

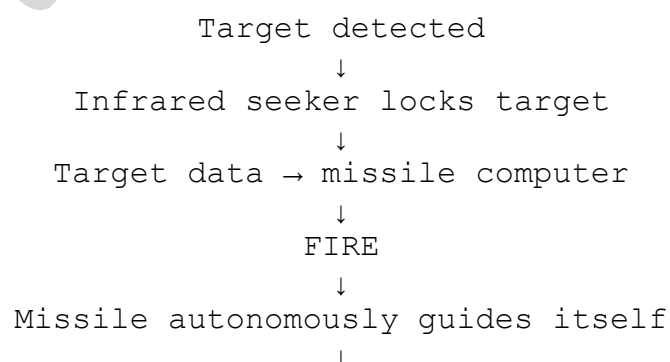
The missile is launched.



Step 4 — Fire-and-forget

The missile's **onboard infrared guidance system** guides it toward the target.

Therefore: the operator does not have to continuously guide the missile after launch.



Operator can relocate/take cover

Two Attack Modes

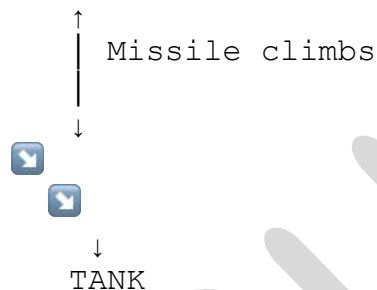
1. Direct Attack

Missile —————→ Target

Useful particularly against:

- Fortifications
- Bunkers
- Some other targets

2. Top Attack ★



The missile climbs and then dives onto the target from above.

Why is this effective against tanks?

Modern tanks generally have **stronger frontal and side armour**, while their roof armour can be comparatively vulnerable.

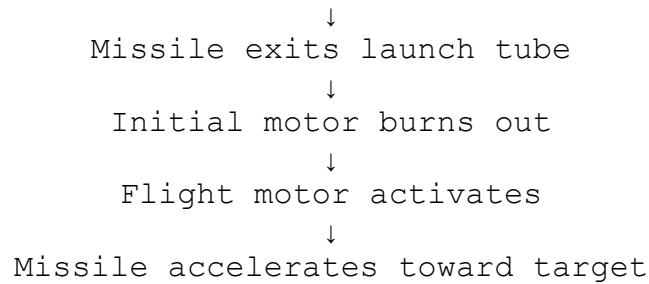
Hence:

Top-attack capability = important advantage against armoured vehicles.

What is "Soft Launch"?

- ❑ One of Javelin's important technological features is its **soft-launch mechanism**.
- ❑ A conventional shoulder-launched missile can produce significant exhaust and recoil near the operator.
- ❑ Javelin uses a two-stage propulsion concept:

Trigger pressed
↓
Initial launch motor



Advantages

- Reduced danger to operator
- Lower recoil
- Lower launch signature
- Can potentially be fired from **confined spaces** subject to operational constraints
- Reduces the chance of immediate detection/counter-fire

Why is Javelin called "Battle-Tested"?

- ☐ The Javelin has been used by US and allied forces in conflicts including **Iraq and Afghanistan**.
- ☐ Its most prominent recent battlefield use has been **Ukraine's war against Russia**, where Ukrainian forces used Javelins extensively against Russian armoured vehicles.
- ☐ This demonstrated the potential of **portable anti-armour weapons against conventional armoured formations**.

Why does India want Javelin?

1. Strengthening anti-armour capability

- India faces security challenges along its borders where **armoured formations** can be relevant.
- Javelin provides infantry with a highly mobile anti-armour capability.

2. Fire-and-forget capability

- The operator can:
Shoot → relocate → avoid counter-fire
- This is particularly valuable in modern battlefield environments.

3. Top-attack capability

- Useful against tanks whose strongest protection may be concentrated on frontal and side surfaces.

4. Man-portability

- It can accompany infantry units without requiring a large vehicle-based missile platform.

5. Modernisation of Indian Army

- The procurement forms part of India's broader effort to modernise its **anti-tank guided weapon inventory**.

Why is the deal strategically important?

- The Javelin deal should not be viewed merely as a missile purchase.
- It represents:
 - **Defence procurement → interoperability → technology cooperation → co-production → defence-industrial partnership**
- The US has indicated that the agreement could create opportunities for **co-production**.
- This fits India's broader objective of: → Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence



Rather than simply purchasing finished weapons, India increasingly seeks:

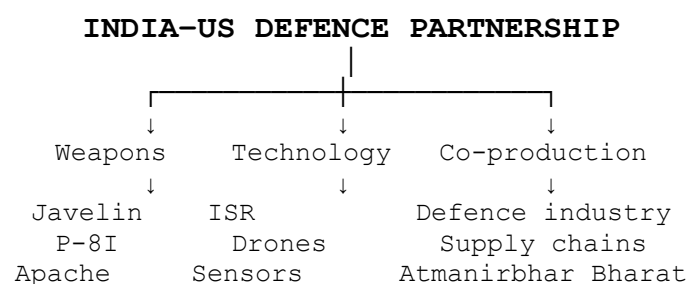
- Domestic manufacturing
- Technology cooperation
- Joint production
- Supply-chain integration
- Defence exports
- Indigenous defence-industrial capability

India's broader US defence relationship

The Javelin procurement comes alongside India's acquisition/plans involving several US-origin systems, including:

- **P-8I maritime patrol aircraft**
- **MQ-9B drones**
- **Apache helicopters**
- **MH-60R helicopters**
- **M982 Excalibur precision-guided artillery projectiles**

Thus:



UPSC Prelims: Key Concepts

FMS — Foreign Military Sales

- The Javelin procurement is being conducted through the **US Foreign Military Sales mechanism**, under which the US government facilitates defence sales to foreign governments.

Fire-and-forget

- The missile autonomously guides itself after launch, reducing the need for the operator to remain exposed for continuous guidance.

Man-portable

- The system is designed to be carried and operated by personnel rather than requiring a large dedicated launch vehicle.

ATGM

- **Anti-Tank Guided Missile** — guided weapon designed primarily to defeat armoured vehicles.

Javelin vs Conventional ATGM — Conceptual Difference

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Conventional manually guided ATGM</i>	<i>Javelin</i>
Guidance after launch	Operator may need to guide	Fire-and-forget
Operator exposure	Relatively greater	Lower after launch
Infrared seeker	Not necessarily	Yes
Top attack	Depends on system	Yes
Mobility	Varies	Man-portable
Main advantage	Guidance flexibility	Shoot-and-relocate

UPSC Prelims Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Javelin missile system:

1. It is a man-portable anti-tank guided missile.
2. It employs a fire-and-forget guidance principle.
3. Its top-attack mode allows it to strike armoured vehicles from above.
4. Its acquisition by India is being undertaken through the Foreign Military Sales mechanism of the US.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

✓ Answer: C.....Remember the combination **Man-portable + Infrared + Fire-and-forget + Top attack + FMS**.



UPSC Mains — Probable Question

Q. The India-US Javelin missile agreement represents a shift from defence procurement towards deeper defence-industrial cooperation. Discuss its significance for India's military modernisation and defence indigenisation. (150 words)

Introduction:

The Javelin is a man-portable, medium-range, fire-and-forget ATGM with top-attack capability.

Significance:

1. Enhances India's infantry anti-armour capability.
2. Provides fire-and-forget capability, reducing operator exposure.
3. Improves ability to counter modern armoured formations.
4. Deepens India-US strategic defence partnership.
5. Creates possibilities for **co-production** and industrial collaboration.
6. Supports India's long-term defence manufacturing objectives.

Challenges:

- Excessive dependence on foreign-origin platforms can create supply-chain vulnerabilities.
- Procurement must be balanced with indigenous ATGM development.
- Technology transfer and domestic value addition remain important.

Conclusion:

The Javelin agreement can be strategically valuable if India uses procurement as a bridge toward **joint production, technology absorption and indigenous defence capability**, rather than treating it merely as an import.



One-line UPSC takeaway

Javelin = Man-portable + Fire-and-forget + Infrared guidance + Top attack + US FMS + potential co-production → stronger India-US defence-industrial partnership.

FCNR(B) Deposits & Record Forex Reserves

Brief

- India's **foreign-exchange reserves** touched a record **\$729.33 billion** on **August 21, 2026**, aided substantially by strong inflows through the RBI's special **FCNR(B) deposit swap window**.

Key Facts

- Forex reserves:** \$729.33 billion → weekly rise of **\$12.42 billion**.
- Previous record: **\$728.49 billion (February 27, 2026)**.
- FCNR(B) inflows:** \$65.4 billion by August 21.
- Outstanding FCNR(B) deposits at end-May: **\$34.04 billion**.
- Total inflows through three RBI facilities: **\$72.85 billion**:
 - FCNR(B): **\$65.4 bn**
 - Overseas foreign-currency borrowing: **\$4.86 bn**
 - ECB: **\$2.59 bn**
- RBI ended the FCNR(B) swap window on **August 31**, earlier than the scheduled September 30, because of faster-than-expected inflows.



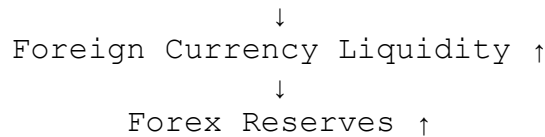
What is FCNR(B)?

FCNR(B) = Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits.

- Deposits made by **NRIs in foreign currencies** with authorised Indian banks.
- Unlike ordinary rupee deposits, the principal and interest are maintained in foreign currency.
- Under the special swap arrangement, **RBI assumes the exchange-rate risk**, encouraging banks to mobilise foreign-currency deposits.

Flow:





Significance for India

Higher forex reserves →

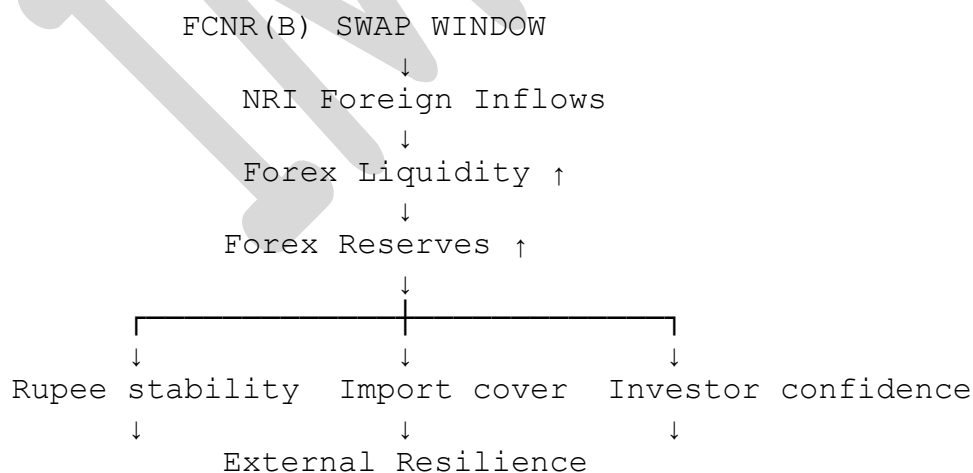
-  Greater ability to manage **rupee volatility**
-  Better capacity to finance essential imports, especially **crude oil**
-  Greater investor confidence
-  Protection against external-sector shocks
-  Improved **balance-of-payments resilience**
-  Greater RBI capacity for intervention in the foreign-exchange market

⊗ *This is particularly important because India imports around **85% of its crude oil requirements**, making the economy vulnerable to global oil-price and geopolitical shocks.*

Key Challenges

- **FPI outflows** can continue to pressure the rupee.
- Higher global interest rates may attract capital towards developed economies.
- A weaker rupee raises the domestic cost of imports.
- FCNR(B) inflows may provide temporary liquidity but **cannot permanently resolve structural external-sector weaknesses**.
- Large reserves **do not automatically cause rupee appreciation**; exchange rates also depend on inflation, capital flows, interest rates and trade balance.

Mind Map



UPSC Prelims probable

Q. Consider the following statements:

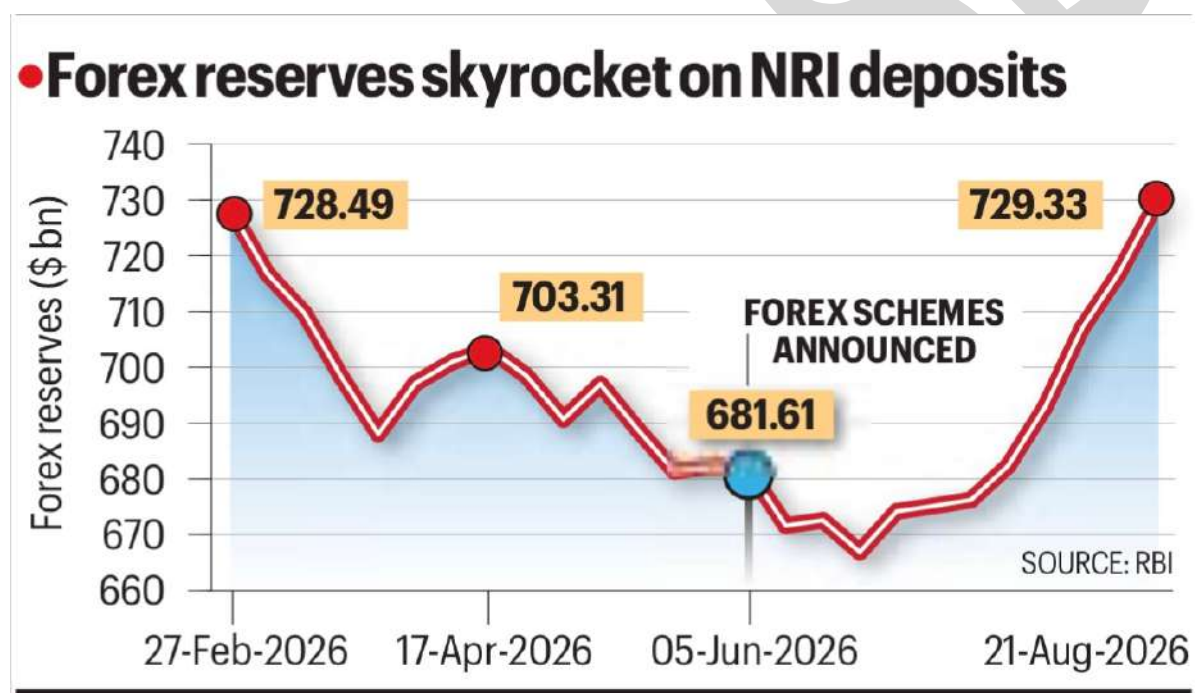
1. FCNR(B) deposits are maintained in foreign currency.
2. RBI swap facilities can augment foreign-exchange liquidity.
3. An increase in forex reserves necessarily leads to appreciation of the rupee.

Answer: 1 and 2 only.



UPSC Mains Question

“India’s record foreign-exchange reserves strengthen its external-sector resilience, but reserves alone cannot guarantee currency stability.” Discuss. (150 words)



Policy Mistakes, Not Ethanol, Behind Sugar Price Rise

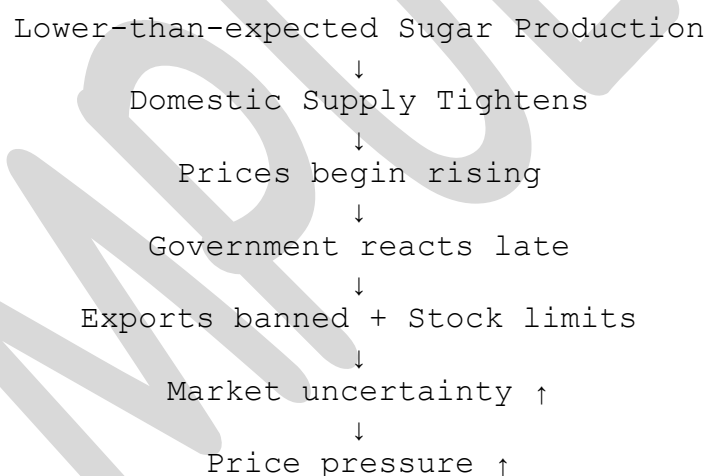
Brief

- Retail sugar prices rose sharply from around ₹45 to ₹65/kg within a month, with the **ethanol-blending programme** being blamed.
- However, the main cause is **lower sugar production and delayed government policy response**, rather than ethanol diversion.

Key Facts

- **2025–26 sugar production: ~30.9 MT.**
- Initial projection: **34.4 MT** → shortfall of around **3.5 MT**.
- Around **3 MT sugar** was diverted for ethanol production—only about **10% of gross sugar output**.
- Only **27.5% of ethanol supplied** by distilleries to OMCs in 2025–26 came from **sugarcane juice/molasses**; the rest came from **cereals**.
- Previous sugar years also witnessed ethanol diversion without comparable price spikes.

Why Did Sugar Prices Rise?



Key reason: Sugar output was much lower than anticipated. Cane availability problems in **Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra** were visible as early as February, but corrective action came late.

Policy Mistakes

1. **Delayed recognition of production shortfall**
 - Mills were already struggling to procure cane and shutting crushing operations.
2. **Export ban**

- Instead of allowing imports to supplement domestic supply, exports were banned only in May.

3. High import tariff

- Import duty on raw and white sugar remained around **100%**, discouraging imports.

4. Excessive administrative controls

- **400-tonne stock limit** imposed on dealers.
- Sugar could not be held beyond **30 days**.
- Bulk consumers purchasing ≥ 500 tonnes had to be disclosed.

Core UPSC Concept: Sugar Economy

India's sugar sector is heavily regulated through:

- **Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)** for sugarcane.
- State-advised prices in some States.
- Controls on sugar sales and stocks.
- Export/import restrictions.
- Government intervention in ethanol policy.

Problem: Excessive controls can weaken the market's ability to balance supply and demand.

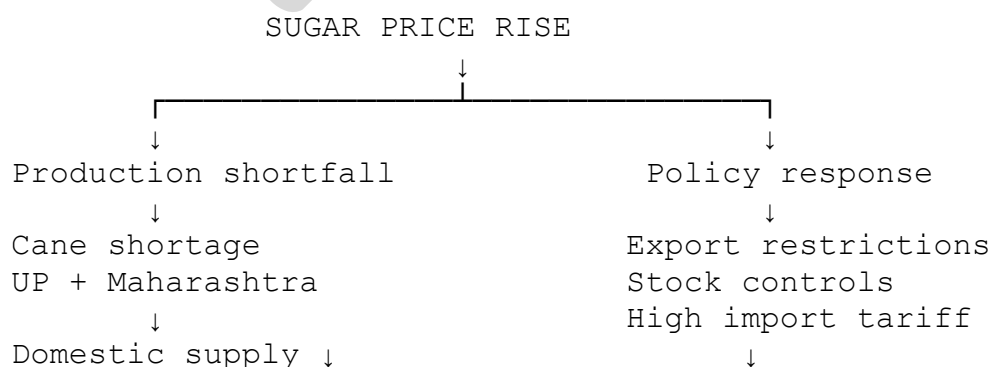
Ethanol vs Sugar

Ethanol blending → reduces fossil-fuel dependence + supports farmers + diversifies sugar industry.

But excessive diversion of sugarcane towards ethanol **can potentially reduce sugar availability** if production is low.

In the present case, however, the article argues that the dominant factor was production shortfall + policy failure.

Mind Map





🎯 UPSC Prelims probable

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. Ethanol used for blending with petrol can be produced from sugarcane as well as cereals.
2. A fall in domestic sugar production can create upward pressure on sugar prices.
3. Import restrictions always help stabilise domestic food prices.

Answer: 1 and 2 only.

📝 UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The recent rise in sugar prices highlights the limitations of excessive government intervention in agricultural markets.” Discuss with reference to India’s sugar and ethanol policies. (150 words)

For UPSC, remember:

- 👉 Sugar price rise ≠ simply ethanol diversion
- 👉 Production shortfall + delayed policy response + market controls = major factors

31.08.2026

Meta’s US Deal Redraws Line of Accountability

◆ **Core Issue**

- The settlement between **Meta and 29 U.S. states** over potential harms to children signals a shift in responsibility:

Earlier approach:	Emerging approach:
Parents + users → responsible for controlling screen time	Technology companies → responsible for safer product design

◆ Key Features of the Settlement

- Meta may pay **up to \$18 billion over 10 years**.
- **2-hour daily limit** for users below 18.
- **Midnight–6 AM curfew**.
- Stronger **age-verification mechanisms**.
- **Default safety settings** for young users.
- Reduced notifications during **school hours**.
- Meta **denies wrongdoing**.
- However, fundamental concerns regarding **personalised recommendations and advertising-driven models** remain.

🧠 Why is this important?

The “Engagement Economy”

- Platforms monetise **user attention**.

Infinite scroll



Continuous recommendations



More time spent



More engagement/data



Higher advertising value

Other engagement mechanisms include:

- 🔔 Notifications
- ❤️ Likes
- 🔥 Streaks
- 🎯 Personalised feeds

These mechanisms can make **disengagement difficult**, particularly for children.

⚖️ Shift in Regulatory Philosophy

❑ Old model

☞ Parental monitoring → User self-control → Platform responsibility

❑ New model

☞ *Platform design* → *Corporate accountability* → *Safer defaults*

This is essentially a move towards “**responsibility upstream**”—placing greater responsibility on those who design and profit from potentially harmful systems.

Relevance for India

India's regulation of children's social-media use should consider:

1. Parental supervision is insufficient

Protection varies according to:

- Digital literacy
- Parents' available time
- Household resources

2. Safer-by-default design

Children should ideally receive:

- Non-personalised or safer feeds by default
- Reduced addictive engagement mechanisms
- Strong privacy protections

3. Platform accountability

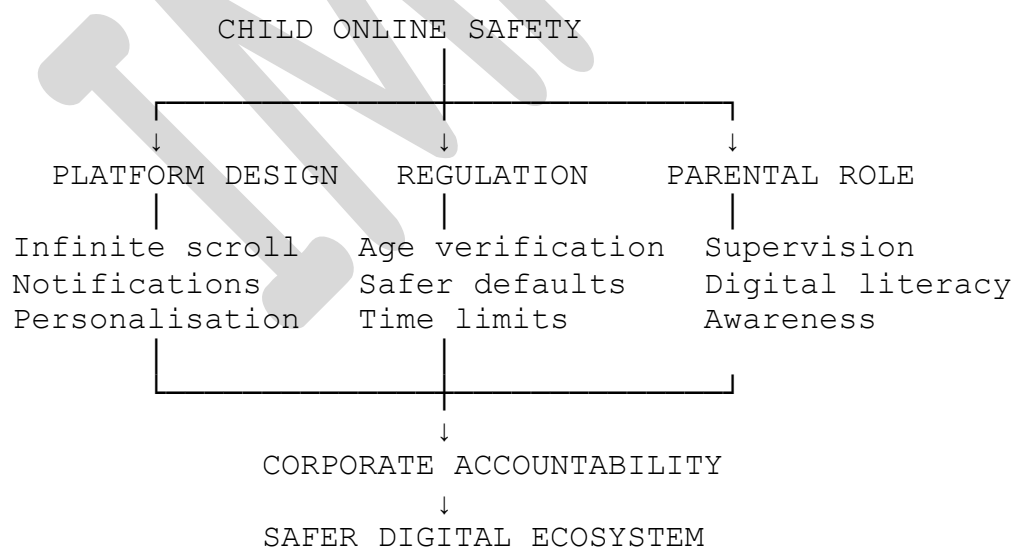
Regulation should examine **how algorithms and product design influence behaviour**, rather than merely asking users to exercise self-control.

4. Age verification

Need to balance:

Child safety ↔ Privacy ↔ Feasibility ↔ Digital rights

Mind Map



One-line takeaway

The central question is no longer merely how children should control their social-media use, but how platforms should be prevented from designing systems that make disengagement difficult.

UPSC Mains Probable

Q. “The regulation of social-media platforms for children requires a shift from user responsibility to platform accountability.” Discuss in the context of algorithmic design, digital rights and child safety. (250 words)

Keywords:

Engagement economy | Algorithmic accountability | Safer-by-default | Age verification | Digital literacy | Child online safety | Platform responsibility | Data privacy | Digital rights

Social media has transformed communication and learning, but its **engagement-driven design** can expose children to excessive screen time, harmful content, cyberbullying and privacy risks. The recent US settlement involving Meta reflects an emerging shift from merely blaming users and parents towards **platform accountability**.

Why platform accountability is necessary

- **Algorithmic design:** Infinite scroll, personalised recommendations, notifications and reward mechanisms are designed to maximise engagement, making self-regulation difficult for children.
- **Information asymmetry:** Platforms possess greater knowledge about their algorithms and their psychological effects than parents or young users.
- **Unequal parental capacity:** Dependence solely on parental supervision creates unequal protection based on digital literacy, time and socio-economic resources.
- **Safer-by-default principle:** Children's accounts can have stronger privacy settings, restricted notifications and age-appropriate content by default.

[Insert the mind map here]

However, regulation must protect digital rights

Excessive restrictions may affect children's **privacy, freedom of expression, access to information and digital participation**. Therefore, age verification must avoid creating unnecessary surveillance or collection of sensitive personal data.

Way Forward

India should adopt a **risk-based, child-centric regulatory framework** combining: **Age assurance + privacy-by-design + algorithmic transparency + safer defaults + parental awareness + independent regulatory oversight.**

Conclusion:

Child safety should not be reduced to “*parents must monitor and children must exercise self-control.*” Since platforms design and profit from engagement systems, **responsibility must extend upstream to product architecture itself.** A balanced framework can ensure that technological innovation remains compatible with children's safety and digital rights.

“As glaciers melt, prepare for Himalayan challenge”

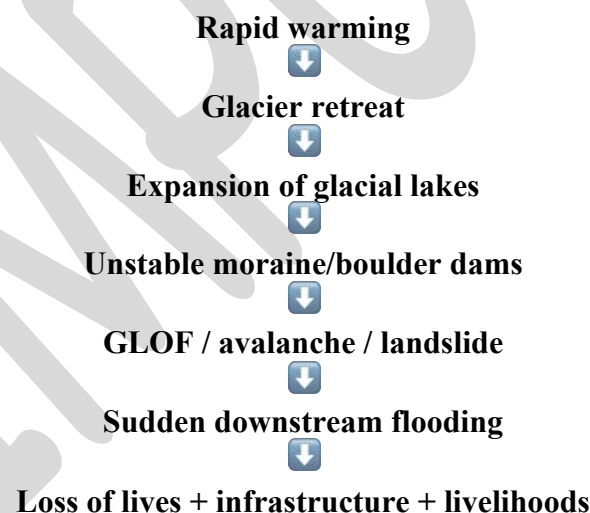


Central Argument

- **Climate change + fragile Himalayan geology + unplanned infrastructure** are creating a growing risk of disasters such as **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), landslides, avalanches and flash floods.**
- The key concern is that a disturbance at high altitude can rapidly transform into a **downstream catastrophe.**



Why the Himalayas are Vulnerable



Major risk multipliers

- **Climate change:** Accelerates glacier retreat.
- **Glacial lakes:** Accumulate meltwater behind unstable natural dams.
- **Fragile geology:** Steep slopes increase landslide and avalanche risks.
- **Erratic rainfall:** Can trigger cascading disasters.
- **Infrastructure expansion:** Roads, hydropower and tourism facilities increase exposure.

-  **Valley settlements:** Concentrate population and infrastructure in hazard-prone areas.

Important Examples

South Lhonak Lake, Sikkim

- A 2021 scientific study warned about instability around the lake. Its subsequent outburst demonstrated the consequences of inadequate preparedness.

Nepal

- Glacier-related flooding and avalanches have repeatedly demonstrated how hazards in high-altitude areas can rapidly affect downstream communities.

Switzerland – Blatten, 2025

- Advance monitoring and evacuation helped reduce casualties after a glacier collapse, offering lessons in **early warning and disaster preparedness**, despite geographical differences between the Alps and Himalayas.

What India Needs to Do

1. Strengthen early-warning systems

- Move from merely monitoring gradual changes to detecting **sudden avalanche/debris events**.

2. Continuous glacier & glacial-lake monitoring

- **Use:**
 - Satellites
 - Remote sensing
 - Drones
 - Automatic sensors
 - AI-based hazard modelling

3. Risk-sensitive infrastructure

- Environmental Impact Assessments should examine **cumulative impacts**, rather than assessing individual projects in isolation.

4. Mountain-specific construction standards

- Roads, dams, bridges and settlements should account for:
 - Seismic vulnerability
 - Landslides
 - Flood pathways
 - Changing precipitation patterns
 - Glacier-related hazards

5. Transboundary cooperation

- Himalayan rivers cross national boundaries.

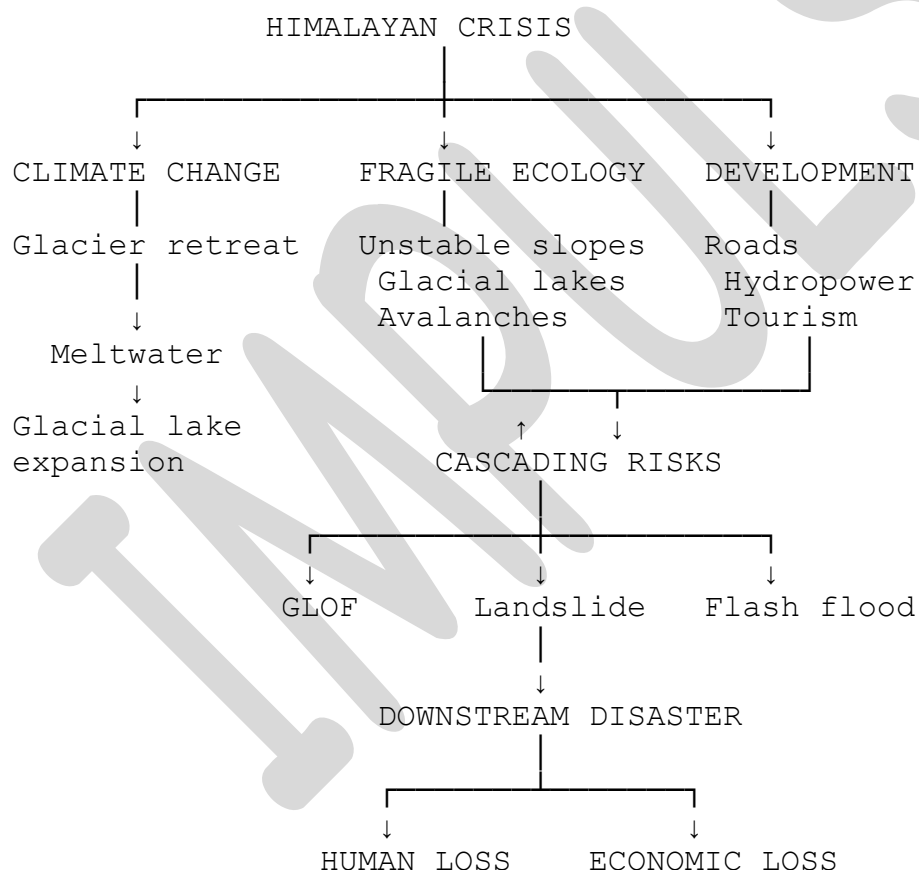
India–Nepal–Bhutan–China cooperation

- Data sharing
- Joint monitoring
- Early warning
- Disaster response

6. Community-based disaster preparedness

- Local communities should receive:
 - Evacuation training
 - Hazard maps
 - Emergency communication systems
 - Clearly identified evacuation routes

Mind Map



Probable UPSC Mains Question

Q. “The Himalayan region is increasingly becoming a climate-induced disaster hotspot due to the interaction of glacier retreat, fragile geology and infrastructure expansion.”

Discuss the challenges and suggest a comprehensive strategy for building Himalayan resilience. (150 words)

★ Keywords to use

Cryosphere | Glacier retreat | GLOF | Climate vulnerability | Cumulative EIA | Ecosystem-based adaptation | Early-warning systems | Disaster-resilient infrastructure | Transboundary cooperation | Community-based disaster management | Remote sensing

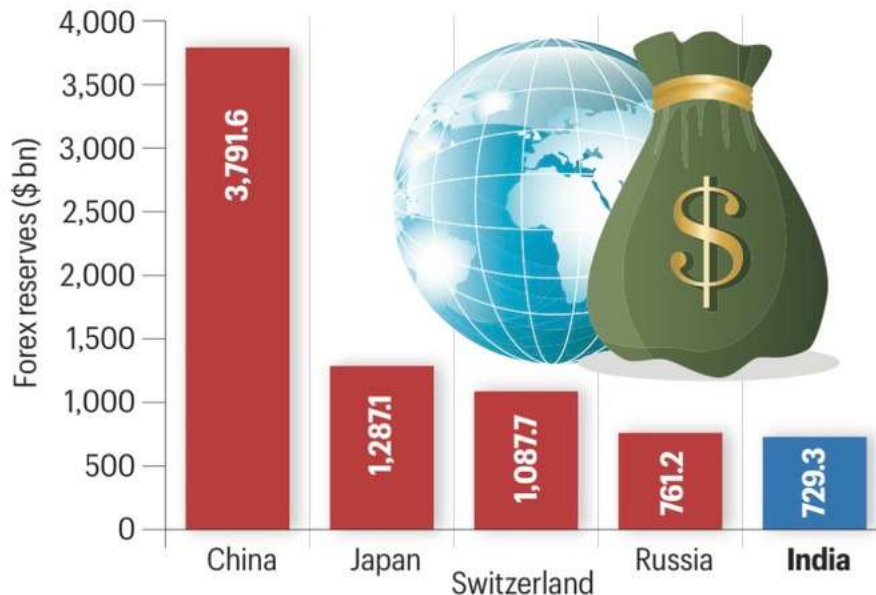
🔥 Mains-ready conclusion

“The objective should not be to stop development in the Himalayas, but to make development compatible with Himalayan ecology.”

(This gives the answer a strong **development vs. ecology** → **sustainable development** balance.)

● India eyes 4th spot in forex reserves ranks

On Friday, Reserve Bank of India data showed India's foreign exchange reserves hit an all-time high of \$729.33 billion, cementing its position as the country with the fifth-largest reserves in the world and approaching Russia in fourth.



- With the RBI's three concessional swap schemes for Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits, Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings, and External Commercial Borrowings still open, reserves should swell further.

- A higher level of forex reserves gives the RBI greater ammunition to defend the rupee when the need arises —

as has been the case over the last year. But how much is enough?

- According to former RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra, the target should be at least \$1 trillion. "Punting against such a level should be beyond the reach of the opportunistic and/or the faint-hearted," Patra wrote in a column in March.

SOURCE: PEOPLE'S BANK OF CHINA, JAPAN MINISTRY OF FINANCE, SWISS NATIONAL BANK, BANK OF RUSSIA, RBI