

Editorial of the Day – 13.03.2026

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1. Reforming choice-based education (TH)

General Studies Paper- GS II (Governance & Social Justice)

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

Sub-Topic- Higher Education Reforms, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and Institutional Governance.

1. Introduction

The Indian higher education landscape is undergoing a paradigm shift from a rigid, "one-size-fits-all" model to a flexible, learner-centric system. The introduction of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic move to institutionalize multidisciplinary learning. However, the gap between policy ideals—such as personalized academic pathways—and the ground reality of classroom constraints remains a significant challenge for systemic reform.

2. The Shift Toward Student-Centric Education

Personalization- Moving away from standardized curricula to focus on individual student abilities, needs, and career aspirations.

Inclusivity- Recognizing diverse talents by allowing students to define their own academic journey.

Learner-Centred Pedagogy- A fundamental transition where the student, rather than the teacher or the institution, becomes the focal point of the educational process.

3. Emergence of Multidisciplinary Learning

Academic Pathways- Students are no longer confined to "streams." They can now pursue diverse combinations, such as majoring in Physics while minoring in Music.

Holistic Understanding- Cross-disciplinary exposure is designed to provide a broader worldview, breaking the "silos" of traditional academic departments.

Transdisciplinary Approach- Encouraging the application of knowledge across different fields to solve complex, real-world problems.

4. The "Illusion of Choice"- Gaps in Implementation

Despite the promises of the Choice-Based Credit and Semester System (CBCSS) introduced in 2009, several limitations emerged-

Inconsistent Credits- Disparities in credit allocation and teaching hours across different departments.

Departmental Control- Electives were often pre-determined by departments based on faculty availability rather than student preference.

Core Dominance- The majority of courses remained compulsory, leaving very little room for genuine "open courses" or external electives.

5. Structural and Institutional Challenges

The successful implementation of FYUGP faces deep-seated structural hurdles-

Resource Constraints- Poor student-teacher ratios and large class sizes make personalized mentoring nearly impossible.

Faculty Burden- Heavy workloads for teachers limit their ability to innovate or support multidisciplinary pathways.

Outdated Evaluation- Traditional, rote-learning-based examination systems are incompatible with flexible, skill-based multidisciplinary learning.

Infrastructure Gaps- Many institutions lack the digital and physical infrastructure required to support inter-college or inter-departmental mobility.

6. Conclusion

Reforming choice-based education is an essential step toward making India a global knowledge superpower. However, flexibility must be more than a symbolic policy promise. For FYUGP to succeed, it requires a systemic transformation—including teacher training, pedagogical innovation, and massive infrastructure investment—to translate "choice" from an abstract concept into a meaningful classroom reality.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reforming-choice-based-education/article70732453.ece>

Question

"Discuss the transformative potential of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) in fostering a student-centric higher education ecosystem in India. To what extent do institutional and structural constraints hinder its effective realization? (250 Words, 15 Marks)"

1. Introduction

The Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP), introduced under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, represents a paradigm shift from a rigid "one-size-fits-all" model to a flexible, multidisciplinary framework. By early 2026, over 300 universities in India have commenced its implementation, aiming to foster holistic development and align Indian education with international standards.

2. Transformative Potential of FYUGP

Multidisciplinary Flexibility- Students are no longer confined to traditional "streams." The ability to combine Major and Minor subjects (e.g., Physics with Philosophy) breaks down academic silos.

Multiple Entry and Exit Points- The system provides flexibility to exit with a certificate, diploma, or degree, reducing the stigma and loss of time associated with dropouts.

Research Integration- The fourth year is dedicated to research, bridging the gap between undergraduate studies and doctoral programs, thereby fostering a culture of innovation.

Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)- The digital storage of credits via the APAAR ID system facilitates seamless mobility between institutions.

3. Institutional and Structural Constraints

Despite the visionary policy, several "classroom realities" act as bottlenecks-

Resource and Faculty Shortages- Many state and private universities suffer from high student-teacher ratios. The burden of mentoring students through personalized pathways often overwhelms existing faculty.

The "Illusion of Choice"- In practice, many colleges restrict elective options based on available faculty expertise rather than student interest, rendering the "choice" symbolic.

Evaluation Lag- While the curriculum emphasizes skills, the evaluation systems often remain rooted in traditional, rote-learning-based summative exams.

Administrative Silos- Lack of coordination between departments hinders the scheduling of multidisciplinary classes, often leading to time-table clashes for students opting for cross-disciplinary minors.

4. The Way Forward

The success of choice-based education depends on systemic restructuring. This involves–

Capacity Building– Extensive teacher training to handle new pedagogical and multidisciplinary demands.

Infrastructure Investment– Upgrading digital and physical infrastructure to support the Academic Bank of Credits and inter-departmental mobility.

Granting Autonomy– Providing colleges with greater autonomy to design innovative, local-needs-based curriculum modules.

5. Conclusion

The FYUGP is an essential step toward making India a global knowledge hub. However, for the policy to translate into real learning opportunities, the focus must shift from mere "rollout numbers" to addressing the grassroots institutional gaps. True student-centricity will be achieved only when the administrative flexibility matches the academic intent.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reforming-choice-based-education/article70732453.ece>

2. Inflation rose to 3.21% in February, but US-Israel-Iran war impact yet to be felt (IE)

General Studies Paper– GS III (Economic Development)

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

Sub-Topic– Inflation Dynamics, Monetary Policy, CPI Revision, and Global Geopolitics.

1. Introduction

In February 2026, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation witnessed a moderate uptick to 3.21%, up from 2.74% in January. While inflation has remained below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) medium-term target of 4% for over a year, new challenges have emerged. Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia, particularly involving Iran and the strategic Strait of Hormuz, pose a significant risk to global energy prices, which could soon spill over into India's domestic inflation trajectory.

2. Understanding Inflation & the New CPI Framework

Core Definition– Inflation is the sustained rise in the general price level, which erodes purchasing power and impacts economic stability.

Primary Indicator– The CPI is the retail inflation index used by the RBI to steer its monetary policy decisions.

The 2024 Base Year Revision– India recently updated the CPI series with 2024 as the base year. This revision incorporates updated consumption patterns from the 2023–24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, making the index more representative of modern Indian spending.

3. Analysis of Current Inflation Trends (Feb 2026)

India's current price stability is characterized by "localized" spikes rather than generalized inflation–

The Food Basket– Food inflation rose to 3.47%. Specific vegetables like Tomato (45%) and Cauliflower (44%) saw sharp spikes, while Onion (–28%) and Potato (–18%) prices cooled, providing a balancing effect.

Precious Metals Surge– A major contributor to the headline rise was the inflation in Gold (48%) and Silver jewellery (161%), driven by global market volatility.

Core Inflation Stability– Core inflation (excluding food and fuel) remained stable at 3.4%. Notably, if precious metals are excluded, the "adjusted core inflation" drops to a low 2%, suggesting very limited underlying price pressure across most sectors.

4. Global Geopolitics and Energy Risks

The primary threat to future stability is external-

The Strait of Hormuz Crisis- Nearly 20% of global oil supply passes through this channel. Tensions involving Iran have pushed crude oil prices toward \$120 per barrel.

Transmission Mechanism- High crude prices lead to increased costs for fuel, transport, and fertilizers, eventually causing "cost-push" inflation in the domestic market.

Lagged Effect- Since these tensions intensified in late February, the full impact is expected to manifest in the March and April 2026 inflation data.

5. Monetary Policy and Management Framework

Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT)- The RBI is mandated to keep CPI inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of $\pm 2\%$.

Policy Tools- Management is achieved through repo rate adjustments, liquidity control, and open market operations.

Fiscal Coordination- The government supports the RBI through supply-side measures, such as food subsidies, export restrictions on essentials, and strategic petroleum reserve management.

6. The Way Forward

To maintain price stability amidst global volatility, India must focus on-

Supply-Side Infrastructure- Enhancing agricultural cold chains and logistics to reduce the volatility of food items.

Energy Diversification- Expanding renewables and securing long-term import contracts to reduce "crude-dependence."

Data-Driven Policy- Utilizing real-time price monitoring and the revised CPI basket for quick policy responses.

Diplomatic Engagement- Strengthening trade ties with energy-producing regions to mitigate the economic fallout of West Asian conflicts.

7. Conclusion

India's inflation dynamics in early 2026 reflect a resilient domestic economy that has successfully managed internal pressures. However, the shadow of global geoeconomic rivalry and energy price shocks looms large. Sustaining the current stability will require a delicate balance between prudent monetary policy and aggressive supply-side management to ensure that external shocks do not derail India's growth momentum.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/india-retail-inflation-february-2026-cpi-data-nso-new-series-10578368/lite/>

Question

"India's transition to a revised CPI base year in 2024 reflects an attempt to capture modern consumption patterns. Analyze the current drivers of retail inflation in India and evaluate the risks posed by 'imported inflation' due to West Asian geopolitical volatility." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

In February 2026, India's retail inflation stood at 3.21%, well within the RBI's target band. This stability is supported by the 2024 CPI revision, which better aligns policy with actual household expenditure. However, the rise of "geopolitical risk premiums" in the oil market presents a new challenge for the inflation-targeting framework.

2. Current Drivers of Retail Inflation

Localised Food Volatility- Current spikes are primarily "item-specific" (e.g., Tomatoes and Cauliflower) rather than a general surge in the food basket.

The 'Precious Metal' Factor- A significant portion of the core inflation uptick is due to the global surge in gold and silver, reflecting global safe-haven buying.

Low Underlying Momentum– Adjusted for precious metals, core inflation remains at a low 2%, indicating that domestic demand is not yet causing "overheating" of the economy.

3. Risks of Imported Inflation

Energy Price Pass-Through– As a net oil importer, a spike to \$120/barrel (due to the Strait of Hormuz tensions) directly raises the transport and logistics costs for all commodities.

Fertiliser and Input Costs– High energy prices increase the cost of natural gas—a key input for urea—potentially raising the government's subsidy burden or food prices.

Currency Depreciation– Global uncertainty often leads to capital flight to the US Dollar, weakening the Rupee and making all imports (electronic components, edible oils) more expensive.

4. Conclusion

While India's internal inflation dynamics are currently stable, the "imported" component remains the Achilles' heel. To counter this, the RBI must remain vigilant in its "higher-for-longer" interest rate stance, while the government accelerates energy diversification and strategic reserve building to buffer against West Asian shocks.

Source– <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/india-retail-inflation-february-2026-cpi-data-nso-new-series-10578368/lite/>

3. Indian Fertilizers' Hormuz Choke (BL)

General Studies Paper– General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & Agriculture

Topic– Agriculture and allied sectors – inputs, subsidies, and supply chains.

Sub-Topic– Impact of geopolitical events on India's economy

Introduction

India's agriculture sector is highly dependent on fertilizer imports, particularly for key nutrients like phosphatic and potassic fertilizers. The Strait of Hormuz, a critical global chokepoint, plays a vital role in transporting these inputs. Geopolitical tensions affecting this route can disrupt supply chains, leading to price volatility, fiscal stress, and food inflation in India.

1. India's Dependence on Fertilizer Imports

1. India imports a significant share of fertilizer inputs such as urea, DAP, and potash.
2. Domestic production is insufficient to meet agricultural demand, especially for non-urea fertilizers.
3. Import dependence makes India vulnerable to global supply disruptions and price fluctuations.

2. Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

1. The Strait of Hormuz is a key maritime route for energy and fertilizer raw material shipments from the Gulf region.
2. Any disruption in this chokepoint affects global energy prices and input costs for fertilizers.
3. Closure or instability in the region can lead to supply shortages and increased import costs.

3. Impact on Indian Economy and Agriculture

Rising Input Costs

1. Disruptions increase fertilizer prices, raising costs for farmers and agricultural production.

Inflationary Pressures

1. Higher input costs can translate into food inflation, affecting overall price stability.

Fiscal Burden

1. The government may need to increase fertilizer subsidies to protect farmers, straining public finances.

Supply Chain Disruptions

1. Delays in imports can affect timely availability of fertilizers, impacting crop yields.

4. Structural Vulnerabilities

1. Heavy reliance on imports exposes India to geopolitical risks and external shocks.
2. Limited diversification of supply sources increases concentration risk.
3. Domestic production constraints reduce self-reliance in critical agricultural inputs.

5. Policy Measures and Way Forward

Diversification of Import Sources

1. Expanding sourcing beyond the Gulf to reduce geopolitical dependency.

Boosting Domestic Production

1. Investing in fertilizer manufacturing capacity and alternative inputs.

Strategic Reserves

1. Maintaining buffer stocks to manage short-term supply disruptions.

Efficient Subsidy Management

1. Rationalising subsidies to ensure fiscal sustainability and targeted support.

Conclusion

India's dependence on fertilizer imports and the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz highlight the intersection of geopolitics, agriculture, and economic stability. Strengthening supply chain resilience, diversifying sources, and enhancing domestic production will be crucial for ensuring long-term fertilizer security and food stability.

Source- <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indian-fertilizers-hormuz-choke/article70736136.ece>

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's dependence on fertilizer imports exposes it to geopolitical risks associated with strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz. Examine the implications of such disruptions and suggest measures to ensure fertilizer security. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's agricultural productivity depends heavily on fertilizers, a significant portion of which is imported. Strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz play a critical role in ensuring the smooth supply of these inputs. Disruptions in these routes can have serious implications for India's economy and food security.

Implications of Chokepoint Disruptions

1. Increase in Fertilizer Prices

1. Supply disruptions raise import costs, increasing input costs for farmers.

2. Food Inflation

1. Higher input costs may lead to rising food prices and inflationary pressures.

3. Fiscal Strain

1. The government may need to increase subsidies to support farmers.

4. Supply Uncertainty

1. Delays in imports can affect agricultural cycles and crop productivity.

Measures for Fertilizer Security

1. Diversification of Imports

1. Expanding sourcing from multiple regions to reduce dependence on specific chokepoints.

2. Enhancing Domestic Production

1. Investing in fertilizer manufacturing and alternative nutrient sources.

3. Strategic Reserves

1. Maintaining buffer stocks to manage short-term disruptions.

Conclusion

Ensuring fertilizer security requires a comprehensive approach combining supply diversification, domestic capacity building, and strategic reserves. These measures are essential for safeguarding India's agricultural productivity and economic stability.

Source- <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/indian-fertilizers-hormuz-choke/article70736136.ece>

4. Long Shadow of Public Health's Colonial Legacy (HT)

General Studies Paper- General Studies Paper II – Governance & Social Sector

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of social sector services relating to health

Sub-Topic- Impact of geopolitical events on India's economy

Introduction

India's public health system has evolved over time but continues to reflect certain structural features inherited from the colonial period. These historical legacies have shaped institutional arrangements, administrative priorities, and patterns of healthcare delivery. Understanding this legacy is essential to address persistent challenges in accessibility, equity, and efficiency in India's health system.

1. Colonial Foundations of Public Health

1. The colonial health system was primarily designed to protect British economic and administrative interests, rather than ensure universal healthcare.
2. Public health measures focused on disease control, sanitation, and protection of urban and military populations.
3. Rural areas and the broader population received limited healthcare attention.

2. Structural Features of the Colonial Legacy

Centralised Administration

1. Health governance was highly centralised and bureaucratic, with limited local participation.

Urban Bias in Healthcare

1. Infrastructure development prioritised urban centres and port cities, neglecting rural healthcare systems.

Disease-Control Approach

1. Focus was on specific epidemics and public sanitation, rather than comprehensive healthcare services.

3. Post-Independence Continuities

1. Despite reforms, many colonial features persisted in the form of centralised governance and fragmented service delivery.
2. Public health remained underfunded and unevenly distributed across regions.
3. Rural healthcare infrastructure continued to face shortages of personnel, facilities, and resources.

4. Consequences for Public Health Outcomes

1. Persistent regional disparities in health indicators such as maternal mortality, infant mortality, and disease burden.
2. Limited access to quality healthcare in rural and underserved areas.
3. Over-reliance on the private healthcare sector, leading to high out-of-pocket expenditure.

5. Institutional and Policy Challenges

1. Fragmentation between preventive, promotive, and curative healthcare services.
2. Weak integration of public health functions with primary healthcare systems.
3. Insufficient focus on public health infrastructure and workforce development.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Primary Healthcare

1. Focus on comprehensive, community-based healthcare systems.

Decentralisation and Local Governance

1. Empower local institutions to improve health service delivery and accountability.

Increased Public Investment

1. Enhance spending on health infrastructure, human resources, and preventive care.

Integration of Services

1. Ensure coordination between public health, clinical services, and social determinants of health.

Conclusion

India's public health system continues to be influenced by its colonial legacy, which has contributed to structural inefficiencies and inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires a shift toward equitable, decentralised, and integrated healthcare systems that prioritise universal access and improved health outcomes.

Source- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/long-shadow-of-public-health-s-colonial-legacy-101773329026625.html>

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India's public health system continues to reflect features of its colonial legacy. Examine the impact of this legacy on present-day health outcomes and suggest reforms to strengthen the system. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

India's public health system has its roots in colonial administrative structures that prioritised disease control and urban sanitation over universal healthcare. Many of these structural features continue to influence the functioning of the health system today.

Impact of Colonial Legacy

1. Centralised Governance

1. Limited decentralisation reduces local responsiveness and accountability.

2. Urban Bias

1. Rural areas continue to face inadequate healthcare infrastructure and services.

3. Fragmented Health Services

1. Weak integration between preventive and curative healthcare systems.

4. Inequality in Access

1. Significant disparities exist in health outcomes across regions and socio-economic groups.

Reforms Needed

1. Strengthening Primary Healthcare

1. Focus on community-based and preventive healthcare systems.

2. Increasing Public Investment

1. Improve health infrastructure and workforce capacity.

3. Decentralisation

1. Empower local bodies for better service delivery and accountability.

Conclusion

Addressing the colonial legacy in public health requires comprehensive reforms that prioritise equity, decentralisation, and integration of services. Such measures are essential for achieving universal health coverage and improved public health outcomes in India.

Source- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/long-shadow-of-public-health-s-colonial-legacy-101773329026625.html>

