

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC



YEARLY COMPILATION

2025 – 2026

MAINS CONTENT (QUESTIONS WITH ANSWER)

SEPTEMBER (PART –2)

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EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 01.09.2025****TOPIC:** Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests**Renewed focus: On India-Japan ties****India-Japan Summit**

- **Summit Context:** The 15th Annual Summit between Indian PM Narendra Modi and Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba focused on creating "Next-Gen" partnerships.
- **Economic Commitments:**
 - Japanese businesses increased their investment target in India to **\$68 billion**.
 - Around 170 MoUs were signed between Indian and Japanese partners.
 - A key goal is to build resilient supply chains and secure critical infrastructure, especially in **semiconductor manufacturing**.
- **Major Agreements:**
 - **2035 Vision Statement:** A long-term plan covering eight areas like economic security, green technology, and mobility.
 - **Updated Security Partnership:** Includes annual NSA-level talks, enhanced cooperation in the **Quad** and **Indo-Pacific**, and discussions on UN Security Council reforms.
 - **Next-Gen Partnership:** Aims to improve grassroots ties and increase direct flights between states and prefectures.
- **Key Projects:** The partnership continues to focus on high-profile projects like India's **High-Speed Rail (Bullet Train)** and developing the semiconductor ecosystem.
- **Geopolitical Stance:**
 - The joint statement condemned North Korea's missile tests and cross-border terrorism.
 - The summit reinforced the India-Japan relationship as a stable and growing partnership amid global uncertainties, such as US trade tariffs and tensions with China.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/renewed-focus-on-india-japan-ties/article69996812.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY**DATE: 01.09.2025****TOPIC:** Agriculture and Fertilizer**The Fertilizer Situation in Simple Pointers**

- **The Cause:** India received **above-normal rainfall** from the South-West monsoon, leading to excellent soil moisture.
- **The Effect:** This prompted farmers to increase the sowing area for **Kharif crops**, especially water-intensive ones like **rice and maize**.
- **The Demand:** More crops led to a surge in demand for essential fertilizers like Urea, DAP, MOP, and SSP to ensure good yields.
- **The Problem (Supply Crunch):** The supply couldn't keep up with the high demand due to two main reasons:
 1. **Lower Domestic Production:** Production of key fertilizers like Urea and DAP declined compared to the previous year.
 2. **Import Shortfalls:** Imports, particularly from major suppliers like **China**, were constrained, worsening the deficit.

- **The Result:** A significant **demand-supply mismatch** has led to shortages, long queues of farmers, and hoarding, which further amplifies the crisis.
- **Future Concern:** With reservoirs nearly full, the upcoming **Rabi season** is also expected to see high sowing and strong fertilizer demand, meaning the crisis is likely to continue.
- **Proposed Solutions (Way Forward):**
 - Rationalize the use of fertilizers to prevent overuse.
 - **Diversify import sources** to reduce dependency on a single country like China.
 - Promote alternative methods like **Zero Budget Natural Farming** and **Organic Farming**.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/the-scramble-for-fertilisers-10222977/#:~:text=In%20the%20case%20of%20urea,the%20same%20day%20of%202024.>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

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EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 02.09.2025

TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Noise pollution is rising but policy is falling silent

The Problem of Urban Noise Pollution:

- **The Core Issue:** Urban noise pollution in India is a critical public health crisis, violating the constitutional right to a dignified life (Article 21).
- **India vs. Europe on Policy:**
 - **India:** The National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network (NANMN) is largely ineffective. It's a passive data collector with flawed sensor placement and little to no use in policy-making or enforcement.
 - **Europe:** The European Environment Agency (EEA) actively uses noise data to shape public health policies, estimate economic costs (€100 billion/year), and implement changes in urban planning.
- **Key Problems in India:**
 - **Governance Failure:** State Pollution Control Boards work in silos, data is often not public, and there's a lack of accountability.
 - **Weak Enforcement:** The **Noise Pollution Rules, 2000** exist but are rarely enforced, leading to high decibel levels even in "silence zones" like hospitals and schools.
 - **Ecological Impact:** Noise disrupts wildlife. A 2025 study found it disturbed the sleep and song patterns of common mynas, affecting their social signaling.
- **The Social Challenge:**
 - **Civic Fatigue:** Constant noise from traffic, construction, and loudspeakers has become normalized, leading to public apathy.
 - **Invisibility:** Unlike smog, noise is an invisible pollutant, making it harder to generate public outrage despite its serious health impacts (stress, sleep loss).
- **The Way Forward:**
 - **National Acoustic Policy:** India needs a dedicated national policy for noise, similar to its Air Quality Standards.
 - **Culture of 'Sonic Empathy':** Shift the focus from mere regulation to building a cultural sensitivity towards noise through education and sustained awareness campaigns.
 - **Link Monitoring to Action:** Decentralize NANMN, provide data to local bodies, and tie monitoring directly to penalties and enforcement.
 - **Adopt a Rights-Based Approach:** Treat the right to a peaceful acoustic environment as a fundamental right.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/noise-pollution-is-rising-but-policy-is-falling-silent/article70000282.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 02.09.2025**

TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests:

Key Takeaways from the SCO Summit

- **About SCO:** It's a major Eurasian political, economic, and security organization. Founded in 2001, it now includes **9 members**: China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics. Its anti-terror body is the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)**.
- **India's "SCO" Policy Pillars:** India's engagement is based on three pillars:
 1. **S for Security:**
 - Strongly condemned **terrorism**, calling it a threat to humanity.
 - Highlighted the role of **SCO-RATS** in combating terror groups.
 - Criticized nations that use "double standards" by supporting terrorism.
 2. **C for Connectivity:**
 - Promoted connectivity for enhancing trade and trust.
 - Cited India's projects like the **Chabahar Port** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
 - Indirectly cautioned against projects that violate national **sovereignty** (a reference to China's CPEC passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir).
 3. **O for Opportunities:**
 - Mentioned India's initiatives to add new areas of cooperation like startups, digital inclusion, and youth development.
 - Proposed a "**Civilization Dialogue Forum**" to boost people-to-people connections.
- **Relevance and Way Forward:**
 - The SCO is expanding its focus to tackle organized crime, drug trafficking, and cybersecurity.
 - It aims to be a key voice for the **Global South** and promote a multilateral world order.
 - For India, the SCO is a crucial platform to engage with Central Asia and navigate regional challenges like border disputes and terrorism while maintaining a non-aligned foreign policy.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/key-takeaways-from-pm-modis-sco-summit-address-and-bilateral-talks-with-putin-10224000/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 4: ETHICS

DATE: 03.09.2025

TOPIC: Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration

The Supreme Court to the soldier's rescue

Bureaucracy, Empathy, and Soldier's Rights

The Core Conflict: Rigid Rules vs. Human Reality

1. The central issue is the clash between the bureaucracy's inflexible, rule-bound approach and the unique, often devastating, medical and personal challenges faced by defense personnel and their families.
2. The article argues that existing rules cannot possibly foresee every tragic circumstance, making **flexibility** and **empathy** essential values for administrators to possess.

1. Judicial Intervention as a Corrective Measure

3. The Supreme Court's *suo motu* cognizance of the case of disabled cadets is highlighted as a necessary intervention.
4. It underscores a systemic failure where the state has neglected young volunteers who suffered life-altering injuries while training to serve the nation. The judiciary is stepping in where the executive and administrative bodies have failed.

2. Case Study 1: The Expectant Widow (Illustrating Inflexible Rules)

5. **The Situation:** An Air Force pilot's pregnant wife was denied a higher pension because the rules had a category for a "widow with a child" and a "widow without a child," but no provision for an "expectant widow."
6. **Bureaucratic Mindset:** Officials acknowledged the injustice but hid behind the phrase "rules are rules," suggesting a lengthy, case-by-case appeal process instead of a systemic fix.
7. **The Lesson:** This case exemplifies how a lack of foresight and empathy in rule-making can lead to cruel outcomes. The eventual amendment took years, showing the system's inertia.

3. Case Study 2: The Injured Pilot (Illustrating Dependency on Connections)

8. **The Situation:** An IAF pilot survived a crash in Siachen with severe injuries and was at risk of being invalidated from service.
9. **The "Solution":** His career was saved not by an institutional mechanism, but through personal intervention. A senior officer contacted a Governor (who was an ex-serviceman), who in turn spoke to the Defence Minister.

10. **The Critical Question:** This raises the concern that a soldier's welfare should not depend on "aligned stars" or personal connections. The support system should be robust, fair, and accessible to everyone, regardless of their network.

4. **Apathy as a Systemic Flaw**

11. The government acted swiftly to grant medical benefits to disabled cadets **only after** the Supreme Court took notice.
12. This proves that the inaction over many years, despite numerous media reports, was due to bureaucratic indifference and apathy, not an inability to act. The judiciary's role is thus crucial in holding the administration accountable for its "heartless" attitude.

5. **The "George Fernandes Solution" as a Historical Lesson**

13. The article recalls an instance where then-Defence Minister George Fernandes sent bureaucrats who were delaying the purchase of snow scooters to Siachen.
14. This serves as a potent example of how forcing decision-makers to experience the ground reality can instill a sense of urgency and empathy that is otherwise lacking.

6. **Conclusion: Chanakya's Wisdom on a State's Moral Duty**

15. The piece concludes by invoking Chanakya's ancient wisdom: a state loses its moral authority to govern the day a soldier has to demand what is rightfully theirs.
16. This principle is applied to the modern context to argue that the state's duty is not just about salaries and pensions but also about providing empathetic and timely support for soldiers' medical and personal needs.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-supreme-court-to-the-soldiers-rescue/article70004950.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 03.09.2025

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—significant provisions and basic structure: The entire debate revolves around the interpretation of Fundamental Rights like **Article 21A, Article 30(1), Article 21, and Article 15(5):**

Is it right to exempt minority schools from the ambit of RTE? Here's why SC has questioned its 2014 judgment

RTE Act vs. Minority Institutions' Rights

1. **The Core Conflict: A Clash of Fundamental Rights**

1. The central issue is the legal and constitutional friction between two fundamental rights:

- **Article 30(1):** The right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- **Article 21A:** The fundamental right of every child (aged 6–14) to free and compulsory education.

2. A recent two-judge Supreme Court bench has questioned the 2014 *Pramati Educational and Cultural Trust* judgment, which gave a blanket exemption to minority institutions from the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009.

2. Criticism of the 2014 *Pramati* Judgment

3. **"Disproportionate" Ruling:** The current SC bench criticized the *Pramati* judgment as a disproportionate measure. It struck down the *entire* RTE Act for minority schools based on a single provision, Section 12(1)(c), which mandates a 25% reservation for children from weaker sections.
4. **Need for Harmonious Construction:** The bench argued that the *Pramati* ruling created a stark conflict instead of finding a balance. The goal should be a "harmonious interpretation" where the rights of minorities (Article 30(1)) and the rights of children (Article 21A) can mutually co-exist without one completely overriding the other.
5. **Denial of Statutory Benefits:** By exempting these institutions entirely, the judgment denies children studying there the various benefits and minimum standards guaranteed under the RTE Act (e.g., pupil-teacher ratio, infrastructure, ban on corporal punishment).

3. The Original *Pramati* (2014) Case Explained

6. **Core Challenge:** The case examined the validity of the 86th Amendment (which introduced Article 21A) and the 93rd Amendment (which introduced Article 15(5) for reservations in educational institutions).
7. **The Verdict:** The Supreme Court upheld the validity of both amendments. However, it carved out an exception for minority institutions.
8. **Reasoning for Exemption:** The court reasoned that forcing minority institutions to implement the 25% reservation for children from the neighborhood (who may not belong to the same minority community) would dilute their "minority character" and effectively "abrogate" their fundamental right under Article 30(1).

4. The Misuse of the "Minority Status" Exemption

9. **Revealing Data:** A key reason for revisiting the issue is a report from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). It found that in minority schools, **62.5% of students are from non-minority communities**, while only 8.7% are from disadvantaged groups within the minority community.

10. **Operating as Elite Institutions:** This data suggests that many institutions are not primarily serving their own communities. Instead, they are using the minority tag as a loophole to operate as elite private schools, avoiding their social obligations under the RTE Act.
11. **A Surge in "Minority" Tags:** After the 2014 judgment, many institutions reportedly sought minority status, some with only token minority management, specifically to escape RTE compliance.

5. **Child-Centric vs. Institution-Centric Approach**

12. The RTE Act is fundamentally **child-centric**. It places the right of the individual child at the forefront.
13. The argument is that the individual right of a child to quality education should not be compromised by the collective right of a group to administer an institution, especially when that institution is not exclusively serving its intended community.

6. **Way Forward: Reaffirming the Right to Education**

14. The right to education is integral to the Right to Life and Dignity under Article 21.
15. Ensuring quality education for every child is essential for India to leverage its demographic dividend.
16. Revisiting the blanket exemption will not only benefit children from weaker sections in general but also help disadvantaged children from within the minority communities themselves to get admission into these schools.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/minority-schools-exempt-rte-sc-question-2014-judgment-10226430/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 4: ECONOMY

DATE: 04.09.2025

TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE: PORTS

India's recent maritime reforms need course correction

Analysis of India's Maritime Reforms (2025)

The Indian government has introduced a package of maritime reforms, including the **Indian Ports Bill, 2025, Merchant Shipping Act, 2025**, and **Coastal Shipping Act, 2025**, to modernize the nation's maritime framework. While aimed at progress, these reforms have raised significant concerns.

Progress and Procedural Pitfalls

- **Objective:** The primary goal is to **modernize India's maritime governance**, replacing outdated laws like the Ports Act of 1908 and aligning the sector with global best practices.
- **Expected Benefits:** The reforms are praised for promoting **ease of doing business**, enabling sustainable port development, and creating regulatory coherence, which is seen as vital for attracting foreign investment.
- **Procedural Concerns:** A major red flag is that these significant bills were passed **without adequate parliamentary debate or review by a standing committee**. This raises concerns about a lack of legislative scrutiny and consensus-building on crucial national issues.

Concerns in the Indian Ports Bill, 2025

- **Undermining Federalism:** Critics argue the Act centralizes power, severely undermining the autonomy of coastal states.
 - The **Maritime State Development Council**, chaired by the Union Minister, can issue binding directives to State governments, turning cooperative federalism into **federal subordination**.
 - State maritime boards lose their fiscal autonomy and flexibility, as they **cannot amend their frameworks without central approval**, despite being responsible for port management.
- **Regulatory and Judicial Issues:**
 - The Act grants **vague and discretionary powers** to regulatory bodies, creating heavy and unpredictable compliance burdens, especially for smaller operators.
 - It contains a flawed dispute resolution mechanism. **Clause 17 explicitly bars civil courts** from hearing port-related disputes.

- Instead, disputes are referred to internal committees run by the very authorities being challenged, creating a conflict of interest and **violating the principles of natural justice and independent judicial review.**

Concerns in the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025

- **Loopholes in Ownership Rules:** The Act significantly dilutes the ownership criteria for Indian-flagged vessels.
 - The previous **1958 law mandated full Indian ownership.**
 - The new Act allows **partial ownership by Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) and even foreign entities**, with the exact thresholds left to be decided later by executive notification, not by Parliament.
- **Risks of "Flag of Convenience":** This unchecked executive power to dilute ownership safeguards could turn India into a **"flag-of-convenience" state**, where foreign owners control Indian-flagged ships to take advantage of lenient regulations, thereby compromising maritime security.
- **Burdens on Small Operators:** The provision for **mandatory registration for all vessels**, irrespective of their size or propulsion method, imposes heavy bureaucratic and financial burdens on small boat owners and fishermen.

Concerns in the Coastal Shipping Act, 2025

- **Arbitrary Licensing:** While the Act aims to reserve coastal trade for Indian vessels (cabotage), it gives the Director General of Shipping **wide and vague discretionary powers** to license foreign vessels on grounds like "national security," which could be misused.
- **Threat to Small Operators:** Mandatory voyage and cargo reporting requirements pose a significant challenge for small operators and fishing communities, who may lack the resources for such compliance. There is also **no clarity on how this data will be used or protected.**
- **Centralization of Power:** The Act centralizes authority with the Union government, echoing the federalism concerns seen in the Ports Bill and threatening the autonomy of local coastal governance.

Conclusion and Way Forward

While modernizing India's maritime laws is essential, the current reforms risk creating an unfair and centralized system. The key takeaway is that critical rules on **ownership, licensing, and state autonomy should be enshrined in the legislation itself**, not left to executive discretion. Without substantial amendments, these reforms may promote "ease of business" for a select few at the cost of federal principles, fair competition, and long-term maritime security.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-recent-maritime-reforms-need-course-correction/article70009149.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: SECURITY

DATE: 04.09.2025

TOPIC: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

India's plan for creating theatre commands in defence, and the challenges

The Plan for Military Theatre Commands in India

A major defence reform is underway to integrate India's military forces into theatre commands. However, a recent tri-service seminar has highlighted significant differences among the Army, Navy, and Air Force regarding the final structure of these commands.

What is Theaterisation?

- **Core Concept:** Theaterisation refers to the integration of the resources of the three-armed forces—the **Army, Navy, and Air Force**—into a limited number of unified commands, known as **'theatre commands**.
- **Unified Command and Control:** Each theatre command will operate under a **single unified commander** for a specific geographical area, controlling all the assets of the three services within that theatre.
- **Current Structure:** Currently, India has **17 service-specific commands** (7 each for the Army and Air Force, and 3 for the Navy). There are only two tri-service commands: the **Andaman and Nicobar Command** and the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)**, which manages the nuclear arsenal.
- **Origin of the Initiative:** The modern push for theaterisation was highlighted by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 2019 Independence Day speech**, emphasizing the need for the military to work together seamlessly.

Rationale for Creating Theatre Commands

- **Adapting to Modern Warfare:** The nature of modern warfare is increasingly **multi-domain**, involving coordinated operations across land, sea, air, cyber, and space. Theatre commands are essential to manage this complexity.
- **Ensuring Jointness and Cooperation:** The primary goal is to foster deep cooperation among the three services, enabling them to plan and execute military operations **jointly and more effectively**, rather than in separate silos.

- **Optimal Resource Utilization:** By bringing all assets under a single operational commander, the military can ensure the optimal and efficient use of its resources, avoiding duplication of efforts and assets.
- **Role of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS):** The creation of the post of **CDS** was a key step in this direction. The CDS is tasked with facilitating the restructuring of military commands and promoting "jointness" in operations, procurement, and training.

Evolution of the Theaterisation Plan

- **Initial Proposal:** The first CDS had planned to create **four theatre commands**: an Air Defence Command, a Maritime Theatre Command, and two land-based commands for the western and eastern fronts.
- **Revised Proposal:** The concept has since evolved. The new plan proposes creating **adversary-based joint theatre commands**, which would involve:
 - An integrated theatre command for the **northern and eastern borders with China**.
 - Another command for the **western borders with Pakistan**.
 - A third **maritime command** to tackle threats in the maritime domain.

Key Challenges and Concerns

- **Dismantling Existing Structures:** The reform requires dismantling the existing 17 service-specific commands, a structure that has been in place for decades, which presents significant organizational and logistical challenges.
- **Indian Air Force (IAF) Apprehensions:** The IAF has expressed strong reservations, based on two primary concerns:
 1. **Division of Scarce Assets:** The Air Force fears that its limited and valuable combat assets (like fighter jets) would be divided and distributed among different theatre commands, diluting their operational impact.
 2. **Reduction of Role:** There is an apprehension within the IAF that theaterisation might reduce its strategic role to that of a **mere support arm for the Army**, rather than an independent and decisive force.
- **Future-Readiness:** The new commands must be structured to deal with emerging forms of warfare in the **space and cyber domains** and should not add more bureaucratic layers or slow down the decision-making chain.

The Way Forward

- **Acknowledge Modern Threats:** Modern warfare requires the ability to counter multi-domain attacks, especially given the threat of a multi-front war with China and Pakistan. Theatre commands are necessary to meet this challenge.

- **Build Consensus:** The legitimate concerns of all three services, particularly the **Air Force's concerns about its assets and role**, must be carefully considered and addressed to build a consensus.
- **An Indian Model:** The final structure of the theatre commands should be **uniquely suited to India's specific security challenges** and operational requirements, rather than blindly imitating the models of advanced militaries like the United States.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/plan-for-theatre-commands-10229049/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 05.09.2025

TOPIC: TAX REFORMS

CII calls GST 2.0 reforms a 'defining milestone in India's tax journey'

GST 2.0: A Landmark in India's Tax Journey

The 56th GST Council meeting, held on **September 3, 2025**, introduced a landmark set of reforms, termed "GST 2.0." This initiative represents a decisive shift towards a simpler, more equitable, and growth-oriented tax system, aligning with the national vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047**.

Core Reform: Simplification of the GST Structure

- **Transition to a Two-Rate System:** The reform addresses a long-standing demand from both industry and consumers by moving away from the complex multiple-slab structure (5%, 12%, 18%, 28%). The new structure is built around two main rates:
 1. A **Standard Rate of 18%.**
 2. A **Merit Rate of 5%** for essential goods and services.
- **Retention of De-merit Rate:** A **40% de-merit rate** will be retained for a select list of luxury or harmful "sin" goods.
- **Transformational Impact:** This simplification is expected to significantly **reduce compliance burdens** for businesses, enhance predictability and transparency in taxation, and make the entire GST system more **citizen-friendly** and easier to understand.

Sector-Specific Relief and Benefits for Citizens

- **Household Essentials:** The tax burden on daily-use items has been reduced.
 - Products like **soap, shampoo, toothpaste, bicycles, and kitchenware** are now in the **5% GST bracket**.
 - Key food essentials such as **UHT milk, paneer, chapati, and paratha** are now **exempt from GST**.
- **Insurance and Social Security:** In a major move to strengthen social security, **all life and health insurance products have been made exempt from GST**. This will make insurance more affordable and accessible, especially for senior citizens and low-income families.
- **Healthcare:** Access to modern medicine has been improved through **exemptions and rate reductions** on essential drugs, medical devices, and treatments for critical illnesses like cancer and rare diseases.
- **Agriculture Sector:** To support farmers and reduce cultivation costs, key changes have been made:
 - **Tractors, farm machinery, and implements** are now taxed at just **5%**.

- Fertilizers and crucial inputs like **sulphuric acid and ammonia** have been moved from the 18% slab to the **5%** slab.
- **Labour-Intensive Sectors:** To boost employment and competitiveness, GST rates have been reduced for **handicrafts, marble, granite, and leather goods**.

Rate Rationalisation and Removal of Distortions

- **Correcting Inverted Duty Structures:** A significant achievement of the reform is the removal of inverted duty structures in key sectors, which had distorted value chains and hampered growth.
 - **Example (Textiles):** GST on **man-made fibre and yarn has been cut to 5%**, resolving a long-standing issue and boosting the competitiveness of the textile industry.
- **Rate Cuts in Core Sectors:**
 - **Cement:** GST has been significantly reduced from **28% to 18%**, providing a major boost to the housing and infrastructure sectors.
 - **Green Growth:** Rates have been cut for **renewable energy devices and auto components** to accelerate India's transition to a green economy.

Institutional Strengthening and Process Reforms

- **GSTAT Implementation:** The much-awaited **Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)** will be made operational by the end of the year. This will ensure **faster dispute resolution**, provide consistent rulings, and enhance trust in the tax system.
- **Other Process Reforms:** Additional measures like **provisional refunds** for inverted duty cases, **risk-based compliance checks**, and the harmonization of valuation rules have been introduced to reduce uncertainty and compliance costs for businesses.

Conclusion: A People-Centric Reform

The "GST 2.0" reforms are being rolled out in a **phased manner starting September 22, 2025**, to balance revenue stability with immediate benefits for consumers and industry. This initiative is not merely a technical adjustment but a **people-centric reform** designed to simplify the tax structure, reduce the burden on essentials, correct past distortions, and strengthen institutions, thereby laying a stronger foundation for India's growth journey.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Mangalore/cii-calls-gst-20-reforms-a-defining-milestone-in-indias-tax-journey/article70022382.ece#:~:text=India's%20tax%20journey.%E2%80%9D-.The%20reforms%20mark%20a%20decisive%20step%20towards%20a%20simpler%2C%20fairer,a%20bold%20and%20transformative%20shift.>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2 : SOCIAL JUSTICE**DATE: 05.09.2025**

TOPIC: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Who are particularly vulnerable tribal groups, which the govt wants to be counted separately in the Census?

Enumerating Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

In a significant policy move, the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** has requested the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India to conduct a **separate enumeration of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** for the first time in the upcoming census. The goal is to collect precise data on PVTG households and their distinct socio-economic conditions to better implement targeted welfare schemes like **PM-JANMAN**.

Who Are PVTGs?

- **Origin of the Concept:** The classification of PVTGs originated from the **Dhebar Commission (1960–61)**. The commission identified that certain tribal communities were "more vulnerable" than others due to significant disparities in their socio-economic conditions.
- **Identification Criteria:** PVTGs are identified from among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on specific characteristics:
 - Declining or stagnant population.
 - Geographical isolation in remote areas.
 - Reliance on pre-agrarian practices like hunting and gathering.
 - Extreme economic backwardness and very low literacy levels.
- **Current Status:** At present, there are **75 identified PVTGs** in India, spread across 18 states and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Status of Census Enumeration and Population

- **Current Practice:** PVTGs have **never been listed as a separate category** in any census. They are currently counted under the broader Scheduled Tribes (ST) category, which makes it difficult to get specific data on their status.
- **Data Limitations:** The Census office releases consolidated data only for the main ST groups listed under Article 342 of the Constitution, not for sub-groups like PVTGs.
- **Population Estimates:** According to recent government estimates, the total PVTG population is around **47.5 lakhs**.
 - The state with the highest PVTG population is **Madhya Pradesh** (13.22 lakh), followed by Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

- The **Baiga community** of Madhya Pradesh is the largest PVTG by population.
- Some groups, like the **Sentinelese** and **Shompens** in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, have critically low populations, with fewer than 1,000 individuals.

The PM-JANMAN Yojana

- **Objective:** Launched in November 2023, the **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)** is a flagship initiative aimed at ensuring the **saturation of basic facilities** and services for the 75 PVTG communities.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Budget:** It has an outlay of approximately **₹24,000 crore** for a three-year period (until 2026).
 - **Implementation:** The scheme uses a **convergent approach**, bringing together multiple central ministries like Tribal Affairs, Health, Education, and Rural Development to work in synergy.
 - **Major Interventions:** The focus is on providing essential services, including:
 - Housing under **PM-AWAS**.
 - Clean drinking water through the **Jal Jeevan Mission**.
 - Road and telecom connectivity.
 - Education via Anganwadi centers and **Eklavya Model Residential Schools**.
 - Healthcare through **Mobile Medical Units**.
 - Livelihood support and skill development.

The Way Forward

- PVTGs are recognized as the most deprived and marginalized groups among all tribal communities in India.
- The government's move to **enumerate PVTGs separately in the census** is a critical and welcome step. This will provide the granular, reliable data needed for the efficient and effective implementation of targeted welfare schemes, ensuring that benefits reach the most vulnerable.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/particularly-vulnerable-tribal-groups-pvtg-census-10229611/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**DATE: 06.09.2025**

TOPIC: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

Governors as Chancellors: On the submission by the Kerala Governor**The Central Conflict: Governors vs. State Governments**

- A significant power struggle has emerged between State Governors (acting as Chancellors) and elected State governments regarding the administration and leadership of state universities.
- This friction raises fundamental questions about **federalism, democratic accountability**, and the **autonomy of higher educational institutions**.
- The conflict is not isolated, with prominent examples seen in **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Punjab**.

The Governor's Stance and UGC Regulations

- **Kerala Governor's Submission:** The immediate trigger for the current debate is the submission by Kerala's Governor to the Supreme Court, arguing that the Chief Minister has **no legitimate role** in the appointment process of Vice-Chancellors (V-Cs).
- **Basis of the Argument (2018 UGC Rules):** The Governor's position is based on the 2018 University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations. These rules mandate that V-C search committees must comprise eminent individuals from higher education who are not connected to the university. The Governor interprets this to **implicitly exclude political figures like the Chief Minister**.
- **Strengthening the Governor's Position (Draft 2025 UGC Regulations):** Proposed new UGC regulations are expected to further marginalize the role of State governments, placing the V-C appointment process almost entirely under the **Chancellor's (Governor's) purview**.

Historical Context of the Governor's Role as Chancellor

- **Colonial Origins:** The position of Governor as Chancellor is a **relic of the colonial era**, originally designed for administrative control by the British regime.
- **Post-Independence Rationale:** The role was retained after Independence with the intention of creating a buffer against political interference. The Chancellor was envisioned as a symbolic, apolitical **"father figure"** to safeguard university independence.
- **Legal Basis (Not Constitutional):** Crucially, the Governor's authority as Chancellor is derived from **State-specific University Acts**, not from a direct constitutional mandate. This means state legislatures create and can potentially alter this role.

State Resistance and the Need for Meritocracy

- **Legislative Countermeasures:** In response to perceived overreach and interference, state governments are actively pushing back. For instance, **Punjab and West Bengal have passed legislation** to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor.
- **The Core Principle at Stake:** The debate highlights that the post of a V-C is fundamentally academic and administrative. The ideal candidate must be a **distinguished academician** with proven **vision, leadership qualities, and managerial skills**.
- **Avoiding Political Patronage:** A primary concern is that V-C appointments must not be reduced to a tool for political patronage, whether exercised by the **Union government (through the Governor) or the State government**.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

- **Balancing Act:** The situation demands a delicate balance between **institutional autonomy** (freedom from political control) and **democratic accountability** (the legitimate role of an elected government).
- **Re-evaluating the Governor's Role:** The historical role of the Governor as an unchecked arbiter in education is being questioned as an anachronism in a modern federal democracy.
- **The Ultimate Goal:** The primary objective must be to ensure that universities are led by **visionary and academically accomplished leaders**. Their selection should be based on a transparent, merit-based process, not political convenience, to uphold the integrity of India's higher education system.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/governors-as-chancellors-on-the-submission-by-the-kerala-governor/article70016206.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

DATE: 06.09.2025

TOPIC: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation:

What Rajasthan's coaching centre Bill says, why it matters so much

Context and Rationale for the Bill

- **Student Mental Health Crisis:** The primary driver for the legislation is the alarming rate of student deaths in Rajasthan's coaching hubs. Over the last five years, **88 students died**, with **78 of these deaths being by suicide**, predominantly in Kota, the "coaching capital."

- **Judicial and Parliamentary Intervention:** The Rajasthan High Court had commissioned a study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) to investigate student stress. Furthermore, a Parliamentary Standing Committee highlighted the **complete lack of a national regulatory framework** to govern the rapidly growing coaching industry.
- **Widespread Malpractices:** The bill aims to address numerous issues plaguing the sector, including reports of **financial fraud**, misleading advertisements, and the prevalence of **drug abuse and severe mental health struggles** among students.
- **Stated Aims of the Bill:** The legislation is designed to register, control, and regulate coaching centers to curb their excessive commercialization and create a **healthy, supportive, and secure environment** for students preparing for competitive exams.

Key Provisions of the Bill

- **Regulatory Structure:**
 - **State-Level Authority:** It establishes a state-level regulatory body comprising senior education and police officials, a psychiatrist, and representatives from coaching centers and parents' associations.
 - **District-Level Committees:** It mandates the formation of district-level committees, led by the District Magistrate, to handle the registration of centers, ensure compliance with the law, and oversee grievance redressal cells.
- **Registration and Infrastructure:**
 - **Mandatory Registration:** All coaching centers with **more than 100 students** are required to register within three months of the Act's enforcement.
 - **Minimum Standards:** The bill sets minimum requirements for infrastructure, such as **at least 1 square meter of space per student**, and for faculty, who must possess a **minimum qualification of a graduation degree**.
- **Operational Guidelines and Student Welfare:**
 - **Curbing Misleading Advertisements:** It explicitly prohibits coaching centers from making **false promises or guaranteeing good ranks or marks**.
 - **Stress Reduction Measures:** Centers are required to provide **weekdays off** for both students and teachers to prevent burnout.
 - **Transparency and Support:** It is now compulsory for centers to have a **counseling system** and maintain an updated website detailing tutor qualifications, hostel facilities, fee structures, and authentic success rates.
- **Penalties for Non-Compliance:**

- **Fines and Deregistration:** Violations of the Act will result in a fine of **₹50,000 for the first offense** and **₹2 lakh for subsequent violations**. Repeated non-compliance may lead to the **cancellation of the center's registration**.

Criticisms and Shortcomings of the Bill Kritik

- **Gaps in Student Welfare:** A major criticism is that the bill **does not make psychological or career counseling mandatory**, which was a key recommendation in central guidelines. It also fails to specify a **minimum age for student enrollment**.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** The regulatory committees are heavily dominated by state officials, sparking fears of increased **red-tapism and an "inspector raj"** that could hinder the functioning of coaching centers.
- **Potential Economic Impact:** There are concerns that the stringent regulations could disproportionately harm **smaller coaching institutes** and might even compel larger centers to relocate, which would adversely affect the local economy of coaching hubs like Kota.

The Way Forward

- **A Palliative, Not a Cure:** The bill is widely considered a necessary **"first-aid" measure** but not a comprehensive solution to the deeper problems within the Indian education system.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** The fundamental issues are the systemic emphasis on **rote learning in schools** and the significant **discrepancy between the school curriculum and the syllabus of competitive exams**.
- **Systemic Reforms Needed:** For a lasting solution, there is a need to effectively implement the vision of the **New Education Policy (NEP)**. The government must also engage in broad consultations with all stakeholders to tackle the root causes of student distress and suicide.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/rajasthan-coaching-centre-bill-kota-engg-medical-10232718/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 08.09.2025

TOPIC: External sector and FDI

A complex turn in India's FDI story

The Illusion of High FDI: A Divergence in Flows

- **Headline vs. Reality:** While gross FDI inflows appear robust, reaching **\$81 billion in FY 2024-25**, this figure masks a serious underlying issue: a massive surge in the amount of money foreign investors is pulling out of the country.
- **Rapid Rise in Disinvestment:** Post-pandemic, while gross FDI inflows grew at a slow **0.3%** annually, **disinvestments and repatriations** by foreign firms surged at an alarming **18.9%** annual rate.
- **Shrinking Net FDI:** In a recent period, against **\$308.5 billion in gross FDI**, foreign investors withdrew **\$153.9 billion**. This has caused net FDI inflows to decline sharply.
- **Negligible Retained Capital:** The situation is even more critical when considering that Indian firms are also investing heavily abroad. After adjusting for both foreign disinvestment and outward FDI by Indian firms, the **net retained capital** in the economy fell to a near-zero figure of just **\$0.4 billion**, exposing a major systemic gap.

Key Trends and Underlying Challenges

- **Shift to Short-Term Profit-Seeking:** Disinvestment now accounts for over **63% of total FDI activity**. This indicates a fundamental shift away from long-term, strategic industrial projects towards **short-term, profit-seeking ventures**, often routed through specific countries for tax arbitrage.
- **Sectoral Shift Away from Manufacturing:** The manufacturing sector, crucial for job creation and industrial growth, has seen its share of FDI drop to just **12%** due to massive outflows. Investment is now increasingly flowing into **services and rent-seeking sectors** like financial services and energy distribution.
- **Changing Sources of FDI:** A growing portion of FDI is channeled through financial centers like **Singapore and Mauritius** for tax-efficient strategies, while direct investment from traditional industrial partners like the **US, Germany, and UK** is declining.
- **Surge in Outward FDI:** Indian firms are increasingly investing overseas, with outflows growing from **\$13 billion in FY 2011-12 to \$29.2 billion in FY 2024-25**. This reflects a search for more stable markets, strategic resources, and favorable tax regimes abroad.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

- **Macroeconomic Risks:** The sharp decline in net FDI poses significant risks to the economy. It affects **capital availability for domestic projects**, puts pressure on the **Balance of Payments (BoP)**, weakens **currency stability**, and ultimately reduces the flexibility of the RBI's monetary policy.

- **Need for Systemic Reforms:** India must urgently prioritize deep-rooted reforms that create a stable environment and reward **long-term investment commitments** over short-term speculative capital.
- **Key Areas for Action:** Critical measures include **simplifying complex regulations, ensuring policy consistency and predictability, making significant investments in infrastructure**, and enhancing **education and skill-building** to create a high-value workforce.

The Path to Becoming a True Investment Hub

- **Focus on Quality Over Quantity:** The government and policymakers must shift their focus from celebrating headline **gross FDI figures** to analyzing the **quality, durability, and strategic alignment** of the capital flowing into the country.
- **Attract Committed Capital:** The primary goal should be to attract and retain investment that builds **domestic industrial capability** and aligns with national priorities, such as **advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and high technology**.
- **Create a Trustworthy Ecosystem:** Building a resilient investment hub requires a foundation of **streamlined regulations, world-class infrastructure, unwavering policy stability**, and renewed **trust in legal and administrative institutions**.
- **Invest in Human Capital:** A highly skilled workforce is the most critical enabler for attracting high-value, technology-intensive investments that can drive sustainable long-term growth.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-complex-turn-in-indias-fdi-story/article70022990.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 08.09.2025

TOPIC: India's GDP growth rates and the challenges to sustaining this momentum.

A complex turn in India's FDI story

The Central Paradox: High Growth, Low Investment

- Despite being the world's fastest-growing major economy, India is experiencing a paradoxical **decline in net foreign capital inflows**.
- Standard economic theory suggests that a high-growth, capital-scarce economy like India should attract significant foreign investment due to higher expected returns.
- However, official Balance of Payments (BoP) data shows that foreign investors are not participating in India's growth story to the extent they have in the past.

The Data Behind the Paradox

- **Exceptional GDP Growth:**

- India's economy grew at an average rate of **8.2%** from 2021 to 2024, far outpacing other economies like China (5.5%) and the European Union (2.8%).
- This momentum continued into 2025, with a year-on-year GDP growth of **7.8%** in the April-June quarter.
- **Shrinking Capital Inflows:**
 - Net foreign capital inflows for 2024-25 stood at **\$18.3 billion**, the lowest level since the 2008-09 global financial crisis.
 - This is a sharp fall from the peak of **\$80.1 billion** recorded in 2020-21.
- **A Closer Look at Recent Flows (2024-25):**
 - Net foreign investment in the fiscal year was a meager **\$4.5 billion**.
 - **Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)** data reveals a crucial shift: there was a massive **outflow of \$15.7 billion from equity markets**. This was more than offset by a **\$19 billion inflow into government bonds and other debt instruments**.
 - **External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs)** have seen a revival, with a net inflow of **\$15.8 billion**, reversing the trend of outflows from the previous two years.

Reasons for Declining Foreign Investment

- **Exit of "Mature" Capital:** A significant portion of FDI in the last decade came from **Private Equity (PE) and Venture Capital (VC)** funds. These investors are now exiting by selling their stakes in companies that have matured.
- **High Market Valuations:** The primary driver for these exits is the **attractive and high valuations in the Indian stock market**. This allows foreign investors to monetize their positions and realize substantial profits.
- **Role of Domestic Investors:** The shares being sold by foreign investors are being absorbed by **more bullish domestic investors**, who are confident about the Indian market's prospects, thus facilitating the profitable exits for FPIs.

Implications for India's Economy

- **Stress on the Balance of Payments (BoP):**
 - India consistently runs a large **merchandise trade deficit** (imports > exports), which stood at **\$287.2 billion** in 2024-25.
 - This deficit is typically financed by two sources: **surpluses from "invisibles"** (like IT services exports and private remittances) and **net capital inflows**.
 - With capital inflows weakening, it becomes more challenging to finance the overall **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**.
- **External Vulnerabilities:**

- The threat of **US tariffs** on Indian exports could worsen the trade deficit, increasing the need for foreign capital precisely when it is declining.
- **Pressure on the Rupee:**
 - The combination of capital outflows and worries over global trade has put significant pressure on the currency, causing the **Rupee to hit record lows** against the US dollar.

The Way Forward

- **Improve Business Climate:** To attract and retain long-term investment, India must push for **next-generation reforms** that improve the **ease of doing business**, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and enhance the transparency of business laws.
- **Boost Corporate Earnings:** Policy measures like **GST rate cuts** are intended to boost domestic consumption, which in turn improves corporate earnings—a key factor for foreign investors.
- **Manage Global Uncertainty:** India needs to proactively **negotiate favorable trade deals** with its major partners to mitigate the impact of external shocks like protectionist tariffs.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/why-foreign-investors-are-not-bullish-on-india-10236408/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: INTERNATIONAL RELATION DATE: 09.09.2025

TOPIC: India and its neighborhood- relations

Iran and India, ancient civilisations and new horizons

The Crisis of the Western-Led Global Order

- The current global system, long dominated by Western powers like the U.S., is undergoing a profound transformation, widely seen as a **period of crisis**.
- Symptoms of this crisis include frequent **violations of international law**, the unchecked use of military force, **destructive trade wars**, the deliberate weakening of global institutions, and widespread **media manipulation**.
- Traditional instruments of Western dominance—such as **financial control**, a monopoly on science and technology, and the imposition of specific human rights standards—are rapidly **losing their effectiveness**.

The Rise of the Global South and the Role of Ancient Civilisations

- In response, nations of the **Global South** are actively refusing to remain subjects of domination and discrimination.
- They are charting a new developmental path by focusing on **local models, indigenous science and technology**, and strengthening their own defense and security capabilities.
- Ancient civilisations like **Iran and India** have a unique historical role, having shaped global culture for millennia not through conquest, but through the enduring influence of their **governance, philosophy, literature, and art**.

Shared Values and Modern Resilience of Iran and India

- Both nations are guided by a deep-rooted civilisational ethos that values **peace, spirituality, respect for diversity**, and the triumph of good over evil.
- This legacy is reflected in their modern history of resistance: India through its **anti-colonial struggle** and leadership in the **Non-Aligned Movement**, and Iran through the **nationalization of its oil industry** and the Islamic Revolution.
- Both countries have demonstrated remarkable resilience, with Iran enduring "**economic terrorism**" and "**cognitive warfare**," and India withstanding **unjust pressures**, all while preserving their independence and identity.

Key Issues Championed by the Global South

- **The Palestinian Struggle:** This is presented as the central concern of the Global South, as it is seen to expose the **hypocrisy, supremacism, and brutality** of the Western-led order. The Palestinian resistance is framed as a defense of the right of all Global South nations to resist domination.
- **The Right to Development:** Iran's defense of its right to **peaceful nuclear energy** is portrayed as a broader defense of the entire Global South's **right to development** and technological advancement, free from external control.

Multilateral Initiatives Shaping the New Order

- **BRICS:** This grouping is a key platform for challenging Western economic dominance. It offers an independent, **participatory, and democratic** framework for cooperation, especially in the face of unilateral sanctions and trade wars.
- **INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor):** This project is viewed as more than just a trade route. It is a "**civilisational bridge**" designed to link Eurasia, the Caucasus, India, and Africa, fostering regional stability and bypassing traditional choke points.

A Counter-Narrative to U.S. Interventions

- **In West Asia:** The text argues that the U.S. and its allies have actively sought to prevent the emergence of an indigenous regional security architecture, primarily through their unwavering support for Israel, which has fueled instability across the region.
- **In South Asia:** The U.S. is accused of playing a role in **creating and expanding terrorist groups**, often using the "fight against terrorism" as a pretext for military interventions that serve its own strategic interests.

The Vision for a Just and Equitable World

- The ultimate goal is to forge a new global order founded on **justice, shared interests, and respect for human dignity**.
- This new model would prioritize **participation over domination, equality over superiority, and self-determination over subjugation**.
- With their deep civilisational wisdom, commitment to strategic independence, and constructive partnership, **Iran and India are positioned as natural leaders** to guide humanity toward this more humane and equitable future.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/iran-and-india-ancient-civilisations-and-new-horizons/article70027027.ece>

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 09.09.2025

TOPIC: Tax Reforms.

GST 2.0 will fuel economic activity

The New GST Rate Structure

- **Simplification of Slabs:** The previous four-slab structure for consumer goods (5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%) has been streamlined into two primary slabs: **5% and 18%**.
- **New Luxury and Sin Tax:** A special rate of **40%** has been introduced for a select few luxury and "sin" goods (like tobacco and soft drinks), replacing the former 28% plus cess system. This move is designed to reinforce the principle of **progressive taxation**, where higher consumption bears a greater tax burden.
- **Mass Tax Reduction:** The majority of goods from the now-eliminated 12% bracket have been moved down to the **5% slab**. Overall, about 90% of the goods considered by the GST Council have seen tax reductions.
- **Tax Exemptions for Essentials:** To make daily life more affordable, **52 essential items** have been made completely exempt from GST.
- **Key Rate Increase for Industry:** The rate on industrial inputs like **coal and lignite** has been increased from 5% to **18%**. However, the compensation cess on these items has been removed, a change aimed at benefiting struggling power distribution companies.

Revenue Implications: A Short-Term Loss for Long-Term Gain

- **Immediate Revenue Shortfall:** The tax restructuring is projected to cause a short-term revenue loss of **₹48,000 crore**, with the effective tax rate across all goods dropping slightly from 11.64% to 11.43%.
- **Long-Term Growth Strategy:** The government is viewing this not as a loss, but as a long-term investment. The policy is based on the classic economic principle of the "**Laffer Curve**," which suggests that lower, simpler tax rates can ultimately lead to higher overall revenue.
- **Mechanism for Growth:** The expected long-term revenue increase is predicated on two factors:
 1. **Increased Economic Activity:** Lower prices passed on to consumers are expected to boost demand and consumption.
 2. **Higher Tax Compliance:** A simpler system reduces the compliance burden, encouraging more businesses to enter the formal economy and pay taxes voluntarily.

- **Role of Demand Elasticity:** The revenue impact will also depend on consumer behavior. For "sin" goods in the 40% slab, demand is often **inelastic** (doesn't decrease much with price hikes), which could secure a steady revenue stream from this category.

Non-Tax Reforms to Boost Compliance and Trade

- **Operational GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT):** The much-awaited GSTAT has been made operational. This gives businesses a **dedicated, streamlined platform for appeals**, ending years of procedural uncertainty and delays.
- **Boosting Small Exporters:** The threshold limit on low-value export consignments has been removed. This allows small Indian businesses and intermediaries to easily claim **export benefits**, making their goods more competitive in the global market.
- **Simplified Scheme for Small Businesses:** A **voluntary simplified registration scheme** has been introduced for low-risk businesses with a monthly output tax liability under ₹2.5 lakh, making it easier for them to join the formal tax structure.
- **Social Goals via Taxation:** The new rates are also designed to influence consumer behavior, particularly among the youth. By increasing taxes on items like **ultra-processed foods, social media services, and online gaming**, the policy aims to discourage their consumption.

The Way Forward: Ensuring Smooth Implementation

- **Learning from Global Precedent:** Studies by the **OECD and IMF** confirm that countries adopting simpler tax regimes often see a short-term revenue dip followed by **sustained long-term economic growth** driven by better compliance and increased activity.
- **Avoiding Disruption:** The successful implementation of these changes is critical. Even small technical glitches or communication gaps can have a **cascading negative effect** on the entire business ecosystem.
- **Key Implementation Steps:** A smooth transition requires a coordinated effort, including **robust training for tax officials**, the swift resolution of any technical issues on the GST portal, and proactive, clear **communication with businesses** about the changes.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/gst-2-0-will-fuel-economic-activity-10238341/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 10.09.2025

TOPIC: Powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies: ECI

Election Commission directs Bihar CEO to accept Aadhaar for SIR

The Supreme Court's Crucial Intervention

- In a significant course correction, the Supreme Court directed the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to accept Aadhaar as a valid document for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.
- This timely intervention safeguards the **fundamental right to vote**, ensuring that procedural rules do not lead to the mass disenfranchisement of lakhs of eligible citizens.
- The ruling was a direct response to the ECI's flawed process, which had already resulted in **65 lakh electors** being struck off the draft roll in Bihar.

Exposing Flaws in the ECI's Logic

- **ECI's Initial Stance:** The ECI had argued that Aadhaar was inadmissible because it was merely **proof of residency, not of citizenship**.
- **The Court's Rebuttal:** The Supreme Court highlighted a glaring **inconsistency** in this reasoning. It pointed out that nine of the other 11 documents accepted by the ECI (such as bank passbooks and ration cards) are also not conclusive proof of citizenship.
- **Illogical Exclusion:** The Court found it unjustified to exclude Aadhaar—a document held by nearly **90% of Bihar's population**—while accepting other, less prevalent documents that suffer from the same "flaw."
- **Conditional Acceptance:** The Court has allowed the use of Aadhaar for verification, subject to the ECI's process of confirming its authenticity.

Evidence of a Hasty and Flawed Process

- Statistical analysis of the ECI's draft roll revealed significant anomalies, indicating that the revision process was rushed and improperly executed.
- **Key Anomalies Found:**
 - A **disproportionate removal of women voters** from the rolls.
 - Unusually and implausibly **high death rates** being recorded in certain areas.
 - Questionable "permanent shifts" being cited for **migrant workers and newly married women**, groups that are often temporarily absent from their registered address but remain eligible to vote there.

The Significance and Wider Implications of the Ruling

- **Immediate Impact:** The ruling immediately works to **restore the voting rights** of the 65-lakh people, particularly the poor and marginalized, who were unfairly excluded. It also simplifies the verification process for existing voters.
- **A National Precedent:** This decision sets a crucial **precedent that extends beyond Bihar**, influencing how future electoral roll revisions will be conducted across India.
- **A Message to the ECI:** The verdict reaffirms that the primary goal of electoral roll revision must be **accuracy and inclusivity, not speed**. It calls on the ECI to adopt a more **diligent, humane, and thorough approach**, including proper house-to-house verification.
- **Strengthening Democracy:** By aligning electoral practice with the reality of India's current identity verification system, the ruling ensures that the nation's electoral roll remains accurate, inclusive, and truly representative of its citizenry.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/bihar-assembly/day-after-sc-order-election-commission-directs-bihar-ceo-to-accept-aadhaar-as-12th-document-in-voter-roll-revision/article70030249.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 10.09.2025

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—amendments, significant provisions and basic structure: The topic is about a proposed **constitutional amendment** and its potential conflict with the **Basic Structure doctrine** (specifically, parliamentary democracy, rule of law, and judicial review).

Bill on removal of ministers — bad in law, liable to misuse

Core Provision of the Bill

- The bill introduces a mechanism to remove a **Prime Minister, Chief Minister, or minister** from office if they remain in judicial or police custody for **30 days** on charges that carry a potential punishment of five years or more.
- This represents a fundamental departure from existing law, as it lowers the threshold for removal from a **post-conviction** stage (as per the Representation of the People's Act) to mere **pre-trial detention**.

How the Bill Undermines Existing Legal Safeguards

- **Contradicts Current Law:** Currently, legislators can only be disqualified after they have been convicted by a court of law. The existing framework has numerous safeguards to prevent the casual arrest of high-ranking elected officials, thereby protecting the people's mandate.
- **Creates a "Constitutional Shortcut":** The bill establishes a pathway to remove ministers without a judicial trial. This violates the spirit of the Supreme Court's judgment in the **A.R. Antulay case (1998)**, which struck down legal shortcuts that bypass the due process rights of an accused under **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- **Weakens Collective Responsibility:** The bill gives the Prime Minister or Chief Minister the sole power to advise the removal of a minister under its provisions. This undermines the constitutional principle of **collective responsibility**, reducing the legal sanctity of the entire council of ministers to the discretion of a single individual.

The Risk of Arbitrary Power and Misuse

- **The "30-Day" Loophole:** The 30-day custody period is not a fixed limit. Investigative agencies can potentially prolong detention indefinitely, especially under stringent laws like the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** where securing bail is exceptionally difficult.
- **Shift of Power to Unelected Officials:** The bill effectively shifts the decisive power to dislodge an elected government from the judiciary and the legislature to **unelected officials in investigative agencies**. This creates a significant risk of misuse by the ruling party at the Centre against opposition-led state governments.
- **Ineffectiveness of Reappointment:** While the bill allows for reappointment once custody ends, this provision fails to restore the dignity and public standing of a leader who has been removed from office without being proven guilty.

Violation of the Constitution's Basic Structure

- **Erosion of Parliamentary Democracy:** The bill undermines the core principle that accountability in a democracy flows from **elections, parliamentary scrutiny, and public opinion**, not from pre-emptive disqualifications based on pre-trial detention.
- **Dilution of Judicial Review:** Although a removal order under the bill could be challenged in court, this judicial review is "**post-partum**"—it happens *after* the elected leader has already been removed and the people's mandate has been effectively nullified.
- **Against the Rule of Law:** By linking a severe consequence like removal from office to detention rather than conviction, the bill goes against the **rule of law**, a cornerstone of the Constitution's basic structure.

The Way Forward: Strengthening Democracy, Not Weakening It

- **Role of the JPC:** The Joint Parliamentary Committee, to which the bill has been referred, must conduct extensive consultations with legal experts, political parties, and other stakeholders to align the bill with fundamental constitutional principles.
- **Focus on Speedy Trials:** Instead of creating new avenues for disqualification, the government and judiciary should focus on mechanisms to ensure **speedy trials** for cases involving politicians.
- **Empower the Electorate:** The most democratic solution is to enhance transparency in **candidate disclosures**, empowering voters to make informed decisions about who they elect to office.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/bill-on-removal-of-ministers-bad-in-law-liable-to-misuse-10240299/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION DATE: 11.09.2025

TOPIC: India and its neighbourhood- relations

Generational rage: On the upheaval in Nepal

The Violent Upheaval of September 9, 2025

- On **September 9, 2025**, Nepal was engulfed by violent protests where demonstrators attacked and torched key state institutions, including the **Parliament building, the Supreme Court, and political residences**.
- The immediate trigger for the chaos was a government crackdown a day earlier that resulted in the deaths of **19 young demonstrators**.
- A major concern is that the nature of the protests has shifted from democratic dissent to "**violent nihilism**," a destructive rage that endangers the country's fragile democratic gains without offering a constructive alternative.

The Deep-Rooted Causes of the "Gen Z Protests"

- The current unrest is the culmination of decades of public frustration with **chronic political dysfunction** and failed governance.
- The promises of a "**Naya Nepal**" (**New Nepal**), made after the **Jan Andolan II** movement overthrew the monarchy in 2005, have remained unfulfilled.
- **Political Instability:** Since the 1990s, Nepal has seen **13 heads of government across 30 different tenures**, with mainstream parties consistently prioritizing power-sharing deals over respecting electoral mandates.
- **Economic Failure:** This political chaos has led to severe economic consequences, including an over-reliance on **remittances**, soaring **youth unemployment**, and a failure to diversify the economy. Nepal remains a UN-designated **least developed country**.

The Rise of New (But Untested) Political Forces

- Widespread disillusionment, particularly among the youth, has fueled the rise of **alternative political movements** and figures.
- Key emerging actors include the **Rashtriya Swatantra Party** and popular independents like Kathmandu's Mayor, **Balendra Shah**.
- While these new forces signify a public hunger for change, their commitment to democratic processes is sometimes questionable. For instance, Mr. Shah's call to **dissolve Parliament outright**, rather than demanding new elections, raises concerns about democratic maturity.

- There is a significant danger that Nepal could follow the path of countries like **Bangladesh**, where democratic institutions have seen severe backsliding.

The Path Forward: Averting Democratic Collapse

- **Immediate Priority:** The first and most urgent need is to restore **peace and stability**. The Nepali Army may be required to provide a secure environment for civilian democratic actors to function.
- **A Clear Warning:** The analysis emphasizes that **destroying state and civil institutions is not a form of democratic renewal** but a path to ruin.
- **Long-Term Solution:** To address the root causes of the crisis, Nepal must pursue meaningful **constitutional reforms** that fulfill the promises made during the Constituent Assembly.
- **A Proposed Reform:** One potential change to consider is a shift to a **presidential system** with a directly elected president who is accountable to an elected Parliament. This could offer greater stability and direct accountability than the current parliamentary system.
- **The Ultimate Risk:** Without decisive action to restore peace and enact reforms, the current wave of violent nihilism could completely **erode the foundations of democracy in Nepal**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/generational-rage-on-the-upheaval-in-nepal/article70034293.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: Social Justice & Governance

DATE: 11.09.2025

TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to...
Education, Human Resources

Himachal Pradesh declared to be 'fully literate': what does this mean?

Defining "Fully Literate" in the Modern Context

- **Recent Achievement:** States and Union Territories like **Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Ladakh, Mizoram, and Tripura** have recently been declared '**fully literate**' after achieving a literacy rate of over 95%.
- **Current Definition:** The Ministry of Education now defines literacy as the "**ability to read, write and compute with comprehension**." This is a functional definition that also incorporates essential life skills such as **digital and financial literacy**.
- **Alignment with National Goals:** This push aligns with both the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and India's **New Education Policy (NEP), 2020**, which strongly advocates for adult education initiatives to achieve 100% literacy.

The ULLAS Program: The Engine of Full Literacy

- **The Scheme:** The **ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All)** program, launched in 2022, is the primary government initiative responsible for this achievement.
- **The Goal:** Its mission is to achieve **100% literacy by 2030** for all individuals **aged 15 and above** who did not have the opportunity to attend school.
- **The Curriculum:** ULLAS focuses on two key areas:
 1. **Foundational Skills:** Teaching basic reading, writing, and simple arithmetic (addition, subtraction, etc.) equivalent to a **Class 3 level**.
 2. **Practical Life Skills:** Imparting crucial daily skills like reading a calendar and clock, using currency notes, writing cheques, and making **digital transactions**.
- **The Method:** The training is conducted by **student and community volunteers** using mobile apps or offline materials.

How States Achieve "Fully Literate" Status

- **Identification:** The process begins with state governments conducting **door-to-door surveys** to create a comprehensive list of all adults who are not literate.
- **Training and Assessment:** These identified individuals are then enrolled in the ULLAS program. After their training, they must take and pass the **Functional Literacy Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)**, a 150-mark exam conducted in their chosen language.
- **The Declaration:** A state is officially declared 'fully literate' only when **all the adults it had identified as non-literate successfully pass the FLNAT**. They then receive a foundational literacy certificate from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

A Note on Historical Literacy Measurement

- **Contrast with the Census:** This new, test-based achievement is different from the traditional literacy rate measured by the Census.
- **Census (2011) Definition:** The Census defined a literate person as anyone **aged 7 and above** who could read and write with understanding in any language. This was typically based on **self-reporting** by households, not a formal test.
- **Past Data:** The 2011 Census recorded India's adult literacy rate at **69.3%**, which later surveys showed had risen to around 77.5% by 2023-24.

The Way Forward: Beyond Foundational Literacy

- **A Crucial First Step:** Achieving 'fully literate' status based on foundational skills is a monumental and necessary first step in national development.

- **The Next Challenge:** The current definition, while practical, focuses on basic knowledge. To ensure holistic development and leverage this newly literate population, the focus must now shift towards achieving **100% employment**.
- **Broadening the Definition:** The way forward is to expand the concept of literacy to include **skill development and vocational learning**, transforming literate citizens into a skilled, employable workforce.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/himachal-pradesh-fully-literate-10242199/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION DATE: 12.09.2025

TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Reckless escalation: On Israel's attack on Qatar

Israel's Reckless Escalation in Qatar

- On **September 9**, Israel launched an unprecedented airstrike in **Qatar**, targeting senior Hamas leaders. This marked a dangerous escalation of the West Asian conflict.
- The attack represents a new and alarming precedent, as it targeted individuals within a **sovereign third country** that is a key **mediator** in the Gaza conflict.
- Qatar is a crucial U.S. ally and hosts America's **largest military base** in the region, making the Israeli strike a direct challenge to regional stability.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly claimed "**full responsibility**," stating the strike hit a house where Hamas leaders were reportedly discussing a ceasefire proposal.

Global Condemnation and U.S. Displeasure

- The strike was met with **widespread global criticism and condemnation** for its violation of Qatari sovereignty and its timing.
- In a rare move, even Israel's staunchest ally, the **United States**, expressed its displeasure. The White House reportedly gave assurances to Qatar that such an attack would not be repeated.
- This near-universal condemnation reflects a growing **international unease** with Israel's unchecked military aggression and its destabilizing impact on the wider region.

A Direct Threat to Peace and Regional Stability

- For years, Qatar has hosted Hamas's political leadership with the **tacit approval of the U.S.**, precisely to maintain a channel for diplomacy and facilitate negotiations.
- By attacking negotiators on the mediator's soil, Israel has signaled a clear **unwillingness to pursue a peaceful resolution** to the Gaza conflict, effectively sabotaging the fragile ceasefire talks.
- This aggressive act severely undermines the prospects of **Arab-Israeli normalization**, making it politically untenable for countries like Saudi Arabia to engage with Israel.

Broader Implications for India and the World

- Israel's actions risk expanding the Gaza war into the **Persian Gulf**, a region that is a critical global **energy hub**.

- This poses a direct threat to India's core interests, as **millions of Indian expatriates** live and work in the Gulf, and the nation's energy security is heavily dependent on the region's stability.
- While Prime Minister Modi condemned the violation of Qatar's sovereignty, India **avoided directly naming Israel**. The incident highlights the need for India to adopt a stronger, more vocal stance against such regional aggression.
- The situation calls for **coordinated diplomatic efforts** from India and other global powers to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in West Asia.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/reckless-escalation-on-israels-attack-on-qatar/article70038003.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE & HEALTH

DATE: 12.09.2025

TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

With GLP-1 drugs in the Indian market, what to look out for

Semaglutide: From Diabetes Drug to Weight-Loss Phenomenon

- **The Drug:** Semaglutide is a medication belonging to the class of **GLP-1 receptor antagonists**. It was originally developed and approved for treating **diabetes**.
- **Mechanism of Action:** It works by mimicking a natural hormone to **slow down digestion**. This helps patients feel full for longer periods, thereby reducing overall calorie intake.
- **Repurposing by Industry:** The weight-loss industry has begun marketing injectable Semaglutide as a cornerstone of **weight-management programs**, usually combined with diet and exercise plans.
- **Market Potential:** The market for weight-loss drugs is projected to reach **\$100 billion by 2030**. Demand for Semaglutide is expected to skyrocket after its **patent expires in 2026**, which will allow for the production of cheaper generic versions.

The Benefits and Risks of Using Semaglutide

Positive Health Effects

- Leads to significant **weight loss** and improved **blood sugar control**.
- Reduces the risk of major **cardiovascular events**, improves fatty liver disease, and lowers inflammation markers.
- Can help restore regular menstrual cycles and ovulation in women with **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)**, potentially improving fertility when combined with lifestyle changes.

Negative Effects and Concerns

- **Common Side Effects:** Includes **nausea, vomiting, constipation**, and a significant loss of appetite.
- **Serious Health Risks:** Can lead to severe conditions such as **gall bladder disease, pancreatitis, and kidney issues**.
- **Other Concerns:** There is a risk of losing **muscle and lean mass** (not just fat) and experiencing **rapid weight regain** after discontinuing the drug.

Cost Comparison

- Weight loss using Semaglutide is expensive, costing approximately **₹13,000 – ₹16,000 per kilogram lost**.
- Weight loss through structured diet and exercise costs around **₹5,000 – ₹6,000 per kilogram lost** and has the added benefit of building sustainable, long-term healthy habits.

The Public Health Dilemma: A Magic Bullet or a Costly Distraction?

- **Shift in Focus:** An over-reliance on this expensive, imported drug risks diverting government resources and public attention away from more cost-effective and sustainable public health campaigns focused on **diet, exercise, and preventive nutrition**.
- **Equity and Access:** The high cost could worsen the **urban-rural and rich-poor divide** in healthcare. Wealthier urban populations could access the drug, while lower-income and rural groups remain underserved in basic obesity and diabetes care.
- **Medicalization of a Lifestyle Issue:** The most significant risk is reframing obesity from a **lifestyle or behavioral issue** to a purely **drug-dependent condition**. This could discourage community-based health strategies and undermine personal responsibility for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

The Way Forward: A Balanced and Integrated Approach

- **Selective and Targeted Use:** Semaglutide should not be a first-line treatment for all. Its use should be targeted for high-risk patients with **coexisting obesity and diabetes**.
- **Integration, Not Replacement:** The drug should be **integrated into public health programs** as a tool to be used alongside—not in place of—fundamental lifestyle interventions.
- **Price Control:** To ensure equitable access for those who need it most, the drug should be brought under a **price control regime** to make it more affordable.
- **The Holistic Goal:** The most effective strategy is to use the drug in conjunction with sustainable lifestyle changes to tackle India's **double burden of malnutrition and rising obesity**.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/glp-1-drugs-indian-market-what-to-look-out-for-10244659/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION DATE: 13.09.2025

TOPIC: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Scam space: On social media platforms, online fraud

The Anatomy of a Modern Digital Scam

- **The Threat:** The rapid advancement of **AI-generated deepfakes** combined with the complexities of **cryptocurrency** has created a potent new form of digital fraud that poses a serious threat to the economy and individual investors.
- **A Case in Point:** A recent case in Hyderabad illustrates the danger, where a retired doctor lost **₹20 lakh** to a fraudulent investment scheme. The scam was promoted using a convincing deepfake video of India's **Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman**, which appeared on the victim's Instagram feed.
- **Exploiting Vulnerabilities:** These scams are effective because they exploit a combination of weaknesses in the digital ecosystem:
 - **Low Technical Literacy:** Many users, despite high smartphone penetration, lack the awareness to distinguish between authentic and manipulated content.
 - **Regulatory Gaps:** The largely unregulated nature of cryptocurrency trading provides a fertile ground for fraudulent schemes.
 - **Lure of Quick Profits:** Scammers entice victims with promises of high, guaranteed returns and often show fabricated gains in fake app interfaces to build trust.
- **Operational Complexity:** These scams are notoriously difficult to police as they often operate through **foreign platforms** and use complex crypto wallet chains, allowing the perpetrators to disappear without a trace.

The Role and Responsibility of Social Media Platforms

- **A Passive Approach:** Social media platforms like Instagram currently adopt a **reactive stance**. While they provide advisories and user-reporting tools, they do not engage in the **proactive detection** of fraudulent content.
- **The Consequence of Inaction:** This focus on user self-protection allows scams to circulate widely, entrapping numerous victims before a sufficient number of reports trigger a takedown.
- **Challenges and Excuses:** Platforms often cite the immense **scale of global content** and the difficulty for automated systems to detect sophisticated deepfakes. However, a reluctance to implement intrusive monitoring is also linked to protecting user engagement and advertising profits.

- **A Systemic Failure:** By treating these scams as isolated incidents to be flagged by users, rather than a **systemic vulnerability** that requires a proactive, platform-level solution, these companies are failing to adequately protect their users.

A Three-Pronged Strategy for Mitigation

A comprehensive solution requires coordinated action from all stakeholders:

1. Government Action and Regulation:

- Governments must establish clear **standards for registration, financial disclosure, and operation** for all investment and cryptocurrency platforms.
- They need to strengthen **cross-border cooperation** with international law enforcement to track and prosecute these global scams.

2. Enhancing Public Literacy:

- Digital and financial literacy must be treated as a **critical public policy priority**.
- Continuous public awareness campaigns should be integrated into **educational institutions** and media outreach to equip citizens with the skills to identify and avoid such scams.

3. Mandatory Platform Accountability:

- The responsibility must shift from the user to the platform. Social media companies should be held legally accountable for the content they host and be required to **proactively detect and remove fraudulent content**.
- This requires significant investment in advanced **monitoring and detection systems** capable of identifying deepfakes and scam advertisements before they can cause widespread harm.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/scam-space-on-social-media-platforms-online-fraud/article70041246.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 13.09.2025

TOPIC: Infrastructure: The project is a prime example of developing critical infrastructure, specifically **Ports** and **Airports**, to boost economic growth and trade.

Great Nicobar Project: A crucial peg in the Viksit Bharat vision

The Great Nicobar Mega-Development Project: An Overview

- **The Project:** The government has proposed a massive **₹81,000 crore mega-development project** for **Great Nicobar Island**, the largest island in the Nicobar archipelago.
- **Key Components:** This ambitious project, conceived by **NITI Aayog**, includes the development of:

- An **International Container Transshipment Terminal**.
- An international **Greenfield Airport**.
- A large-scale **solar power plant**.
- Two **Greenfield cities**.
- **The Ambition:** The project aims to leverage Great Nicobar's strategic location to develop a hub that can compete with major international port cities like **Singapore**.

The Strategic and Economic Imperative

- **Geostrategic Location:** Great Nicobar is critically located near the **Malacca Strait**, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes and a vital maritime choke point. Its southernmost tip, **Indira Point**, is just 145 km from Indonesia.
- **Economic Lifeline:** The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is indispensable for India, as it facilitates **80% of its external trade** and **100% of its energy imports**. Developing maritime infrastructure is therefore essential for economic security.
- **Countering Geopolitical Rivals:** The IOR has become a key arena for the geopolitical contest between global powers like the **U.S. and China**. This project strengthens India's presence and operational capabilities in this crucial region.
- **Maritime Security:** The enhanced infrastructure is vital for tackling a wide array of security challenges, including **piracy, sea-borne terrorism, illegal fishing, and human trafficking**, as well as for managing humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

Grave Environmental and Social Concerns

- **Massive Deforestation:** The project necessitates the diversion of approximately **130 km² of pristine tropical rainforest**, which could lead to the felling of an estimated **8 to 10 lakh trees**.
- **Destruction of Coastal Ecosystems:** There are major concerns about the destruction of vital **mangrove belts**, which act as natural shields against tsunamis and cyclones.
- **Threat to Indigenous Tribes:** The project poses a significant threat to the traditional lands, resources, and way of life of the indigenous **Shompen** (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group - PVTG) and **Nicobarese** tribes.
- **Impact on Biodiversity:** Key protected areas, such as the **Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary** (a globally important nesting site for Leatherback sea turtles), have been denotified or will be severely impacted, threatening numerous endemic and protected species.

Government's Stated Mitigation Measures

- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** The government states that a comprehensive EIA was conducted by involving multiple reputed institutions like IITs and the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT).

- **Compensatory Afforestation:** To compensate for the felled trees, the government plans to carry out **compensatory afforestation** in the distant and ecologically distinct **Aravali mountain range** in Haryana.
- **Tribal and Local Population:** The official stance is that **tribal habitats will not be disturbed** and that comprehensive development plans are in place for the villages that need to be relocated.
- **Wildlife Conservation:** New conservation plans are reportedly being prepared to protect key local species like the Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodiles, and the surrounding coral reefs.

The Way Forward: A Call for Balance

- **The Core Challenge:** The project's success and legitimacy hinge on the ability to strike a delicate **balance between its strategic and economic objectives and its immense ecological and social costs.**
- **Sustainable and Inclusive Approach:** The path forward must be guided by the principles of **sustainable development**, with the strict implementation of robust **environmental safeguards.**
- **Community Participation:** Ensuring meaningful **participation and consent** from the local and indigenous communities, especially the Shompen and Nicobarese, is critical for the project's long-term success and for mitigating social conflict.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/great-nicobar-project-a-crucial-peg-in-the-viksit-bharat-vision-10246663/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 15.09.2025

TOPIC: CONSERVATION

Sliver of hope: On survey of saltwater crocodiles, conservation

Context: A Conservation Success Story

- **Recent Survey Findings:** A recent survey conducted in the **Sundarban Biosphere Reserve** has revealed a significant increase in the saltwater crocodile population. This success is not just in numbers but also in the **demographic diversity**, indicating a healthy and breeding population with a good mix of juveniles, sub-adults, and adults.
- **Symbol of a Policy Shift:** This achievement marks a crucial turning point in India's conservation policy, moving from an almost exclusive focus on "**charismatic megafauna**" (like tigers and elephants) to a more inclusive approach that values other critical species.

Evolution of Conservation Policy and Methods

- **Initial Bias:** The early implementation of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, was heavily skewed towards protecting iconic and publicly popular animals, often leaving less-known species like crocodiles with limited targeted action.
- **Targeted Interventions:** The recovery of crocodiles was driven by specific, site-based initiatives. The **Bhagabatpur Crocodile Project**, a captive breeding and release program, was instrumental in reviving the population in the Sundarbans.
- **A Proven Model:** India's conservation strategy, which combines **blanket legal protection** under the Wildlife Act with dedicated **captive breeding and release programs**, has proven to be highly effective for species recovery.
- **Existing Legal Gaps:** Despite this success, current wildlife laws are largely **reactive**. They lack proactive provisions to address modern challenges such as **climate change**, increasing **habitat fragmentation**, and ecological shifts like rising water **salinity**.

The Ecological Importance of Crocodiles

- **Apex Predators & Ecosystem Engineers:** As apex predators, crocodiles play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. They regulate the populations of their prey species and act as scavengers by clearing carcasses, which helps in keeping the waterways clean and preventing the spread of disease.
- **Indicators of Mangrove Health:** The thriving crocodile population serves as a **bio-indicator**, signaling that the Sundarbans' mangrove ecosystem remains healthy and functional despite severe pressures from human activities, frequent cyclones, and rising sea levels.

- **Ecosystem Resilience:** The high survival rate of juvenile crocodiles suggests that their breeding habitats are still viable. A stable age structure within the population enhances the overall **resilience of the mangrove network**, indicating a robust ecosystem.

Lessons for a Broader Conservation Vision

- **Protecting Non-Charismatic Species:** The crocodile's recovery is a powerful lesson that even species lacking popular appeal can be successfully conserved with **sustained legal protection** and well-designed, targeted programs.
- **Beyond Legal Schedules:** While listing species in the Schedules of the Wildlife Act is crucial, it must be supplemented with **proactive, species-specific recovery plans** to address unique threats and needs.
- **Effective Communication:** Conservation outreach must evolve to highlight the ecological importance of neglected species, building public support and awareness beyond just the iconic animals.
- **Integrating Climate Change Adaptation:**
 - Climate change must be a central element of future conservation planning.
 - While crocodiles are relatively tolerant of salinity changes, many other species, particularly **amphibians and freshwater reptiles**, are not.
 - Future strategies must include identifying "**climate refugia**" (areas that can offer stable conditions) and implementing measures like **assisted breeding** for vulnerable species.

Conclusion: Towards an Inclusive Future

The success of the Sundarban crocodile conservation effort demonstrates that a combination of **sustained investment, strong legal safeguards, and site-specific action** yields lasting results. This case study provides a blueprint for a richer, more inclusive biodiversity management strategy in India—one that integrates **climate change adaptation**, develops proactive recovery plans for all types of species, and engages the public in protecting the entire web of life, not just its most famous strands.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/sliver-of-hope-on-survey-of-saltwater-crocodiles-conservation/article70048575.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 15.09.2025

TOPIC: Provisions related to the roles and responsibilities of the President (**Article 143 – Advisory Jurisdiction**) and the Governor (**Article 163 – Aid and Advice of Council of Ministers, Article 200 – Assent to Bills**).

Issues in SC hearings on timeline for the President and Governors to assent to Bills

Core Issue: Presidential Reference on Assent to Bills

- **Context:** President Droupadi Murmu has sought the Supreme Court's advisory opinion under **Article 143(1)** of the Constitution. This action, known as a **Presidential Reference**, asks the court to clarify the constitutional powers of the President and Governors regarding granting assent to Bills passed by legislatures.
- **Trigger:** The reference was prompted by the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in **April 2024**. In that case, the court, using its extraordinary powers under **Article 142**, declared that the delay by Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi in assenting to 10 Bills was unconstitutional and established timelines for such actions.
- **Fundamental Questions:** The case scrutinizes the delicate **balance of power** between the Union and states, the principle of **separation of powers** between the judiciary and the executive, and the nature of India's **quasi-federal structure**.

Nature and Legality of the Reference

- **State's Argument - Circumventing Judicial Process:**
 - The states argue that the reference is an attempt to **re-litigate a matter already settled** by the court's April judgment.
 - They contend it's a "backdoor appeal" that bypasses the established legal routes for challenging a Supreme Court verdict, which are a **review petition (Article 137)** or a **curative petition**.
 - A review petition must be heard by the same judges who delivered the original verdict. By using Article 143, the Centre is effectively seeking a review by a different bench, which the opposition argues subverts the **integrity of the court** and the principle of **stare decisis** (adhering to precedent).
- **Centre's Justification - Seeking Clarity:**
 - The Union Government maintains that the reference is necessary to **clarify significant constitutional doubts** and ambiguities that have arisen from the April ruling.
 - It argues the matter is of immense **public importance**, thus justifying the use of Article 143(1), and is not an appeal against the previous judgment.

The Constitutional Role of the Governor

- **Primacy of the Elected Government:**
 - **Article 163** of the Constitution mandates that the Governor must act on the **aid and advice of the state's Council of Ministers**.

- This provision is the bedrock of parliamentary democracy and federalism, ensuring that the will of the elected government, representing the people, is respected. The Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld this principle.
- **The "Not a Mere Postman" Argument:**
 - The Centre argues the Governor is not merely a "rubber stamp" or "postman." The phrase "ordinarily bound" by aid and advice implies that in exceptional circumstances, the Governor can exercise discretion.
 - **Data Point:** This power is used sparingly. Between 1970 and 2025, out of approximately 17,000 Bills presented, Governors have withheld assent in only about 20 cases.
 - **Example of Justified Discretion:** In 2004, the Punjab Governor withheld assent to a Bill that unilaterally terminated a tripartite river-water sharing treaty. The Supreme Court later declared that law unconstitutional, vindicating the Governor's action.

The Governor's Veto Power and Timelines

- **The Pocket Veto Dilemma:**
 - The Constitution does not specify a timeline for the Governor to grant assent, leading to the possibility of an indefinite delay, effectively a "**pocket veto.**"
 - The Supreme Court has explicitly ruled that a Governor cannot use a pocket veto to stall legislation from an elected government.
- **Colonial vs. Constitutional Discretion:**
 - The Centre drew a parallel to the **Government of India Act, 1935**, where the Governor's withholding of assent was an **absolute veto**.
 - The states countered this by arguing that Governors are not "**Viceroy of the British Government**" and that such sweeping colonial-era discretions were deliberately omitted from the Indian Constitution.
- **Judicial Enforcement of Timelines:**
 - **Constituent Assembly's Intent:** The framers of the Constitution considered and dropped a proposed six-week limit for assent, instead opting for the phrase "**as soon as possible.**" This was done to foster dialogue and resolve deadlocks between the Governor and the state government.
 - **Separation of Powers:** The Centre argues that by setting a fixed deadline, the Supreme Court's April ruling encroaches upon the Parliament's exclusive power to amend the Constitution.
 - **Judicial Review, Not Amendment:** The states contend that "as soon as possible" implies a constitutional duty of urgency. They argue the court's timeline doesn't amend the

Constitution but merely defines the point at which unreasonable delay becomes subject to **judicial review**.

States' Right to Seek Redressal (Article 32)

- **Centre's Objection:** The Centre argues that **Article 32** is a mechanism for citizens to enforce their **fundamental rights**, and a state, not being a citizen, cannot invoke it. Furthermore, they claim Governors do not represent the Central government in a capacity that would make them respondents in a writ petition filed by a state.
- **State's Counter:** The states argue that the Governor serves as a **constitutional link between the Union and the state**. In this capacity, the Governor acts as an agent of the central government, making it appropriate for the state to seek judicial remedy against their actions under Article 32.

The Way Forward

The Supreme Court's advisory opinion will be a pivotal moment for Indian federalism. The outcome is expected to affirm that while the President and Governors possess constitutional discretion and are not mere rubber stamps, this power cannot be used arbitrarily to undermine the democratic will of elected legislatures. The judgment will likely solidify the principle of "**reasonable time**" for granting assent, thereby strengthening both democratic processes and the federal balance of power.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/sc-presidential-reference-10250235/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 1: INDIAN SOCIETY

DATE: 16.09.2025

TOPIC: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues.

India's economic ambitions need better gender data

Introduction: The Economic Imperative for Gender Inclusion

- **The Unseen Engine of Growth:** India's ambition to become a **\$30 trillion economy by 2047** is fundamentally linked to the economic participation of its female population. Currently, women contribute a mere **18% to the national GDP**, a figure significantly lower than the global average.
- **The Scale of the Challenge:** The core issue is not a lack of potential but a lack of inclusion. An estimated **196 million employable women** are currently outside the formal workforce. While the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has shown an encouraging rise to **41.7%**, a closer look reveals that only **18%** of these women are engaged in formal, secure jobs.
- **The Core Problem:** The challenge is twofold: first, creating meaningful economic opportunities, and second, making women's contributions and barriers **visible, measurable, and actionable** for policymakers. Without robust data, half the population remains invisible in economic planning, making inclusive growth an impossible goal.

Uttar Pradesh's WEE Index: A District-Level Diagnostic Tool

- **A Pioneering Initiative:** Uttar Pradesh has launched India's first **Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Index**, a granular, district-level tool designed to diagnose and address the systemic barriers women face.
- **The Five Economic Levers Tracked:** The index moves beyond simple participation metrics to provide a multi-dimensional view of women's economic lives by tracking five critical pillars:
 1. **Employment:** Measures not just the rate of employment but also the quality, formality, and wage parity of jobs held by women.
 2. **Education and Skilling:** Tracks enrolment in higher education and vocational training programs, focusing on alignment with market-demanded skills.
 3. **Entrepreneurship:** Assesses the number of women-owned enterprises, their access to credit and markets, and their scale of operations.
 4. **Livelihood and Mobility:** Examines women's engagement in local livelihood opportunities (like Self-Help Groups) and their physical mobility, which is crucial for accessing economic opportunities.

5. **Safety and Inclusive Infrastructure:** Measures the availability of safe public spaces, reliable transport, and gender-inclusive infrastructure (e.g., public restrooms, hostels), which are foundational for women to participate in the economy.
- **The Power of Gender-Disaggregated Data:** India has numerous indices for economic and social development, but very few break down the data by gender. The WEE Index addresses this critical gap. Without gender-specific data:
 - **Gaps Remain Hidden:** Systemic problems affecting women are not identified.
 - **Reforms Are Ineffective:** Policies are designed based on generic data and fail to address the unique challenges women face.
 - **Exclusion Becomes Entrenched:** The cycle of invisibility and exclusion continues.

From Data to Action: Practical Applications

- **Case Study: Transforming the Uttar Pradesh Transport Sector:**
 - **The Insight:** Data from the index revealed a minuscule percentage of women employed as bus drivers and conductors.
 - **The Action:** This data-driven insight prompted immediate, targeted interventions. The transport department redesigned its **recruitment strategies** to be more inclusive and addressed a major infrastructure gap by mandating the construction of **women's restrooms** in all bus terminals.
 - **The Result:** These changes, though seemingly modest, were catalytic, proving that gender-specific data is the essential first step to meaningful reform.
- **Moving Beyond Participation Rates to Identify Structural Barriers:**
 - The index uncovers deeper, systemic issues. For instance, data shows that while women constitute over **50% of enrolments in skilling programs**, they represent only a tiny fraction of registered entrepreneurs. Furthermore, their **access to formal credit** is disproportionately low.
 - **The Insight:** This reveals the problem isn't a lack of willingness or participation from women, but a **structural bottleneck in the financial and enterprise support systems** that prevents them from translating their skills into viable businesses.

Integrating a Gender Lens Across All Governance

- **A Universal Mandate:** Gender-disaggregated data cannot be an afterthought; it must become a **universal and normative** practice. Every Management Information System (MIS) in every government department—from MSMEs and transport to housing and energy—must include gender breakdowns as a default.

- **Empowering Local Governments:** The goal is to build capacity at the district and block levels. Local officials must be trained to **collect, analyze, and use this data** to design and implement targeted **Gender Action Plans**.
- **From Headcounts to High-Quality Metrics:** The focus must shift from basic counts (how many women are enrolled/employed) to tracking more sophisticated metrics like **job retention rates, promotion to leadership roles, post-maternity re-entry rates, and the quality of employment**.
- **Gender Budgeting as a Core Principle:** This data-centric approach is the foundation of effective gender budgeting. The principle is simple: **"You cannot budget for what you do not measure."** A gender lens must be applied not just to women-specific welfare schemes but to every rupee spent on infrastructure, education, and energy to ensure equitable outcomes.

A Replicable Framework for National Growth

- **A Blueprint for Other States:** Uttar Pradesh's WEE Index provides a **replicable and scalable framework** that other states can adopt. States like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Odisha, which have ambitious trillion-dollar economic targets, cannot achieve them without unlocking their "gender dividend."
- **Conclusion: A New Paradigm for an Old Problem:** India's gender gap is a long-standing challenge, but the response to it must fundamentally evolve. The WEE Index represents a paradigm shift—from a welfare-based approach to a data-driven, economic empowerment model. It is the crucial starting block that makes the invisible visible, providing a clear roadmap to move women from the margins to the mainstream of India's economic growth story.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-economic-ambitions-need-better-gender-data/article70052746.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 16.09.2025

TOPIC: Conservation, and Sub-topic: Biodiversity, Wildlife Conservation, and Species Reintroduction Programs.

How Madhya Pradesh is planning for a cheetah mating programme in Gandhi Sagar

Rationale for Establishing a Second Population

- **De-risking the Project:** The primary goal is to mitigate the risks associated with having the entire reintroduced population in a single location, **Kuno National Park**. A single site is vulnerable to catastrophic events like disease outbreaks or natural disasters, which could wipe out the entire population.

- **Ensuring Genetic Viability:** A second, geographically separate population is essential to create a **meta-population**. This allows for a wider genetic pool, reducing the long-term risks of **inbreeding** and enhancing the species' resilience and adaptability.
- **Expanding Carrying Capacity:** Kuno National Park has a finite carrying capacity. As the cheetah population grows, establishing new sites is crucial to accommodate them and allow for natural dispersal and territory formation.
- **Site Selection – Gandhi Sagar:** The **Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary** was identified after a thorough assessment by the NTCA and WII. Its suitability is based on:
 - **Habitat:** It offers extensive grassland and open forest habitats, which are ideal for cheetahs.
 - **Prey Base:** The sanctuary has a viable prey population (like chital, sambar, and nilgai), which is being further augmented before the cheetahs' arrival.

Cheetah Reproduction and Life Cycle

- **Sexual Maturity:** Female cheetahs can begin to conceive around the age of **2.5 years**. Males typically begin mating later, between **4 and 8 years**, once they are strong enough to establish and defend their territory.
- **Mating Behavior:** Cheetahs are **polygamous**, with both males and females having multiple partners. A receptive female advertises her status through urine marking and specific behaviors like rolling and rubbing, attracting males in the vicinity.
- **Gestation and Cub Rearing:**
 - The gestation period lasts for about **three months (90–95 days)**.
 - A female gives birth to a litter of up to **six cubs** in a secluded, safe location like dense bushes or a rocky crevice.
 - The mother is the sole caregiver, staying with her cubs for the first few months to provide food, water, and critical protection from predators.

Key Conservation Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

- **High Cub Mortality:** A major threat to the program's success is the naturally high mortality rate of cheetah cubs.
 - **The Threat:** Predators like **leopards and hyenas** are the primary cause of cub deaths. Mothers often lose entire litters despite their best efforts.
 - **The Strategy:** Before translocation, authorities are actively managing the predator density in Gandhi Sagar and ensuring the prey base is abundant enough to divert predators' attention away from cheetah cubs.

- **Human-Animal Conflict:** The sanctuary is surrounded by agricultural and pastoral communities, creating potential for conflict.
 - **The Threat:** Cheetahs may prey on livestock, leading to retaliatory killings and negative perceptions among local communities.
 - **The Strategy:** A multi-pronged approach is being implemented:
 1. **Creation of Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs):** These act as buffer areas around the sanctuary to minimize negative interactions.
 2. **Community Engagement:** Extensive awareness programs are being conducted to educate villagers about cheetah behavior and the importance of coexistence.
 3. **Prompt Compensation:** A robust mechanism for providing fair and timely compensation for any livestock losses is being put in place.

Monitoring and Ecological Significance

- **Scientific Monitoring:** The relocated cheetahs will be under constant surveillance to track their progress.
 - **Tools:** This will be done using advanced technology like **satellite radio collars**, an extensive network of **camera traps**, and dedicated ground patrolling teams.
 - **Parameters:** Experts will closely monitor the cheetahs' adaptation, hunting success, movement patterns, reproductive behavior, and overall health.
- **Restoring Ecological Balance:** The initiative is not just about saving a species but also about restoring a vital ecological function. Cheetahs are **keystone predators** in grassland ecosystems, playing a crucial role in controlling herbivore populations and maintaining the health and balance of the entire habitat.

Way Forward

The success of establishing this second population hinges on a **collaborative and adaptive management approach**. It requires continuous engagement between conservation authorities (Forest Department, NTCA, WII), independent scientists, academics, and, most importantly, local community volunteers. A successful translocation to Gandhi Sagar will be a major milestone, solidifying the long-term survival prospects of cheetahs in India and reinforcing the country's leadership in global conservation efforts.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/madhya-pradesh-cheetah-mating-gandhi-sagar-kuno-10245508/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 17.09.2025

TOPIC: Role of Governor, Centre-State Relations, and Separation of Powers.

Constitutional clarity: On hearings on the Presidential Reference

Introduction: Reaffirming Constitutional Principles

- **Context:** The hearings on the Presidential Reference, initiated after the Supreme Court's landmark **April 8, 2025 judgment**, served as a platform to re-examine and solidify the constitutional powers of Governors and the President in assenting to State Bills.
- **Core Objective:** A five-judge Constitution Bench addressed 14 specific questions, with the overarching goal of reinforcing the principle that **indefinite delays by Governors are unconstitutional** and fundamentally undermine democratic governance and the federal structure.

The Heart of the Matter: Gubernatorial Delay as a Threat to Democracy

- **Echoing the April Judgment:** The proceedings consistently upheld the core finding of the April 2025 ruling: Governors do not possess unlimited discretion to withhold assent indefinitely. Their actions must align with constitutional intent, which respects the will of an elected legislature.
- **Judicial Stance on Inaction:** Chief Justice of India **B.R. Gavai** articulated the judiciary's role powerfully, questioning if the Court should remain **"powerless"** while a Governor's inaction effectively paralyzes a state's legislative function. This framed the issue not as a mere procedural delay but as a direct challenge to democratic functioning.

Key Arguments and Judicial Scrutiny

- **Rejecting "Constitutional Silence" as Discretion:**
 - **The Argument:** The Centre contended that since **Articles 200 and 201** do not specify a timeline for assent, it implies that Governors have unlimited discretion (a "pocket veto").
 - **The Court's Rejection:** The Bench firmly dismissed this interpretation. It asserted that constitutional silence cannot be read as a grant of arbitrary power. Instead, it must be interpreted within the broader framework of responsible governance and federalism, implying that action must be taken within a **reasonable time**.
- **Challenging the "Check on Hasty Legislation" Narrative:**
 - **The Argument:** The Solicitor-General positioned the Governor as a necessary **"check on hasty legislation"** passed by state assemblies.
 - **The Court's Counter:** This view was seen as fundamentally conflicting with democratic principles. **Justice Vikram Nath** explicitly stated that Governors **"cannot sit over the**

wisdom of the legislature indefinitely," reinforcing that the legislative mandate comes from the people, not the nominated head of state.

Federalism, State Autonomy, and Selective Application

- **The Political Dimension:** Counsel for Kerala pointed out a critical pattern: prolonged delays in assent have been a significant issue almost exclusively in **Opposition-ruled states**. This suggested that the problem stems not from constitutional ambiguity but from the **selective and politically motivated use** of the Governor's office.
- **Inconsistency in Judicial Review:** The Bench highlighted a legal paradox. The judiciary can review the imposition of **President's Rule (Article 356)**, a far more drastic measure. It questioned why similar scrutiny should not apply to a Governor's inaction under **Article 200**, which can similarly cripple a state's governance and autonomy.
- **Upholding the Federal Balance:** The hearings underscored that the framework established in the April judgment is constitutionally sound, as it preserves **cooperative federalism** and respects the legislative autonomy of states.

The Centre's Legal Strategy and Constitutional Boundaries

- **The Choice of Article 143:** The Centre's decision to seek an advisory opinion via a **Presidential Reference (Article 143)**, instead of using standard judicial remedies like a review or curative petition, raised questions about its intent.
- **Advisory vs. Binding Precedent:** Legal scholars emphasize that an advisory opinion under Article 143 is **non-binding**. It cannot override a binding judgment delivered under **Article 141**, which is considered the law of the land. This suggests the reference may have been a political tool rather than a genuine quest for legal clarity.
- **A Call for Constitutional Propriety:** The Court's final opinion is expected to guide the Centre to respect established constitutional boundaries and avoid actions that disrupt the delicate federal balance.

Conclusion: A Victory for Democratic Governance

The hearings have powerfully reaffirmed the April 2025 judgment as a cornerstone of India's federal structure. By rejecting the notion of indefinite gubernatorial discretion and emphasizing the primacy of the elected legislature, the Supreme Court has protected the core of democratic governance. The clear message is that the Centre must operate within these constitutional limits to preserve the spirit of **cooperative federalism**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/constitutional-clarity-on-hearings-on-the-presidential-reference/article70057096.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

DATE: 17.09.2025

TOPIC: study of natural disasters like **flash floods, cloudbursts, and landslides** in the Himalayan region.**Topography, climate change: Behind the heavy rain in Uttarakhand, Himachal****The Interplay of Topography, Geology, and Climate Change**

The recent devastating rainfall events in the Himalayas are not random occurrences but the result of a dangerous convergence of the region's inherent natural vulnerabilities with accelerating human-induced pressures.

1. Natural Drivers of High Rainfall & Vulnerability

- **The Orographic Effect:** The Himalayas act as a colossal natural barrier to the moisture-laden Southwest monsoon winds. This process, known as **orographic lift**, forces the winds to rise, cool, and condense, resulting in intense, concentrated rainfall on the windward slopes. This is different from the more spread-out rainfall seen in the plains.
- **Fragile Geology:** The Himalayas are geologically young and tectonically active. The terrain is composed of **unstable, fragile rock formations** and loose soil. This inherent instability makes the steep slopes highly susceptible to **landslides**, which are easily triggered when intense rainfall saturates the ground, increasing its weight and reducing friction.

2. The Climate Change Multiplier

Climate change is not just a future threat; it is actively amplifying the region's vulnerabilities in several ways:

- **Shift in Rainfall Patterns:** The traditional pattern of steady, distributed monsoon rains is being replaced by **short, erratic, and extremely intense bursts**. These cloudburst-like events overwhelm the natural drainage capacity of the mountain terrain, leading to immediate and massive surface runoff and flash floods.
- **Interaction of Weather Systems:** Global warming is altering large-scale atmospheric circulation.
 - **Western Disturbances:** These winter weather systems, originating in the Mediterranean, are shifting southward and interacting with the summer monsoon. This unusual convergence creates highly unstable and complex weather conditions, making rainfall prediction difficult and leading to extreme precipitation events.
 - **Bay of Bengal Systems:** Low-pressure systems from the Bay of Bengal are now traveling further north than their normal track, pumping excessive moisture directly into the Himalayan region.

- **Influence of Arctic Warming:** The rapid melting of Arctic sea ice has a cascading effect (**teleconnection**) on global weather. It can disrupt atmospheric patterns like the jet stream, further increasing the variability and intensity of the Indian monsoon.

3. The Role of Anthropogenic Stressors

While natural factors make the Himalayas vulnerable, unplanned human activities have drastically reduced the region's resilience and magnified the scale of disasters.

- **Destabilizing Infrastructure Projects:**
 - **Roads:** Haphazard road construction, often using the "cut and fill" method, weakens the fragile slopes by removing their base support.
 - **Dams and Tunnels:** Blasting and excavation for hydropower projects create fractures in the rock, further destabilizing the terrain.
- **Unplanned Urbanization:** Haphazard construction along riverbanks and on steep slopes obstructs natural water channels, forcing floodwaters into human settlements.
- **Deforestation:** The removal of forest cover strips the soil of its natural binder. This leads to increased soil erosion and reduces the land's capacity to absorb rainwater, thereby increasing runoff and the risk of landslides.

The Way Forward: A Strategy for Resilience

Addressing this escalating crisis requires a multi-faceted approach that respects the region's ecological fragility.

- **Sustainable Development:** All infrastructure projects must be preceded by rigorous **geological and environmental impact assessments**. There must be a shift towards promoting **regulated tourism and sustainable construction** practices.
- **Climate-Resilient Policies:** Future urban planning, land-use policies, and infrastructure design must explicitly incorporate climate change projections to build long-term resilience.
- **Strengthened Early Warning Systems:** Investment in advanced weather forecasting technologies like Doppler radars, coupled with a network of landslide monitoring systems, is crucial for providing timely alerts.
- **Enhanced Disaster Preparedness:** Building the capacity of local communities and disaster response forces is essential to minimize loss of life and property when disasters strike.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/topography-climate-change-behind-heavy-rains-in-himalayas-10254105/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 18.09.2025

TOPIC: Role of Governor, Centre-State Relations, and Separation of Powers.

Letter and spirit: On Supreme Court and Waqf (Amendment) Act 2025 judgment

Introduction: A Judgment of Constitutional Balance

The Supreme Court's judgment on the **Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025**, delivered on September 15, 2025, is a significant ruling that navigates the complex intersection of **religious autonomy, state regulation, and constitutional law**. Instead of delivering a blanket verdict, the Court adopted a nuanced, middle-path approach by selectively **staying** some controversial provisions while **upholding** others, thereby preserving the Act's core while addressing the most contentious concerns.

The Core Dispute: Regulation vs. Interference

- **Government's Position:** The Union Government defended the amendments as a necessary administrative reform to enhance **transparency, curb corruption, and prevent the widespread misuse and encroachment** of valuable waqf properties across the country.
- **Critics' Position:** Opponents, including political parties and various Muslim community organizations, argued that the Act was an act of **arbitrary state interference** in the religious affairs of a minority community, designed to undermine their autonomy in managing their institutions.

Provisions Stayed by the Court: Protecting Autonomy and Due Process

The Court placed a temporary hold on provisions that were deemed *prima facie* arbitrary or in conflict with foundational constitutional principles.

- **Requirement of a Five-Year 'Practising' Muslim:** The Court stayed the rule that only a person who has been a practising Muslim for at least five years can dedicate property as waqf. This was likely done because the term 'practising' is subjective, vague, and nearly impossible to prove or disprove legally, making the provision ripe for arbitrary application.
- **Adjudicatory Powers of the District Collector:** The provision empowering the District Collector, an executive officer, to decide on waqf property disputes was stayed. This was a crucial intervention to protect the **doctrine of separation of powers**, as such quasi-judicial functions are typically reserved for specialized bodies like Waqf Tribunals or the judiciary.
- **Representation of Non-Muslims:** While the amendment allowed for non-Muslim members, the Court **capped their numbers** (4 in the Central Council, 3 in State Boards). This decision strikes a balance between promoting inclusivity and ensuring that the administrative bodies retain their essential minority character, with management primarily in the hands of the community they serve.

Provisions Upheld by the Court: Ensuring Public Interest and Legality

The Court affirmed amendments that were seen as necessary to prevent misuse and align the law with broader constitutional principles.

- **Abolition of 'Waqf-by-User':** The Court upheld the removal of a provision that allowed property to be declared as waqf based merely on long-term use for religious or charitable purposes, even without a formal deed. This measure is aimed at preventing **frivolous and unsubstantiated claims** on public and private lands.
- **Protection of Existing Rights:** Critically, the Court ensured this change would apply only **prospectively**. This means all properties already registered under the "waqf-by-user" clause before April 8, 2025, are protected, preventing widespread legal chaos.
- **Exclusion of Protected Monuments and Tribal Lands:** The judgment affirmed that properties designated as **protected monuments** under the ASI or those belonging to **Scheduled Tribes** cannot be claimed as waqf. This upholds the primacy of national heritage preservation laws and constitutional safeguards for tribal land rights over religious claims.

Broader Constitutional Implications

- **Balancing Religious Freedom and State Oversight:** The verdict reinforces the principle that while religious autonomy is a fundamental right, it is not absolute. The state has a legitimate interest in regulating the administration of religious endowments to ensure transparency and prevent corruption, especially when vast resources are involved.
- **Presumption of Constitutionality:** In refusing to freeze the entire Act, the Court applied the established legal doctrine of **presumption of constitutionality**, which holds that a law passed by Parliament is considered valid unless proven otherwise.
- **A Call for Political Consensus:** The judgment implicitly sends a strong message to the executive. In a diverse democracy, laws that deeply impact a particular community should not be pushed through with a partisan majority. They require a process of **consultation, dialogue, and confidence-building** to achieve wider acceptance and legitimacy.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/letter-and-spirit-on-supreme-court-and-waqf-amendment-act-2025-judgment/article70060505.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 1: ART & CULTURE

DATE: 18.09.2025

TOPIC: Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times

Tracing history of Sarnath: from Buddha's first sermon to emblem of Indian republic

The Dual Identity of Sarnath: A Sacred Past, A Secular Present

Sarnath holds a unique dual significance in the Indian imagination. It is revered globally as a sacred pilgrimage site where Buddhism was born, and simultaneously cherished domestically as the source of the national emblem of the modern Indian Republic. Its recent nomination to the **UNESCO World Heritage List** and the move to correctly credit its initial discoverer, **Babu Jagat Singh**, highlight its enduring importance.

The Birthplace of Buddhism

- **The First Sermon (Dhammachakrapravartana):** In the 6th century BCE, after attaining enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, Gautama Buddha chose the deer park at Sarnath (then known as **Mrigadava** or **Rishipatna**) to deliver his first sermon. This pivotal event set in motion the "Wheel of Dharma."
- **Foundation of Buddhist Doctrine:** It was here that the Buddha first articulated his core teachings to his first five disciples, laying down the foundational principles of Buddhism:
 - **The Four Noble Truths:** The truth of suffering (Dukkha), its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation.
 - **The Eightfold Path:** The practical guide to achieving enlightenment, comprising right understanding, right intent, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- **Establishment of the Sangha:** This first sermon marked the formal beginning of the **Buddhist Sangha** (the community of monks), making Sarnath the birthplace of institutional Buddhism.

A Center of Royal Patronage and Artistic Excellence

- **The Mauryan Era:** In the 3rd century BCE, Emperor **Ashoka**, after embracing Buddhism, visited Sarnath and erected several monuments. The most iconic of these was a highly polished sandstone pillar topped by the magnificent **Ashokan Lion Capital**. This sculpture of four lions facing the four cardinal directions, originally crowned by a large Dharma Chakra (Wheel of Law), symbolized the universal spread of the Buddha's teachings.
- **The Gupta and Kushana Periods:** Sarnath continued to flourish for centuries under the patronage of later dynasties like the Kushanas and Guptas. They expanded the site, building new monasteries and refurbishing existing stupas, most notably the grand **Dhamekh Stupa**.
- **An International Hub of Learning:** During this golden age, Sarnath became a world-renowned center for Buddhist art, culture, and philosophy, attracting scholars and pilgrims from across Asia, including the famous Chinese travelers **Faxian** and **Xuanzang**, whose writings documented its splendor.

The Period of Decline and Oblivion

- **Gradual Decline:** From the late medieval period, the rise of Brahmanical Hinduism and a decline in royal patronage led to the gradual deterioration of Buddhist institutions.
- **The Final Blow:** The widespread destruction during the **Turkish invasions of the 12th century**, particularly by the forces of Qutub-ud-din Aibak, was the death knell for Sarnath. The monasteries were razed, monks were dispersed, and the sacred monuments were left to decay.
- **Centuries of Neglect:** After this destruction, Sarnath was abandoned and eventually buried under layers of soil, its glorious history forgotten and its location lost to time.

Rediscovery and Rebirth as a National Symbol

- **The Rediscovery:** The site was first accidentally unearthed in **1787–88 by Babu Jagat Singh**, the Diwan of the Raja of Benares, whose workers were sourcing bricks. Systematic archaeological work began in the 19th century under **Alexander Cunningham**, the first Director-General of the ASI.
- **The Crowning Discovery:** The most significant finding was the unearthing of the almost perfectly preserved **Ashokan Lion Capital** in 1905 by archaeologist Friedrich Oertel.
- **Adoption as the National Emblem:** In 1950, the newly independent Republic of India adopted this Lion Capital as its **official state emblem**. The wheel at its base was placed in the center of the national flag, and the motto "**Satyameva Jayate**" (Truth Alone Triumphs), from the Mundaka Upanishad, was inscribed below it. This act permanently linked Sarnath's ancient spiritual heritage with the secular, democratic identity of modern India.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-history/tracing-history-sarnath-from-buddhas-first-sermon-to-emblem-of-indian-republic-10255804/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT**DATE: 19.09.2025**

TOPIC: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies.

Holistic approach: On dealing with North India's stubble burning

An all-round strategy is necessary for India to effectively manage stubble burning, as punitive measures like prosecuting farmers are insufficient to address the deep-rooted socio-economic and administrative challenges contributing to North India's air pollution crisis.

Context: The Stubble Burning Crisis

Supreme Court's Stance: The Supreme Court of India has indicated it may consider the prosecution of farmers who practice stubble burning to clear their fields for the next (Rabi) crop season.

Core Issue: Stubble burning is a primary contributor to the severe air pollution that engulfs northern India, particularly Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, during the post-monsoon months of October and November.

Causes of Severe Air Pollution in North India

Meteorological Factors: Adverse weather conditions, including low wind speed and temperature inversion following the monsoon, trap pollutants close to the ground, leading to the formation of a thick smog layer.

Multiple Pollution Sources: The crisis is not caused by a single factor but is a cumulative result of emissions from various sources:

Vehicular and Industrial Emissions: A constant source of pollutants like Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}), NO_x, and SO_x.

Open Garbage Burning: Unregulated burning of municipal solid waste releases toxic fumes.

Agricultural Waste: The large-scale burning of paddy residue (stubble) in a short window of time releases massive amounts of smoke and particulate matter into the atmosphere.

Government Interventions and Institutional Failures**Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):**

Mandate: The CAQM was established as a statutory body to ensure better coordination and a unified approach among the states of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan to tackle air pollution.

Acknowledgement: Its creation recognized that air pollution is a transboundary problem that cannot be solved by any single state in isolation.

Shortcomings of the CAQM:

Lack of Independence: The commission has failed to operate independently, often succumbing to political pressure from state governments and public opposition.

Case Study (Vehicle Ban): The CAQM ordered a ban on end-of-life petrol and diesel vehicles in the NCR. However, following political backlash, the order was first postponed and then diluted to apply only to areas outside Delhi's municipal limits, showcasing its weak enforcement capability.

Failure on Stubble Burning: The CAQM could not effectively convince the judiciary of the complex nature of the problem, which stems from:

Stubborn Agricultural Practices: Long-standing methods used by farmers.

Weak State Enforcement: Inability of states like Punjab and Haryana to enforce bans.

Adverse Agricultural Economics: High debt and lack of economically viable alternatives leave farmers with no choice but to burn stubble.

Lack of Transparency: The commission has been accused of withholding critical information. For instance, it did not challenge Punjab's misleading claims of a reduction in farm fires when the data indicated a rise in such incidents.

Way Forward: A Holistic Strategy

Instead of resorting to drastic and often counter-productive punitive measures like jailing farmers, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach is required.

Effective Legal Framework: The principle of "polluter pays" should be applied consistently, ensuring that no section of society, whether farmers or industries, is considered above the law.

Farmer-Centric Solutions:

Better Incentives: Provide financial support, subsidies on happy seeders and other machinery, and a viable market for crop residue (e.g., for bio-energy plants) to make alternatives to burning more attractive.

Addressing Economic Distress: Tackle the root cause of the issue by addressing farm debt and improving the overall economic condition of farmers.

Strict and Unbiased Enforcement: Existing environmental laws must be enforced strictly and uniformly across all states without political interference.

Transparency and Accountability:

Transparent Reporting: Ensure accurate and real-time data on farm fires and pollution sources is publicly available.

Realistic Targets: Set achievable and scientifically-backed targets for reducing pollution.

Systemic Changes: The focus must shift from short-term, reactive "carrot-and-stick" policies to long-term, sustainable systemic solutions that integrate agricultural, economic, and environmental policies.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/holistic-approach-on-dealing-with-north-indias-stubble-burning/article70065958.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

DATE: 19.09.2025

TOPIC: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of other countries on India's interests; India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defence pact: What it means for the two countries

Background and Rationale for the Agreement

Immediate Trigger: The pact was signed in the aftermath of an **Israeli military strike in Qatar**, which created a sense of urgency among Arab and Muslim nations.

Strategic Shift: This is the first major defense pact signed by a key Arab nation with a **nuclear-armed state (Pakistan)**, signaling a shift in regional security alignments.

Security Vacuum: A **decreasing US military presence** in the Arabian Peninsula has led to perceptions of weakened security guarantees for Gulf states against regional rivals like Israel and Iran.

Mutual Defense Clause: The agreement contains a crucial provision stating that an **aggression against one country will be considered an aggression against both**, establishing a framework for joint deterrence.

The Historical Saudi-Pakistan Relationship

Early Military Cooperation (1960s): The foundation was laid when Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia to provide training and protection.

Key Security Interventions: Pakistani Special Forces played a critical role in helping Saudi authorities retake the **Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979**.

Formalizing Ties (1982): The **Bilateral Security Cooperation Agreement** institutionalized the relationship, allowing for Pakistani troop deployment, training, and advisory support on Saudi soil.

Defense Trade: Saudi Arabia has historically been a key buyer of Pakistani arms, and Pakistan has been instrumental in training the Royal Saudi Air Force.

Economic Lifeline: Saudi Arabia has consistently provided crucial financial support to Pakistan, especially during economic crises and after international sanctions were imposed due to its nuclear program. This includes oil at concessional rates and direct cash deposits.

People-to-People Ties: A large Pakistani diaspora in Saudi Arabia sends significant remittances, making it a vital economic partner.

Significance of the Pact for Pakistan

Economic Relief: In the face of high external debt and IMF dependency, this pact is expected to yield **economic dividends**, including Saudi investment in Pakistan's defense industry.

Strategic Leverage: It strengthens Pakistan's position in the **West Asian security architecture** and enhances its role as a key security provider in the Muslim world.

Military Modernization: The agreement opens doors for **joint ventures and technology transfers**, helping Pakistan upgrade its military capabilities despite budgetary constraints.

Political and Diplomatic Prestige: A formal defense alliance with a regional powerhouse like Saudi Arabia enhances Pakistan's international standing.

Significance of the Pact for Saudi Arabia

Diversifying Security Partnerships: The pact helps Saudi Arabia reduce its traditional **over-dependence on the US** for security by gaining a reliable and professional military partner.

Countering Regional Threats: Pakistan's combat experience is highly valued by Riyadh for addressing regional instability, particularly tensions with Iran and the conflict in Yemen.

Alignment with Vision 2030: The goal of creating a secure environment for economic diversification under **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030** is supported by strengthening defense capabilities with trusted allies.

Maintaining Regional Balance: The pact allows Saudi Arabia to maintain its strong, traditional ties with Pakistan while simultaneously developing its strategic partnership with India.

Saudi Arabia-India Relations and India's Response

Strong Economic Ties: India is Saudi Arabia's **second-largest trading partner**, with bilateral trade standing at nearly **\$43 billion** in FY 2023-24. Saudi Arabia is a critical source of energy imports for India.

Strategic Partnership: The relationship was elevated to a "**Strategic Partnership**" in 2010, and high-level engagements have been frequent.

Diplomatic Neutrality: Saudi Arabia has often acted as a balanced mediator during India-Pakistan tensions and has refrained from taking sides, strengthening its role as a regional peace broker.

Large Indian Diaspora: A robust community of **2.7 million Indians** in Saudi Arabia contributes significantly to both economies.

India's Cautious Stance: India has responded cautiously, stating it will carefully study the pact's implications for its national security and regional stability.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/saudi-arabia-pakistan-defence-pact-significance-10257728/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**DATE: 20.09.2025**

TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Shifting sands: On the defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan**Introduction: A New Security Chapter in West Asia**

- A **mutual defence agreement** has been signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, marking a significant development in the region's security dynamics.
- This pact formalizes a long history of military cooperation and financial support, signaling a strategic recalibration amid **waning U.S. security guarantees** and ongoing regional turbulence.

Strategic Significance of the Agreement

- **Core Principle:** The pact is founded on the principle that "**any aggression against one is aggression against both**," creating a formal military alliance.
- **Institutionalizing a Historic Partnership:** It solidifies a deep-rooted, symbiotic relationship between two key Islamic nations:
 - **Saudi Arabia:** The custodian of Islam's holiest mosques, wielding immense religious and political influence in the Muslim world.
 - **Pakistan:** The Islamic world's only declared **nuclear power**, providing a significant military and deterrent capability.
- **Past Cooperation:** The agreement builds on decades of informal ties, which included:
 - Pakistan providing military training and personnel to Saudi armed forces.
 - Saudi Arabia offering extensive financial assistance to Pakistan, including purported support for its nuclear program.

The Shifting Regional Security Landscape

- **Immediate Context:** The agreement was announced shortly after an Israeli bombing in Qatar, highlighting the increasing volatility and unpredictability of the region.
- **Erosion of U.S. Credibility:** A primary driver for this pact is the declining confidence in the U.S. as a reliable security guarantor.
 - **2019 Saudi Oil Attack:** The muted U.S. response to the attack on Saudi oil facilities by Iranian-backed forces was a turning point, making Riyadh question the U.S. commitment to its security.
 - **Israel's Strike on Qatar:** The recent Israeli strike on Qatar, which hosts America's largest military base in the region, further accelerated this realignment, demonstrating the limits of U.S. influence.

- **End of an Era:** The pact reflects the breakdown of the old **U.S.-centric security framework** that has dominated West Asia for decades, forcing regional powers to seek alternative alliances.

Strategic Realignments and Broader Implications

- **Faltering of the Abraham Accords:**
 - The Accords were intended to unite Arab monarchies and Israel against their common adversary, Iran, with Saudi participation being the ultimate goal.
 - However, Hamas's 2023 attack and Israel's subsequent war in Gaza derailed the normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- **A Signal to Washington and Tel Aviv:** With this pact, Saudi Arabia is clearly signaling its intent to **diversify its alliances** and reduce its strategic dependence on the United States.
- **Benefits for Pakistan:**
 - It gains critical **financial support** from Riyadh, which is vital for its struggling economy.
 - It elevates its geopolitical status by positioning itself as a formal **security provider** in the strategically important Gulf region.

India's Concerns and Policy Imperatives

- **Geopolitical Sensitivity:** The timing of the pact, following a recent India-Pakistan conflict (May), makes it a matter of significant concern for New Delhi.
- **Divergence in Strategy:** The agreement highlights a growing divergence between India's recent **pro-Israel tilt** and the "hedging" strategy of Arab monarchies, who are now balancing their relationships with multiple powers.
- **Key Risks for Regional Stability:**
 - **Ambiguity of Scope:** It remains unclear whether the pact extends a de facto **nuclear umbrella** to Saudi Arabia or mandates automatic reciprocal defence in any conflict.
 - **Danger of Entrapment:** The alliance carries the risk of pulling its members into wider conflicts. Pakistan could be dragged into a West Asian crisis (e.g., involving Iran), while Saudi Arabia could become entangled in a South Asian conflict between India and Pakistan.
- **Recommendations for India's Foreign Policy:**
 - India must **avoid doubling down on an isolated Israel** and recognize the shifting dynamics in the Arab world.
 - It is imperative for India to maintain a **strategic balance** in its West Asia policy, engaging with all key actors.
 - The primary focus of Indian policy should be on fostering long-term **regional stability** to protect its energy, trade, and diaspora interests.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/shifting-sands-on-the-defence-agreement-between-saudi-arabia-pakistan/article70070190.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION **DATE: 20.09.2025**

TOPIC: Bilateral agreements involving India (specifically India-Pakistan relations).

Indus Waters Treaty: A document past its time

Introduction: A Treaty Facing a Relevance Crisis

- The **Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)**, a landmark 1960 water-sharing agreement between India and Pakistan, is increasingly viewed as a document ill-equipped to handle 21st-century challenges.
- Once celebrated as a triumph of water diplomacy, its relevance is now being severely tested by modern realities such as **climate change, heightened political hostility, and new environmental crises** like siltation.
- The recent **Pahalgam terror attack** has further strained relations, leading India to keep the treaty's cooperative mechanisms **in abeyance**, underscoring the fragility of the agreement in the current geopolitical climate.

Historical Context and Original Significance

- **A Unique Diplomatic Achievement:** Signed 65 years ago in 1960 with the **World Bank's mediation**, the IWT was a pragmatic solution to a complex trans-boundary water dispute.
- **The Division of Rivers:** The treaty created a clear allocation of the Indus River system's six rivers:
 - **Western Rivers (to Pakistan):** The Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab were allocated for Pakistan's unrestricted use.
 - **Eastern Rivers (to India):** The Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej were allocated exclusively to India.
- **A Symbol of Necessity and Peace:**
 - For India, control over the eastern rivers was crucial for irrigation in **Punjab and Rajasthan**. For Pakistan, access to the western rivers was a matter of national survival, essential for its agriculture and preventing food insecurity.
 - For decades, the IWT was hailed as one of the world's most successful water-sharing agreements, having survived **multiple wars and persistent political hostility**, forcing a baseline of cooperation between the two neighbors.

Emerging Challenges Undermining the Treaty

The treaty's framework, designed for a different era, is unable to address the following modern challenges:

- **1. Political Hostility and Terrorism:**

- Continuous terror attacks have eroded the spirit of cooperation that is essential for any shared resource management.
 - India's decision to hold the treaty's mechanisms in abeyance post the Pahalgam attack has rendered the idea of joint management practically hollow.
- **2. The Unaddressed Reality of Climate Change:**
 - **Accelerated Glacier Melt:** The shrinking of glaciers in the Hindu-Kush and Himalayan ecosystems is projected to increase water flow in the upper Indus basin initially, potentially leading to major shifts in the river's course and long-term water scarcity.
 - **Erratic Weather Patterns:** The downstream monsoon has become highly unpredictable, resulting in extreme events like the recent devastating floods that submerged vast farmlands in both Indian and Pakistani Punjab. These floods are no longer rare disasters but a "**new hydrological reality**" that the treaty's clauses cannot manage.
- **3. The Crisis of Siltation:**
 - The treaty is completely silent on **siltation**, a major contemporary problem.
 - Excessive silt is **choking reservoirs**, drastically shrinking their water storage capacity, and raising riverbeds, which in turn makes floods far more destructive.
 - While silt is a hazard in this context, it is also a valuable natural resource that could be used for enriching soil or in construction. The lack of a coherent **silt management strategy** is a major failure.

The Mismatch: Treaty's Focus vs. Modern Needs

- **Original Focus:** The IWT was forged with a narrow focus on **irrigation projects, building dams, and volumetric water sharing**.
- **Modern Imperatives:** Today's challenges require a much broader and more dynamic approach centered on:
 - Building **resilience to climate extremes**.
 - Developing joint **disaster preparedness** and management protocols.
 - Ensuring the **sustainability of the fragile Himalayan ecosystem**.
 - Strengthening the existing mechanism for sharing **trans-boundary hydrological data** to create effective, real-time flood warning systems

The Way Forward

- **Renegotiate and Modernize the Treaty:** The 65th anniversary of the IWT presents an opportunity to begin the process of renegotiating the treaty to make it robust and resilient enough to withstand the shocks of the 21st century.

- **Adopt a National Siltation Policy:** India must move beyond ad-hoc dredging and formulate a comprehensive national policy on silt management. This would help reduce flood intensity, expand water storage, and utilize silt as a productive resource.
- **Broaden the Treaty's Scope:** A modernized treaty must be more holistic, incorporating clear provisions on **climate change adaptation, joint flood management, ecosystem health, and robust data sharing** for disaster mitigation.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indus-waters-treaty-a-document-past-its-time-10260227/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE**DATE: 22.09.2025**

TOPIC: Government Policies and Interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Uranium unrest: On uranium mining in Meghalaya**Introduction: The Core Conflict**

- The Union government's decision to press forward with **uranium mining in Meghalaya** has reignited a long-standing conflict between national resource strategies and the constitutional rights of indigenous communities.
- The primary point of contention is the government's use of an **executive order (Office Memorandum)** to bypass mandatory **public consultations**, a move that threatens to undermine democratic and environmental safeguards.
- This issue mirrors past negative experiences in places like **Jharkhand**, where tribal communities have disproportionately borne the environmental, health, and livelihood costs of resource extraction without having a meaningful say in the decision-making process.

The Centre's Push and Bypassing of Safeguards

- **Decades of Local Resistance:** The government's insistence on mining disregards decades of consistent and strong opposition from the local **Khasi tribal groups**, who have resisted mining projects at **Domiasiat and Wakhaji** since the 1980s.
- **Exemption via Office Memorandum (OM):** The Union Environment Ministry has issued an OM that exempts mining of **atomic, critical, and strategic minerals** from the crucial stage of public consultation required under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification.
- **Weakening Democratic Processes:**
 - Local organizations have warned that this move severely weakens procedural safeguards designed to protect communities and the environment.
 - The **Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council** has been urged to invoke its special powers under the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution to defend tribal rights against this executive overreach.
 - Since OMs are executive instruments that do not require legislative scrutiny, they risk reducing constitutionally protected communities to **passive bystanders** in decisions that profoundly affect their land and lives.

Lessons from Past Uranium Mining in Jharkhand

- **The Singhbhum Experience:** The operations of the **Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL)** in Singhbhum, Jharkhand, serve as a cautionary tale.
- **Marginalization of Local Voices:** Expansion proposals in the region triggered widespread protests over severe issues, including:

- Fears of **radiation exposure** and related health crises.
- The loss of traditional lands and **livelihoods**.
- A systemic disregard for objections raised by affected villagers.
- **Procedural Flaws:** Protesters alleged that official notices for public hearings were often issued in unfamiliar languages, effectively sidelining genuine local participation and making the consultation process a mere formality.
- **The "Resource Frontier" Perception:** These experiences reinforce the tribal perception that their lands are treated as a "**resource frontier**"—an area to be exploited for the benefit of the nation, while the local inhabitants are left to deal with the irreversible consequences.

The Imperative of Democratic Consent

- **Respecting Local Refusal:** The Centre's current approach signals a worrying shift where local opposition is no longer seen as a valid reason to halt or reconsider a project, no matter how polluting or ecologically damaging.
- **The Principle of FPIC:** Global best practices and human rights norms are built on the principle of **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**. This mandates that indigenous communities must give their consent *before* any project affecting their ancestral lands or resources can be initiated.
- **The Need to Explore Alternatives:** If genuine consent cannot be obtained, the state is obligated to explore alternatives rather than resorting to coercion. These alternatives could include:
 - Exploring other uranium deposits in areas where communities might consent.
 - Investing in substitutes or alternative power-generation strategies to reduce reliance on uranium.

The Way Forward: Upholding Constitutional Guarantees

- **Legal and Constitutional Remedies:**
 - Affected communities have the right to challenge the OM's constitutional validity in court.
 - They can invoke protections under the **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** and cite powerful legal precedents like the **Supreme Court's Niyamgiri judgment (2013)**, which upheld the right of a tribal community to veto a mining project on their sacred land.
- **Immediate Withdrawal of the OM:** The Environment Ministry should revoke the OM. By exempting a wide range of minerals from public consultation, it undermines the integrity of mining governance across the entire country, not just in Meghalaya.
- **Prioritizing Dialogue Over Coercion:** Should protests intensify, the government must engage in genuine and respectful **dialogue**. Coercive measures may secure short-term compliance but will inevitably fuel long-term resentment, conflict, and alienation.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/uranium-unrest-on-uranium-mining-in-meghalaya/article70077165.ece>

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INDIAN CONSTITUTION

DATE: 22.09.2025

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—significant provisions (especially related to secularism and fundamental rights like Article 25).

Why SC order on Anand Marriage Act won't end old debate

Introduction: A Step Towards Recognition, But Not a Complete Solution

- A recent Supreme Court judgment has directed all states and Union Territories to frame rules for the registration of Sikh marriages under the **Anand Marriage Act, 1909**.
- This order is a significant step towards affirming the distinct religious identity of the Sikh community, which for decades has had to register its marriages under the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**.
- However, the judgment is not a panacea; it addresses only the issue of registration and does not resolve the larger legal lacunae, leaving Sikhs without a comprehensive, codified personal law for matrimonial matters.

The Anand Marriage Act, 1909: Historical Context and Limitations

- **The Anand Karaj Ceremony:**
 - Meaning "blissful union," **Anand Karaj** is the traditional Sikh marriage ceremony prescribed in the Guru Granth Sahib.
 - It involves the couple circumambulating the **Guru Granth Sahib** four times while sacred hymns (laavan), composed by the fourth Sikh Guru, Ram Das, are recited.
- **Colonial Era Enactment:** The original Act was enacted in 1909, largely due to the efforts of the **Singh Sabha movement**, which sought legal recognition for this distinct Sikh ceremony.
- **Limited Scope of the Original Act:** The 1909 Act was extremely limited in its scope. It only provided **legal validity to the ceremony itself** but did not include any provisions for:
 - Marriage registration.
 - Matters of divorce, succession, inheritance, maintenance, or child custody.

The 2012 Amendment: A Symbolic Victory with Flawed Implementation

- **Addressing a Long-Standing Demand:** To address the demand for a separate registration process, Parliament passed the **Anand Marriage (Amendment) Act in 2012**.
- **Key Provision:** The amendment inserted **Section 6** into the Act, which empowered state governments and UT administrations to frame and notify their own rules for registering Sikh marriages.
- **The Implementation Gap:**
 - While a symbolic victory for Sikh identity, the amendment's effectiveness was severely hampered by **poor implementation**.

- Only a handful of states and UTs, such as Punjab and Delhi, actually framed and notified the required rules.
- Consequently, Sikhs in the majority of Indian states were still compelled to register their marriages under the Hindu Marriage Act, defeating the purpose of the amendment.

The Supreme Court's Recent Order: Enforcing Uniform Implementation

- **The Directive:** A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sanjay Karol has now mandated the remaining **17 states and eight UTs** to frame and notify the rules for registering marriages under the Anand Marriage Act.
- **Rationale of the Court:** The Supreme Court emphasized that marriage registration is a **crucial legal safeguard** that provides official proof of marriage for vital purposes like inheritance, insurance, and child custody.
- **Significance of the Judgment:** This order is a landmark because it seeks to ensure that the statutory right provided by the 2012 amendment is **uniformly available** to all Sikh citizens across the country, not just in select jurisdictions.

Persisting Legal Complications: A Registration Law is Not a Personal Law

The Supreme Court's order, while positive, does not resolve the core legal challenges faced by the Sikh community.

- **1. A Registration Law, not a Matrimonial Code:** The fundamental limitation is that the Anand Marriage Act is **only a registration law**. It is completely silent on critical aspects of family law, including:
 - Divorce and separation.
 - Maintenance and alimony.
 - Succession and inheritance rights.
 - Child custody and adoption.
- **2. Continued Reliance on the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:** For all the above-mentioned matters, Sikh couples will still be governed by the provisions of the Hindu Marriage Act. This creates a confusing and inconsistent **dual legal framework**.
- **3. The Demand for a Comprehensive Sikh Personal Law:**
 - Leading Sikh organizations, such as the **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)**, argue that this partial solution is insufficient.
 - They continue to advocate for a **comprehensive, codified Sikh personal law**, similar to the separate legal frameworks that exist for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis, to fully and respectfully recognize their distinct religious identity.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/why-sc-order-on-anand-marriage-act-wont-end-old-debate-10261997/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 23.09.2025 TOPIC: Indian

Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Consumption conundrum: On the Indian economy's predicament

Introduction: A Critical Juncture for the Indian Economy

- The Indian economy, which relies on four main engines of growth—**household consumption, private investment, government expenditure, and net exports**—is currently at a pivotal moment.
- While **government spending** has been the primary driver of growth in recent years, emerging constraints are shifting the focus towards **household consumption** as the key to future economic momentum.
- Recognizing this, the government is actively prioritizing policies aimed at **stimulating domestic demand**, such as tax reforms and GST rationalization, to enhance the disposable incomes of households.

Analysis of Growth Engines and Emerging Constraints

The traditional drivers of India's GDP growth are facing individual challenges, leaving household consumption as the most viable path forward.

- **1. Government Expenditure:**
 - This has been the **strongest engine** recently, powered by a significant infrastructure push (capital expenditure) and financial support to states.
 - However, the high growth pace of 30–35% in government capex is **not sustainable** in the long term due to fiscal limits and competing priorities like defence and other developmental schemes.
- **2. Private Investment:**
 - Private sector investment remains **weak and sluggish**. A critical indicator, **capacity utilization**, has stayed below the 80% threshold since 2011.
 - This indicates that industries are not using their existing production capacity to the fullest, which disincentivizes them from making new investments in expansion.
- **3. Net Exports:**
 - This engine is hampered by significant **global trade uncertainty** and the threat of protectionist measures like potential **U.S. tariffs**.

- Weakened external demand reduces the potential for export-led growth in the near future.

- **4. Household Consumption:**

- With the other three engines facing significant constraints, **household consumption** emerges as the most critical and dependable driver for sustaining India's economic growth.

Policy Measures to Boost Consumption

The government is employing a two-pronged strategy to increase consumer spending: **raising disposable incomes** and **lowering the prices** of goods and services.

- **GST Reforms (September 2025):** Recent rationalization has significantly lowered the tax burden on everyday items.
 - **For Rural Households: 75%** of their typical monthly expenditure now falls under the nil or 5% GST slab, a major increase from 56% previously.
 - **For Urban Households: Two-thirds** of their monthly spending is now in the lowest tax slabs, up from 50% before the reforms, effectively lowering prices.
- **Income-Tax Cuts (Budget 2025):**
 - While the budget's tax cuts successfully increased the **disposable income** available to households, they did not lead to a corresponding surge in spending.
 - This is because most households exhibited a preference for **savings over consumption**, indicating cautious consumer sentiment and a need for more than just tax cuts to change spending habits.
- **The Challenge of Wage Growth:**
 - Directly increasing wages would be the most effective way to boost incomes, but this remains a major challenge.
 - Structural issues like a large **oversupply of labour** and a persistent **skills deficit** prevent significant wage increases across the economy.

The Present Predicament and Path to High Growth

- **Consumption as the Mainstay:** Household consumption is currently the only **reliable and insulated** growth engine, as it is less vulnerable to global shocks compared to exports and foreign investment.
- **The Problem of Inertia:** The primary challenge with consumption is its **high inertia**—it is slow to react and requires a sustained and significant fiscal push to gain momentum.

- **The Link to Investment:** Without a strong revival in household demand, private investment will not pick up, as businesses will not expand if they don't see a growing market for their products. This makes the national target of achieving **8%+ GDP growth** very difficult.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/consumption-conundrum-on-the-indian-economys-predicament/article70080624.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 23.09.2025

TOPIC: Noise pollution

Too loud to ignore: Why Indians should care about noise pollution in cities

Introduction: The Silent Urban Health Crisis

- Noise pollution, defined as unwanted or harmful sound, is escalating into a significant but frequently overlooked **urban health crisis** in India.
- Driven by rapid urbanization, increasing vehicle density, and a booming construction sector, noise levels in Indian cities consistently exceed permissible limits, yet the issue remains a low priority in urban governance and public health planning.
- Although legally classified as an **air pollutant** under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**, its intangible nature makes it less perceptible but equally damaging as other forms of pollution.

Understanding Noise Pollution and its Health Implications

- **Definition and Standards:**
 - It is unwanted sound that disrupts human or animal life. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** identifies it as a major environmental pollutant.
 - While WHO recommends a residential daytime limit of **55 decibels (dB)**, a standard mirrored by India's **Noise Pollution Rules, 2000**, traffic noise in major Indian cities often surpasses **70 dB**.
- **Profound Health Impacts:** The effects of noise pollution extend far beyond mere annoyance.
 - **Auditory Issues:** Prolonged exposure can cause **tinnitus** (ringing in the ears) and **permanent hearing loss**.
 - **A Chronic Stressor:** The body perceives loud noise as a threat, triggering a chronic stress response that leads to severe non-auditory health problems.

- **Cardiovascular and Other Diseases:** Numerous studies have linked high noise levels to **hypertension, heart disease, sleep disturbances, and impaired cognitive development in children.**
- **Reduced Quality of Life:** It also contributes to reduced productivity, exacerbates mental health conditions, and diminishes the overall quality of urban life.

Three Key Failures in Tackling Noise Pollution in India

- **1. Weak Monitoring and Enforcement:**
 - Unlike air pollution, which is increasingly monitored using advanced technologies, the measurement of noise data is **sporadic, reactive, and incomplete.**
 - Enforcement mechanisms are weak, and responsibility is scattered across multiple authorities, resulting in a lack of accountability and effective action.
- **2. Structural and Cultural Barriers:**
 - There is a significant **lack of public awareness** regarding the serious health risks of noise. Unlike visible smog, noise is often not even perceived as a harmful pollutant.
 - Cultural norms, including the use of loudspeakers for religious processions and noisy celebrations, mean that many citizens both tolerate and actively participate in creating noise pollution.
- **3. Fragmented Governance:**
 - The governance of noise pollution control in India follows a **piecemeal approach.**
 - Jurisdiction is fragmented among **Pollution Control Boards, municipalities, and the police**, with each body having partial responsibility, limited resources, and weak incentives to enforce regulations effectively.

The Path Ahead: A Multi-Pronged Approach

Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive and integrated strategy.

- **Robust Monitoring:** Implement **real-time decibel mapping** systems and develop mobile applications for public reporting to create a comprehensive, city-wide noise database.
- **Stricter Enforcement:** Enforce existing noise regulations vigorously and introduce **graduated penalties** for repeated violations to create a strong deterrent.
- **Integration into Urban Planning:** Urban planning must proactively incorporate noise mitigation measures, such as designing **buffer zones around residential areas, creating green belts, and mandating soundproofing** in sensitive buildings like schools and hospitals.
- **Technological Solutions:** Promote the adoption of quieter technologies, including **electric vehicles, modern construction machinery, sound-absorbing materials**, and intelligent traffic management systems.

- **Public Awareness:** Launch sustained public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the health risks and encourage a cultural shift towards respecting community sound norms.

The Equity Dimension of Noise Pollution Control

- **A Right, Not a Privilege:** The **right to a quiet environment** must be treated as a fundamental component of public health, not a luxury available only to the affluent.
- **Protecting the Vulnerable:** Interventions must be framed with equity in mind, as the most vulnerable urban populations are often the most exposed to high noise levels and lack the means (e.g., soundproof homes, air purifiers) to protect themselves.
- **Political Will and Policy Integration:** Strong political will is needed to integrate noise pollution control measures into **clean air agendas, embed them in urban planning, and make them a priority for public health**, thereby reclaiming the basic human right to quiet.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-health/explained-too-loud-to-ignore-why-indians-should-care-about-noise-pollution-in-cities-10265691/#:~:text=Traffic%20corridors%20in%20Indian%20cities,and%20residents%20of%20informal%20settlements.>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY**DATE: 24.09.2025 TOPIC:** Government

Budgeting (specifically, taxation and fiscal policy)

Introduction: A Transformative Step in India's Tax System

- On September 3, 2025, the 56th GST Council meeting approved a landmark set of reforms, now being termed "**GST 2.0**", aimed at fundamentally simplifying India's indirect tax framework.
- This overhaul is the culmination of consistent advocacy from industry bodies like the **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)**, which highlighted long-standing issues such as complex rate structures, classification disputes, and high compliance burdens, especially for **MSMEs**.
- The reform addresses critical concerns previously raised in the **Economic Survey**, marking a monumental step towards a more efficient and user-friendly tax system with far-reaching implications for all sectors of the economy.

Key Features of the GST 2.0 Reforms

The new framework introduces significant changes to both the tax structure and compliance procedures.

- 1. Revised Three-Tier Tax Structure:**
 - The old, complex four-slab system (5%, 12%, 18%, 28%) has been collapsed into a simpler three-tier structure:
 - ~5%:** For essential, mass-consumption goods.
 - 18%:** A standard rate applicable to most goods and services.
 - 40%:** A new, higher demerit rate for luxury items and sin goods.
- 2. Procedural Simplifications:** The reforms aim to reduce friction and ease the compliance burden for businesses.
 - Easier Stock Adjustments:** Businesses can now manage stock adjustments due to rate changes **without the cumbersome process of relabelling** products.
 - Clearer Classification Norms:** Simplified guidelines have been introduced to minimize ambiguity and reduce litigation over which tax rate applies to a particular product.
 - Faster Refunds:** The process for claiming refunds has been streamlined to improve the liquidity and cash flow for businesses.
 - Simplified Compliance for Small Firms:** Special, less cumbersome compliance procedures have been put in place for MSMEs.

Impact on Various Stakeholders

The reforms are designed to create a positive ripple effect across the economy, benefiting consumers, businesses, and the government.

- **Benefits for Consumers:**

- **Direct Price Reductions:** A vast range of daily-use items, including household goods and small appliances previously taxed at 12% or 18%, will now fall into the 5% or lower slabs, leading to tangible price drops.
- **Widespread Relief:** According to the Finance Minister, **99% of all goods and services** will now be taxed at 18% or less, significantly boosting household purchasing power.
- **Inflation Moderation:** The reduction in taxes on mass-consumption items is expected to help **moderate inflation**.

- **Benefits for Industry and MSMEs:**

- **Reduced Costs and Litigation:** The new structure lowers input costs and the clearer classification norms will reduce legal disputes with tax authorities.
- **Relief from Inverted Duty Structures:** Key sectors like FMCG, textiles, cement, and farm equipment will get major relief from the problem of **inverted duties** (where tax on inputs is higher than on the final product).
- **Improved Business Environment:** A lighter compliance burden, better margins, and improved liquidity will create a more favorable environment for businesses, especially MSMEs, to thrive.

- **Wider Economic Impact:**

- **Consumption-Led Growth:** The reforms are expected to provide a significant **boost to consumption**, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where consumers are highly price-sensitive.
- **Boost to GDP:** Analysts project that the resulting surge in demand could add **over one percentage point** to India's GDP growth.
- **Fiscal Implications:** While the government anticipates a **short-term revenue loss**, it is expected to be offset in the medium to long term by:
 - Higher tax compliance.
 - Increased economic activity and formalization.
 - Overall fiscal buoyancy from a more efficient tax system.

Ensuring Effective Implementation of GST 2.0

The success of these reforms hinges on seamless execution and collaborative effort.

- **Passing on Benefits to Consumers:** A primary challenge is to ensure that the tax cuts are fully passed on to the end consumers and are not absorbed by intermediaries in the supply chain.
- **Administrative Readiness:** The entire tax ecosystem, including the **GST Network (GSTN)**, state revenue departments, and related authorities, must be agile and aligned to ensure a smooth transition.

- **Handholding MSMEs:** A special focus is required to build capacity among smaller firms and MSMEs, which often lack advanced accounting support, to help them navigate the changes.
- **Strong Feedback Mechanisms:** Robust and responsive feedback loops are essential to quickly address any transitional challenges related to unsold stocks, classification confusion, or packaging adjustments.
- **The Foundation of Trust:** The ultimate success of GST 2.0 depends on a foundation of **trust and partnership between the government, industry, and consumers**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/getting-gst-20-to-run-like-a-well-oiled-machine/article70085502.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE

DATE: 24.09.2025

TOPIC: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Modi government has made healthcare an instrument for economic transformation

Introduction: A Fundamental Paradigm Shift in Healthcare Policy

- **From Welfare to Economic Pillar:** India's approach to healthcare has undergone a fundamental transformation. It has shifted from being viewed traditionally as a **welfare measure** (to mitigate the effects of illness) to being recognized as a strategic **pillar of economic growth and human capital development**.
- **The Core Philosophy:** The new approach, championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, strategically links good health to **workforce productivity, income generation, and overall national development**, moving it from a peripheral concern to a central tenet of economic strategy.

Healthcare as an Instrument of Economic Growth

- **Boosting Household Finances:** Healthy households spend less on medical expenses, which reduces their financial vulnerability and increases their **disposable income**. This, in turn, boosts consumption and savings, which are critical drivers of the economy.
- **Enhancing Workforce Productivity:** A healthier population leads to a more reliable and productive workforce. **Preventive healthcare** reduces illness-related absenteeism and ensures that citizens can participate fully and effectively in economic activities.
- **Investment in Human Capital:** In this new paradigm, investing in public health is viewed as a direct investment in the nation's **human capital** and long-term economic productivity.

Key Government Initiatives and their Economic Linkages

- **1. Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY):**

- **Mechanism:** It is the world's largest publicly funded health insurance scheme, providing coverage to over **50 crore vulnerable citizens** for secondary and tertiary care.
- **Economic Impact:** By shielding families from catastrophic **out-of-pocket medical expenses**, the scheme prevents them from falling back into poverty due to illness. It also stimulates the healthcare market by empaneling hospitals and encouraging private investment in infrastructure, especially in underserved areas.
- **2. POSHAN Abhiyan:**
 - **Mechanism:** Launched in 2018, this mission focuses on improving **maternal and child nutrition** through supplementary food, health check-ups, and behavioral change campaigns.
 - **Economic Impact:** By addressing malnutrition and supporting early childhood cognitive development, the scheme lays the foundation for a healthier, more capable future generation, thereby enhancing the nation's **long-term human capital**.
- **3. Jan Aushadhi Kendra:**
 - **Mechanism:** A network of over **16,000 pharmacies** providing quality generic medicines at heavily discounted prices.
 - **Economic Impact:** This initiative ensures the affordability of medicines, allowing households to divert their savings from expensive branded drugs towards other essential needs like **food, education, or small-scale business investments**.
- **4. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao & Swachh Bharat Mission:**
 - **Mechanism:** These initiatives target the broader **social determinants of health**. 'Beti Bachao' promotes girl child education and improves sex ratios, while 'Swachh Bharat' ensures better sanitation and hygiene.
 - **Economic Impact:** A UNICEF report highlights that improved sanitation under the Swachh Bharat Mission has helped rural families save approximately **₹50,000 annually** by reducing illness and associated medical costs.
- **5. Digital Health and Telemedicine:**
 - **Mechanism:** Initiatives like **Ayushman Arogya Mandirs** and other digital platforms enable tele-consultations, electronic medical records, and remote screening.
 - **Economic Impact:** These tools make healthcare more **accessible and efficient**, particularly for rural populations, by reducing travel costs and time, and strengthening the focus on preventive care.

Sustaining the Transformation: Reforms in Medical Education

- **Addressing Supply-Side Gaps:** To ensure a sufficient supply of skilled professionals for this healthcare expansion, India has massively scaled up its medical education infrastructure.
- **Rapid Expansion:** The number of medical colleges has more than doubled from **317 to 780**, resulting in India now producing over **118,000 doctors annually**, the highest number globally.

Vision for 2047 and the Broader Economic Rationale

- **From Vulnerability to Empowerment:** The reforms aim to shift the burden away from the high **out-of-pocket expenditure** that has historically crippled Indian households.
- **Public Finance as a Catalyst:** Government spending in healthcare also acts as **seed capital**, stimulating private entrepreneurship in hospitals, laboratories, and health-tech startups, which creates jobs and deepens service penetration.
- **A Healthier, More Productive Nation:** The long-term vision for 2047 is that a healthier population will enjoy higher life expectancy, greater productivity, and improved incomes, creating a virtuous cycle where health and economic prosperity reinforce each other.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/modi-government-has-made-healthcare-an-instrument-for-economic-transformation-10267424/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 1: INDIAN SOCIETY**DATE: 25.09.2025 TOPIC:** Challenges of

urban infrastructure (drainage, waste management), impact of climate change on urban centers, urban flooding as a critical urban problem.

Follow the rains, not the calendar, to fight floods**1. The Core Problem: A Mismatch Between Planning and Reality**

- **Outdated Climate Paradigm:** Indian cities continue to base their monsoon preparedness on historical, predictable climate patterns, which are no longer relevant.
- **Traditional Preparedness:** Municipal activities, such as de-silting drains and setting up emergency drills, are rigidly tied to a fixed calendar (e.g., pre-June), failing to adapt to the monsoon's shifting timeline.
- **The New Reality:** Climate change has resulted in untimely, erratic, and extremely high-intensity rainfall events that overwhelm urban infrastructure designed for a different era.
- **Widespread Impact:** Recent events in Punjab, Delhi, Gurugram, and Kolkata demonstrate that this is a pan-India problem, not limited to a few coastal cities.

2. Characteristics of Changing Monsoon Patterns in Urban India

- **Increased Intensity over Short Durations:** The nature of rainfall has shifted from prolonged, moderate showers to short, intense cloudbursts (e.g., 50 mm in one hour). This provides cities with very little time to react and causes flash flooding.
- **Higher Frequency of Heavy Rainfall:** Data indicates a significant rise in the number of heavy rainfall days, with 64% of tehsils now experiencing 1 to 15 more such days, especially in states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat.
- **Shift in Monsoon Timelines:** Rainfall events are occurring outside the traditional monsoon calendar, with significant pre-monsoon showers (e.g., Mumbai in May) catching unprepared civic bodies off-guard.
- **Escalating Economic and Human Cost:** Urban floods have become the leading cause of life and property loss among natural disasters, with a single event estimated to cost around ₹8,700 crore.

3. Key Measures for Building Urban Flood Resilience

- **Integrate Sub-Daily Rainfall Data into Planning:**
 - **Move Beyond Averages:** Urban planners must stop using long-term seasonal averages and instead incorporate high-resolution, short-duration (sub-daily) rainfall data into infrastructure design.

- **Real-Time Operations:** This data should be used to operate drainage systems dynamically and issue precise, real-time public alerts.
- **Example in Practice:** The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) plans to upgrade its drains to handle rainfall intensity of up to 120 mm per hour, reflecting this data-driven approach.
- **Align Stormwater and Waste Management Systems:**
 - **Recognize the Interlinkage:** Unmanaged solid waste, particularly plastics and construction debris, is a primary cause of choked drains, which severely exacerbates flooding.
 - **Coordinated Action:** Stormwater management and sanitation departments must work in synergy. Rainfall alerts should automatically trigger joint sanitation drives and inspections of drainage networks.
 - **Example in Practice:** Vijayawada's coordinated monsoon teams, involving drainage, sanitation, and planning departments, have been effective in reducing waterlogging.
- **Update and Modernize Urban Drainage Infrastructure:**
 - **Revise Design Standards:** The Intensity-Duration-Frequency (IDF) curves, which are critical for designing drainage systems, must be updated every 5-10 years to reflect the latest rainfall patterns.
 - **Holistic Design:** Drainage planning should be based on micro-catchment hydrology and local topography, ensuring stormwater drains are separate from sewage networks to prevent overflows.
 - **Example in Practice:** BMC's proposal for a new, comprehensive drainage master plan aims to expand the city's overall stormwater capacity based on current climate realities.
- **Foster a Mindset Shift: From Calendar to Reality:**
 - **Focus on Intensity, Not Volume:** The critical understanding must be that cities flood not because of the total amount of seasonal rain, but because of extreme hourly rainfall that overwhelms the system.
 - **Adaptive Preparedness:** Preparedness must become flexible and data-driven, responding to meteorological forecasts rather than a fixed seasonal schedule.

4. Conclusion: The Way Forward

- Urban flooding is no longer just a consequence of high rainfall volume but a direct result of short, intense, and unpredictable downpours.
- To build resilient cities, India must transition from a reactive, calendar-based approach to a proactive, data-driven strategy.

- This involves coordinated governance between departments, updating infrastructure design with current climate science, and fundamentally realigning urban planning to "follow the rains, not the calendar."

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/follow-the-rains-not-the-calendar-to-fight-floods/article70088641.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE

DATE: 25.09.2025

TOPIC: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Why does Ladakh want to be part of the Sixth Schedule?

1. Core Demands Driving the Protests

- **Statehood for Ladakh:** The primary demand is the elevation of Ladakh from a Union Territory without a legislature to a full-fledged state, which would grant it its own legislative assembly and greater political autonomy.
- **Inclusion in the Sixth Schedule:** Protesters are demanding constitutional safeguards under **Article 244** of the Constitution. This is aimed at protecting Ladakh's unique tribal identity, culture, land rights, and fragile ecology from external pressures and potential exploitation.
- **Purpose of Sixth Schedule:** This constitutional provision allows for the creation of **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** with powers to legislate on matters like land, forests, local governance, and employment, ensuring self-rule for tribal populations.

2. Background and Key Actors in the Agitation

- The protests are being organized by a coalition of local interest groups, primarily the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)**, which represents the Buddhist-majority Leh district.
- Climate activist **Sonam Wangchuk** has emerged as a prominent face of the movement, using a **35-day fast** to draw national attention to Ladakh's demands.
- The agitation has gained significant momentum, unifying different sections of Ladakhi society under a common cause, which recently escalated from peaceful protests to violent unrest in Leh.

3. The Centre's Stance and the Widening Trust Deficit

- **Reluctance to Grant Demands:** The Union Government has so far been unwilling to grant either statehood or Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh.
- **Alternative Proposals:** As a counter-offer, the Centre has proposed measures like **domicile-based job reservations** and strengthening local administrative bodies. However, these are seen

as inadequate by local groups who believe only constitutional safeguards can truly protect their interests.

- **Breakdown in Dialogue:** Formal talks have been stalled for months, creating an impasse. The trust gap has widened due to the Centre's perceived unwillingness to engage with key leaders like Sonam Wangchuk, who was excluded from the delegation for the upcoming talks on October 6.
- **Conditional Negotiations:** Dialogue was only scheduled to resume after the Leh Apex Body replaced Wangchuk with former MP **Thupstan Chhewang** as its chairperson, indicating the Centre's discomfort with Wangchuk's role.

4. Escalating Tensions and Setbacks for Protest Leaders

- The recent protests in Leh marked a significant escalation, turning violent with incidents like the burning of a police vehicle.
- Sonam Wangchuk has consistently appealed for peace and urged the youth to avoid violence, despite growing frustrations over unemployment and land alienation.
- The Ladakh administration's recent cancellation of a **1,000-kanal land allotment** to Wangchuk's Himalayan Institute of Alternatives is perceived by him and his supporters as a retaliatory measure for his activism. This action has further fueled local anger and suspicion.

5. The Leh-Kargil Unity: A Significant Development

- The demands have found resonance across Ladakh, bridging the traditional regional and religious divide between Leh and Kargil.
- The **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)**, representing the Muslim-majority Kargil district, has extended full support to the agitation, echoing the calls for statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion.
- This solidarity, demonstrated by the KDA's call for a *bandh* in Kargil, presents a united front and strengthens the movement's overall political weight. It signals that the concerns are pan-Ladakhi, not confined to one community or district.

6. Way Forward: A Need for Meaningful Dialogue

- The unrest in Ladakh is not merely a law-and-order issue but a manifestation of deep-seated fears regarding the erosion of cultural identity, ecological degradation, and political marginalization.
- Given Ladakh's strategic importance as a sensitive border region, prolonged instability poses a risk to national security.

- The path to resolution lies in **sincere and meaningful dialogue** between the Centre and Ladakh's representatives, backed by concrete assurances that address the core concerns of the Ladakhi people. Failure to do so risks further escalation and alienation.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ladakh-sixth-schedule-10275252/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

DATE: 26.09.2025

TOPIC: India and its Neighbourhood-Relations.

The Saudi-Pakistan deal upends India's strategic thought

1. The Core of the Agreement: A New Strategic Alliance

A **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement** has been formalized between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, signaling a significant deepening of their security relationship.

The pact's most critical clause establishes a collective security principle: **"any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both."** This elevates their partnership from a transactional one to a formal military alliance.

This development directly challenges India's regional security calculations and has created significant apprehension in New Delhi's strategic circles.

2. The Immediate Context: A Setback for Indian Diplomacy

The agreement was announced following a period of heightened India-Pakistan tensions, including a major terror attack in **Pahalgam (April 2025)** and India's retaliatory **"Operation Sindoor."**

India had launched a major diplomatic initiative to **isolate Pakistan** on the global stage. The Saudi-Pakistan pact is a clear indicator that this effort has not succeeded and, in fact, marks a significant diplomatic achievement for Islamabad.

Despite high-level engagement, including visits by Prime Minister Modi to Riyadh and the Saudi Foreign Minister to New Delhi, India's influence was insufficient to prevent the formalization of the pact.

3. Drivers Behind the Saudi-Pakistan Rapprochement

For Saudi Arabia:

Search for Strategic Autonomy: Riyadh is actively pursuing a foreign policy of **multipolarity and multialignment**, reducing its traditional dependence on the US, which it increasingly views as an unreliable partner.

Valued Military Expertise: Saudi Arabia has historically valued the Pakistani military for its combat experience (primarily against India) to enhance its own domestic and regional security, especially after refusing to join the Yemen conflict in 2015 strained ties.

Regional Instability: The shifting geopolitics in West Asia, particularly after the **Hamas attack (Oct 2023)** and the **Israel-Iran "12-day war,"** has compelled Riyadh to solidify traditional alliances.

For Pakistan:

Leveraging Nuclear Status: As the only declared Islamic nuclear power, Pakistan's nuclear capability continues to provide significant strategic dividends, enhancing its influence from Washington to Riyadh. This pact is seen as implicitly linked to the "Islamic bomb" concept.

Countering Indian Influence: The deal serves the dual purpose of strengthening its own security and directly challenging New Delhi's strategic calculus in the region.

Overcoming Isolation: It represents a major success for Pakistan in breaking free from India's attempts at diplomatic quarantine.

4. The Fundamental Resilience of the Saudi-Pakistan Relationship

The analysis points to a **misconception in Indian strategic thought** that it could create an institutional wedge between Pakistan and key Arab states.

The bilateral relationship is not merely transactional; it is deeply rooted in shared **Islam, ideology, and theological principles (specifically Sunnism)**, making it fundamentally resilient to external pressures.

India's interests, while important, remain peripheral to Riyadh's core security considerations, which are intrinsically linked with Pakistan.

5. Key Strategic Implications and Challenges for India

Erosion of Strategic Space: The pact complicates India's two-front challenge. An Indian conflict with Pakistan could now potentially draw in Saudi Arabia, at least diplomatically or logistically, if not militarily.

The Nuclear Overhang: It brings the challenge of the "**Islamic bomb**" back into focus, raising concerns about potential nuclear cooperation or proliferation that could destabilize West Asia and directly impact Indian security.

Limits of Multialignment: The deal demonstrates a key challenge in India's own foreign policy. While India pursues multialignment, its major partners (like Saudi Arabia) are doing the same, which can lead them to take positions directly contrary to India's core strategic interests.

A Call for Strategic Re-evaluation: The development exposes a **disconnect between India's culturally risk-averse strategic thinking** and the rapidly evolving, disruptive global reality. A passive, "fence-sitting" approach is shown to be inadequate.

6. The Concluding Message: An Imperative for Decisive Action

The world is undergoing a profound geopolitical reshaping and will not wait for what India perceives as "**its time.**"

Pakistan and its military have proven adept at leveraging disruptions in the global order to their strategic advantage.

India must move beyond its idealistic or pacifist roles and **embrace the risks associated with the exercise and mobilization of power.**

It is imperative for Indian leadership to make accurate strategic calculations and act with **decisive resolve** to shape the rules of the new international order, as another opportunity may not arise this century.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-saudi-pakistan-deal-upends-indias-strategic-thought/article70093765.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE & HEALTH

DATE: 26.09.2025

TOPIC: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

It's OK to use paracetamol in pregnancy. Here's what the science says about the link with autism

1. The Context: Misinformation vs. Medical Consensus

Recent claims by a high-profile public figure have reignited unsubstantiated fears linking the use of **paracetamol (acetaminophen)** during pregnancy to **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** in children.

This has created confusion and anxiety among expectant mothers regarding a commonly used and medically approved drug.

The global medical and scientific community, including the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, has firmly refuted these claims, emphasizing that they are not supported by robust scientific evidence.

2. The Scientific Consensus on Paracetamol's Safety

Safest Option: Paracetamol is globally recognized as one of the **safest and most essential medications** for managing pain and fever during pregnancy.

Essential for Maternal Health: Effectively treating fever is crucial, as high maternal fever, if left untreated, can pose significant risks to fetal development.

Long-Term Safety Record: The drug has been used by millions of pregnant women for decades worldwide with no established causal link to neurodevelopmental disorders.

Global Endorsement: Leading health authorities continue to recommend its use in prescribed doses, reinforcing its status as a safe and necessary medication.

3. Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Complex Developmental Condition: ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior, with symptoms typically appearing in early childhood.

Multi-Factorial Causes: Scientists agree that the causes of autism are complex and involve an interplay of **genetic, biological, and environmental factors**.

No Single Cause Identified: Crucially, no single drug, medication, or specific environmental exposure has been scientifically proven to be a direct cause of autism.

Rising Diagnosis Rates: The increase in global autism rates is largely attributed to **greater public awareness, improved diagnostic methods, and a broader definition of the spectrum**, rather than a new environmental or medical trigger.

4. The Critical Flaw in the Argument: Association is Not Causation

Some observational studies have noted a statistical "**association**" between prolonged or high-dose paracetamol use in pregnancy and a slightly higher incidence of conditions like ADHD or autism.

Confounding Factors: Experts stress that this association is likely influenced by **confounding variables**. For example, the underlying illness (like a severe infection) that necessitated the use of paracetamol could be the actual contributing factor, not the medication itself.

Lack of Causal Evidence: No high-quality, controlled scientific study has ever established a direct **cause-and-effect relationship** between responsible paracetamol use and the development of autism.

5. The Dangers of Avoiding Necessary Medication

Avoiding safe and recommended medications due to unfounded fears can lead to greater harm.

Untreated maternal infections (e.g., influenza) and high fevers can significantly increase the risk of developmental complications in the fetus.

Therefore, the risk of not treating a genuine medical issue in a pregnant woman is far greater than the unproven risk associated with taking paracetamol.

6. Way Forward: Prioritizing Evidence-Based Care

The public and policymakers should rely on **evidence-based science** rather than anecdotal claims or misinformation, especially in matters of public health.

Paracetamol remains the safest recommended option for pain and fever management during pregnancy.

The focus should remain on ensuring maternal safety, promoting responsible medication use, and investing in **early identification and intervention strategies** to support children with autism and other developmental challenges.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/its-ok-to-use-paracetamol-in-pregnancy-science-link-with-autism-10268557/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY

DATE: 27.09.2025 TOPIC:

INFRASTRUCTURE

Upgrading shipyards: On strengthening India's shipbuilding infrastructure

1. The New Government Initiative: A ₹69,725 Crore Shipbuilding Package

- The Government of India has announced a comprehensive **₹69,725 crore package** to rejuvenate the nation's shipbuilding and maritime industry, replacing an earlier, largely unsuccessful 2015 policy.
- **Primary Goal:** The central aim is to significantly expand India's merchant shipbuilding capacity to **4.5 million Gross Tonnage (GT)**, addressing the current negligible capacity for large commercial vessels.
- **Core Objectives:**
 - **Modernize Shipyards:** Upgrade existing shipyards with state-of-the-art technology, advanced management practices, and expanded infrastructure.
 - **Develop Ancillary Ecosystems:** Promote the creation of new shipyards within industrial clusters that include dedicated factories for shipbuilding components, thereby strengthening the domestic supply chain.
 - **Support Shipowners:** Provide robust financial support and incentives to encourage Indian shipowners to place orders for new vessels with domestic shipyards.

2. Persistent Challenges in Indian Shipbuilding

- **Technological and Infrastructural Deficiencies:**
 - Most Indian shipyards lack the necessary length and high-capacity cranes (1,000+ tonnes) required for modern prefabrication and modular construction techniques.
 - There is insufficient space for assembly-line processes, which are standard in leading shipbuilding nations.
- **Weak Ancillary Industry:** The domestic supply chain for essential ship components is underdeveloped and fragmented, leading to significant bottlenecks, import dependence, and delays.
- **Extended Construction Timelines:** Due to these constraints, the typical construction time for a ship in India is **2-3 years**. This long gestation period locks up capital and makes Indian shipyards uncompetitive.
- **Lack of Investor Confidence:** The combination of long delays and high costs has historically discouraged Indian shipowners from ordering new builds domestically, even when subsidies were available.

3. Indian Shipbuilding vs. Global Best Practices: A Comparative Analysis

Feature	Indian Shipyards (Current State)	Global Leaders (S. Korea, Japan, China)
Construction Method	Traditional, piece-by-piece construction within the dry dock.	Prefabrication & Assembly Line: Large ship blocks are built separately and then assembled in the dry dock.
Infrastructure	Limited dock length and crane capacity (often below 100 tonnes).	Extensive dry docks with high-capacity cranes (1,000+ tonnes) for moving large prefabricated sections.
Construction Time	2–3 years from first steel to sea trials.	Approx. 1 year. Keel-laying to making the ship waterborne takes only 3–4 months .
Ancillary Ecosystem	Weak and fragmented, causing supply chain bottlenecks.	Strong, integrated, and co-located ancillary clusters ensuring timely supply of components.
Capital Efficiency	Low, due to long construction periods and delayed returns on investment.	High, due to rapid turnover and efficient assembly-line production.

4. A Strategic Roadmap for India's Shipbuilding Success

- **Adopt an Incremental Approach:** India should begin by focusing on building capabilities for smaller vessels (**500 GT and above**) and gradually scale up to larger merchant ships as expertise and infrastructure improve.
- **Provide Long-Term Demand Assurance (Crucial Step):**
 - Financial incentives like infrastructure status are insufficient on their own. The most critical factor is providing **demand visibility** to shipowners.
 - This can be achieved through **guaranteed offtake contracts** and **long-term time charters**, especially for public sector undertakings (PSUs) importing coal or crude oil.
- **Integrate with National Strategic Projects:**
 - India missed a key opportunity to link its **green fuel hub projects** (e.g., in Kakinada and Kochi) with the shipbuilding sector by mandating the construction of green-fuel-powered ships.
 - Future policies must integrate shipbuilding with national energy, trade, and environmental goals to create a self-sustaining demand cycle.
- **Implement a Holistic Ecosystem Approach:**
 - The success of the new package depends on the simultaneous development of three pillars:
 1. **Modernized Shipyards** with advanced technology.
 2. A **Trained and Skilled Workforce**.
 3. **Guaranteed Offtake Agreements** to ensure financial viability for shipowners.

5. Conclusion: Beyond Financial Packages

The success of India's ambitious shipbuilding plan cannot be guaranteed by financial outlays alone. The core challenge lies in execution. For India to become a competitive global player, it must move beyond subsidies and focus on creating a structurally sound ecosystem. This requires **modernizing shipyard infrastructure to reduce construction time, developing a robust ancillary industry, and, most importantly, ensuring long-term contracts that give shipowners the confidence to invest in 'Made in India' vessels.** Without this integrated strategy, the risk of repeating past failures remains high.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/upgrading-shipyards-on-strengthening-indias-shipbuilding-infrastructure/article70098292.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

DATE: 27.09.2025

TOPIC: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

India needs a plan

1. The Geopolitical Shift: China's Renunciation of SDT

- China has officially announced at the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** that it will no longer seek benefits under the "**Special and Differential Treatment**" (**SDT**) provisions.
- **What is SDT?** SDT provisions are a cornerstone of the WTO framework, allowing developing countries preferential treatment, such as longer periods to implement agreements and the flexibility to maintain certain trade protections and subsidies.
- **China's Signal:** By foregoing SDT, China is projecting its status as a mature global economic superpower. This move implicitly challenges other major developing nations, particularly India, to reconsider their own long-standing reliance on these trade concessions.

2. India's Vulnerability: Over-reliance on a Protective Shield

- Historically, India has heavily depended on SDT provisions to protect its nascent and vulnerable domestic sectors from the full force of global competition.
- China's decision creates diplomatic pressure and weakens the collective bargaining position of developing countries, making it harder for India to justify its continued use of SDT in future WTO negotiations.
- This development necessitates a fundamental reassessment of India's trade policy, moving from a defensive, protectionist stance to a more proactive and competitive one.

3. Sector-Specific Exposure and Risks for India

- **Agricultural Sector:**

- This sector is **highly exposed** as millions of small and marginal farmers are shielded by subsidies and trade barriers (e.g., high tariffs on imports).
- A forced reduction in these protections could lead to **depressed rural incomes**, increased **volatility in food prices**, and a potential rise in **malnutrition**, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable populations.
- Ongoing WTO disputes, such as those concerning India's sugar subsidies, highlight the country's precarious position if it fails to adapt its policies.

- **Pharmaceuticals and Digital Services:**

- Sectors like pharmaceuticals, e-commerce, and digital services also rely on regulatory safeguards and state support.
- Phasing out protections could undermine domestic firms, especially Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), by exposing them to intense competition from large foreign corporations.

4. A Recommended Multi-Pronged Strategy for India

- **1. Domestic Modernization and Regulatory Reform:**

- India must enhance the competitiveness of its domestic industries by strengthening regulatory frameworks and institutions.
- This includes bolstering platforms like the **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** to empower MSMEs in digital trade and investing in technology to drive productivity.

- **2. Calibrated and Phased Subsidy Reduction:**

- Rather than an abrupt removal of protections, India should adopt a **phased and gradual approach** to subsidy rationalization.
- This allows domestic industries and vulnerable populations time to adjust to the new competitive landscape.
- **In agriculture**, this could involve pairing subsidy reductions with targeted support mechanisms like **crop insurance**, **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)**, and investment in rural infrastructure (e.g., cold storage, supply chains).

- **3. Proactive and Strategic WTO Engagement:**

- India needs to shift from a purely defensive posture to one of **active and pragmatic negotiation** within the WTO.
- The goal should be to find a middle ground that balances the need for market access with critical national priorities like **food security, public health, and sustainable development**.

- **4. Long-Term Vision for Self-Reliance and Competitiveness:**

- Tactical trade negotiations must be part of a broader **long-term industrial and digital policy**.
- This vision should focus on boosting domestic capabilities through sustained investments in **innovation, research & development, and export diversification**.
- The ultimate aim is to reduce India's dependence on preferential treatment and build an economy that can compete on its own strengths.

5. Way Forward: A Wake-Up Call for Action

- China's decision is a critical "**wake-up call**" for India, signaling the end of an era where developing countries could indefinitely rely on protective trade measures.
- India must urgently formulate a **comprehensive, forward-looking plan** that integrates domestic reforms with strategic global engagement.
- By doing so, India can not only protect its vulnerable sectors but also enhance its overall trade resilience, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth in a more competitive global environment.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-needs-a-plan-10273739/>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 3: ECONOMY**DATE: 29.09.2025 TOPIC:** Food

Processing and Related Industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.

What an empty plate of food should symbolise**1. The Scale and Impact of India's Post-Harvest Losses**

- **A Silent Crisis:** The **International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (IDAFWL)**, observed on September 29, highlights the critical issue of food loss, which undermines both food and climate security.
- **Massive Economic Toll:** India incurs an annual economic loss of **₹1.5 trillion** due to post-harvest losses, which is equivalent to approximately **3.7% of its agricultural GDP**.
- **High Vulnerability in Perishables:** The losses are most severe for high-value perishable goods, with **fruits and vegetables** experiencing losses between **10–15%**. Even staple grains like **paddy (4.8%)** and **wheat (4.2%)** suffer significant losses.
- **Compounded Resource Wastage:** Every tonne of food lost represents a squandering of embedded resources, including nutrition, water, energy, and human labor, thereby intensifying the climate crisis.

2. Key Findings from National and Global Studies

- **Systematic Monitoring:** India has aligned its National Indicator Framework with **SDG Target 12.3.1 (Global Food Loss and Waste)**, enabling systematic tracking and enhancing accountability.
- **Significant GHG Emissions:** A collaborative study by the **FAO and NIFTEM** revealed that food loss from just 30 key commodities generates over **33 million tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions** annually.
 - Losses in **cereals (especially paddy)** are a major contributor, accounting for over **10 million tonnes of CO₂e** due to rice cultivation's high methane intensity.
 - Losses in **livestock products** are particularly damaging due to the resource-intensive nature of their production.
- **India vs. High-Income Countries:** A key distinction in the pattern of food wastage is:
 - **In India:** The majority of food loss occurs early in the supply chain—during **handling, processing, and distribution**—due to infrastructure gaps.
 - **In High-Income Countries:** Waste is predominantly a **consumer-level problem**, where purchased food is discarded.

3. A Multi-Pronged Approach to Mitigating Food Loss

- **1. Strengthening Infrastructure:**

- The primary cause of post-harvest loss in India is weak and fragmented infrastructure.
- **Cold Chains** are critical for reducing spoilage in perishables. This includes pre-cooling facilities, refrigerated transport, and modern storage units.
- Government initiatives like the **Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (PMKSY)** are focused on creating modern food logistics and processing infrastructure.
- **2. Deploying Affordable Technology:**
 - **For Smallholders:** Low-cost solutions like **solar-powered cold storage, perishable crates, and moisture-proof grain silos** can empower small and marginal farmers to significantly reduce spoilage at the farm gate.
- **3. Leveraging Digital Tools:**
 - Modern technologies like **IoT sensors** and **AI-driven forecasting** can optimize storage conditions, transportation routes, and distribution networks, thereby minimizing bottlenecks and waste.
 - The **FAO's Food Loss App (FLAPP)** is a digital tool that enables tracking of losses across the value chain, helping identify hotspots for intervention.
- **4. Adopting a Circular Economy Model:**
 - **Redirecting Surplus:** At the retail and consumption level, surplus edible food should be redirected to **food banks, community kitchens**, and charitable organizations.
 - **Waste-to-Wealth:** Unavoidable food waste can be converted into valuable resources such as **compost, animal feed, or bioenergy**, closing the loop and reducing landfill burden.

4. Shared Responsibility: A Collective Call to Action 🤝

- **Government's Role:**
 - Integrate food loss reduction targets into national **climate action plans (e.g., NDCs)**.
 - Invest in building resilient supply chain infrastructure and provide policy support (subsidies, credit guarantees) for adopting loss-reduction technologies.
- **Business and Private Sector's Role:**
 - Adopt **circular economy models** to minimize waste and create value from by-products.
 - Invest in and scale up innovative solutions for storage, transport, and distribution.
- **Civil Society and Academia's Role:**
 - Conduct research to map food loss hotspots and identify evidence-based solutions.
 - Run public awareness campaigns to educate consumers about mindful consumption.

- **Consumer's Role:**

- Make conscious purchasing and consumption choices to avoid household food waste.
- Actively support and participate in food redistribution programs.

5. Conclusion: The True Symbol of an Empty Plate

The challenge of food loss in India is substantial, but it is not insurmountable. A combination of **modern infrastructure, accessible technology, circular economy principles, and collective action** from all stakeholders can create a more efficient and sustainable food system. The IDAFLW serves as a crucial reminder that saving food is synonymous with conserving resources, protecting livelihoods, and strengthening our fight against climate change. An empty plate should be a symbol of a meal enjoyed and nourishment received, not of resources squandered from farm to fork.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/what-an-empty-plate-of-food-should-symbolise/article70106079.ece#:~:text=Saving%20food%20means%20saving%20the,meal%20enjoyed%2C%20not%20resources%20squandered.>

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION**DATE: 30.09.2025 TOPIC:** Bilateral,

Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

South-South and Triangular Cooperation is more than a diplomatic phrase**1. Foundations and Core Principles of SSTC**

- **Historical Roots:** The framework for SSTC was established by the **Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) in 1978**, which laid the groundwork for technical cooperation among developing nations of the Global South. The **UN Day for SSTC** is celebrated on September 12 to commemorate this milestone.
- **Guiding Values:** SSTC is built on the principles of **solidarity, mutual respect, and shared learning**, distinguishing it from traditional North-South donor-recipient aid models.
- **A Complementary Framework:** It is not a replacement for but a critical **supplement to conventional aid**, offering a more agile and contextually relevant approach to development, especially in a world facing geopolitical tensions and shrinking development funds.
- **Unique Advantages:** SSTC is highly valued for its **cost-effectiveness, replicability, and higher returns on investment**, as solutions are often developed in similar socio-economic contexts, making them easier to adapt.

2. India's Leadership and Contributions to the Global South

- **Philosophical Underpinning:** India's engagement in SSTC is driven by its ancient philosophy of "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**" (the world is one family), positioning it as a voice for sovereignty, inclusion, and mutual respect.
- **Key Diplomatic Initiatives:**
 - Hosted the **Voice of the Global South Summits** to consolidate the perspectives and priorities of developing nations.
 - Successfully championed the inclusion of the **African Union** as a permanent member of the G-20 during its presidency.
- **Institutional Mechanisms for Development Partnership:**
 - Established the **Development Partnership Administration** to streamline its development assistance.
 - Expanded the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** programme to over 160 countries, offering capacity-building and skill development.

- Launched the **India-UN Development Partnership Fund**, which has financed over 75 projects in 56 developing countries, with a focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- **Sharing Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** India is actively promoting its successful digital solutions like **Aadhaar and UPI** as replicable models for other developing countries to enhance financial inclusion and governance.
- **Collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP):**
 - A six-decade partnership has yielded innovative and scalable solutions for food security.
 - Initiatives like **Annapurta (Grain ATM)**, optimization of the Public Distribution System (PDS), and the national rice fortification project have not only strengthened India's own food safety net but also offer valuable models for other nations.

3. The Expanding Role and Global Support for SSTC

- **Triangular Cooperation:** This model enhances SSTC by connecting developing nations, traditional donors (from the Global North), and emerging donors. It facilitates the sharing of best practices, unlocks additional resources, and fosters greater trust and accountability.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** Effective and sustainable development requires partnerships that go beyond governments to include **civil society, the private sector, and grassroots communities**.
- **Growing Global Momentum:**
 - The **UN Fund for South-South Cooperation** has received contributions from over 47 governments, with its projects benefiting 155 nations.
 - In 2024, the WFP mobilized **\$10.9 million** from Global South countries and the private sector specifically for SSTC projects aimed at achieving **SDG 2: Zero Hunger**.

4. Conclusion: A Pathway to a Fairer Future

- SSTC is more than a diplomatic phrase; it is a **powerful and practical tool for transformation**, especially with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development deadline approaching.
- It provides a **lifeline for billions** by offering frugal, innovative, and replicable solutions to complex challenges like food insecurity, climate change, and inequality.
- By fostering a renewed spirit of partnership that values the contributions of all nations, SSTC offers a clear roadmap toward a **more equitable, sustainable, and resilient global future**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/sstc-is-more-than-a-diplomatic-phrase/article70109816.ece>

EDITORIAL: THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES I: GEOGRAPHY**DATE: 30.09.2025**

TOPIC: Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent)

India wins second mineral exploration contract in the Indian Ocean: What is this, why it matters

1. Context: India's Milestone in Deep-Sea Exploration

- India has achieved a significant milestone by becoming the **first country** to secure two separate exploration contracts with the **International Seabed Authority (ISA)** for **Polymetallic Sulphides (PMS)** in the Indian Ocean.
- This positions India as a key player in the race for deep-sea minerals, which are critical for the global transition to renewable energy and advanced electronics.

2. Understanding Polymetallic Sulphides (PMS)

- Formation:** PMS are mineral-rich deposits that form around **hydrothermal vents** on the ocean floor. Superheated, mineral-rich water ejected from these vents cools and precipitates, creating chimney-like structures containing high concentrations of valuable metals.
- Strategic Importance of Metals:** These deposits are rich in **copper, nickel, cobalt, gold, silver, zinc, and rare earth elements**. These metals are indispensable for green technologies like **EV batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines**, making their sourcing a matter of national and economic security.

3. Details of India's Exploration Contracts with the ISA

- Dual Exploration Zones:** Unlike other nations with single-zone contracts, India now manages two distinct exploration areas for PMS, giving it a strategic advantage.
 - Central Indian Ocean Ridge (CIR):** A contract for a **10,000 sq km** area secured in 2016.
 - Carlsberg Ridge (CR):** A new contract for a **2,239 sq km** area located strategically near the Lakshadweep islands.
- Strategic Value of Carlsberg Ridge:** The CR zone's proximity to India's maritime boundaries enhances logistical feasibility and strengthens India's access to vital resources close to home.

4. Multi-Faceted Significance for India

- Ensuring Resource Security:** By securing its own deep-sea mineral sources, India can reduce its dependence on volatile and often monopolized foreign supply chains for critical metals like cobalt and nickel, which are essential for its "Make in India" and green energy ambitions.

- **Geopolitical Leverage in the Indian Ocean:** In the face of increasing Chinese presence and interest in the Indian Ocean's resources, these contracts solidify India's strategic footprint and reinforce its role as a leading and responsible maritime power in the region.
- **Boosting Scientific and Technological Prowess:** The exploration push drives indigenous innovation in oceanography, deep-sea robotics, and geology. Institutions like the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)** are at the forefront of developing the niche technologies required for such missions.
- **Advancing the Blue Economy:** This initiative is a cornerstone of India's **Deep Ocean Mission** and aligns perfectly with its vision for a sustainable "**Blue Economy**"—leveraging marine resources for economic growth while ensuring environmental protection.

5. Overcoming the Challenges Ahead

- **Technological Hurdles:** Extracting minerals from extreme depths (3,000–6,000 meters) requires highly sophisticated and expensive technology, including remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) and pressure-resistant equipment, much of which is still under development in India.
- **Ecological Concerns:** Deep-sea mining poses a significant threat to fragile and often unique hydrothermal vent ecosystems. The potential for irreversible damage to marine biodiversity is a major concern, and the full ecological impact remains poorly understood.
- **Economic Viability:** Deep-sea mining is a capital-intensive, high-risk venture. The commercial feasibility depends heavily on global metal prices, and the high costs of exploration and extraction could outweigh the benefits if market conditions are unfavorable.

6. The Path Forward: India's Deep Ocean Mission

- India's contracts are for a **15-year exploration phase**, which involves detailed surveys, resource assessment, and environmental impact studies. Commercial extraction can only be considered after this phase is successfully completed and approved by the ISA.
- The **Deep Ocean Mission (launched in 2021)** is the government's flagship program to build capacity in this domain. Key components include:
 - Developing technology for mining polymetallic nodules and sulphides.
 - Creating a manned submersible ("**Samudrayaan**") capable of diving to 6,000 meters.
 - Establishing onshore processing plants for extracted minerals.
- A responsible and phased approach, potentially involving international collaboration on technology and environmental safeguards, will be crucial for success.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-pms-exploration-carlsberg-ridge-indian-ocean-significance-10278691/lite/>