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NextGenPsc

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2026 | COMPLETE EDITION



GS I | GS II | GS III | GS IV | ESSAY | PRELIMS

All the month's major stories, with original analysis, maps, charts and practice

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Top stories this month

- **India-EU FTA:** the 'mother of all deals' concluded after almost two decades.
- **Economic Survey 2025-26:** 7.4% growth and the 'development as adaptation' argument.
- **Section 17A split verdict:** prior approval to probe public servants goes to a larger Bench.
- **Menstrual health:** the Supreme Court makes it part of the right to life.
- **A year of extremes:** extreme weather on 331 of 334 days, and what the Himalaya needs.

How to read this magazine

Did you know?
Map
Chart
Prelims pointer
Key points
Revision tick box

About this issue

- The complete January 2026 edition in the new NextGenPsc design: every GS paper, Essay and Prelims, with maps, charts, fact boxes and practice questions.
- Facts are as reported up to 31 January 2026. Several stories kept developing afterwards, so check later updates before using them in an answer.
- Maps are location diagrams (points by latitude and longitude, no boundaries). Use an official Survey of India map for India's boundaries.

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01 | HISTORY GS 1

150 Years of Vande Mataram: A Song in the Freedom Struggle

Syllabus Mapping: GS1: Modern Indian history (freedom struggle); Indian culture

Context

India's 77th Republic Day parade on 26 January 2026 took '150 Years of Vande Mataram' as its theme. A year-long commemoration of the national song began on 7 November 2025. The anniversary is a good moment to revise how the song moved from a novel into the centre of the national movement.

Key Points

- **1875:** Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote the song, in a mix of Sanskrit and Bengali.
- **1882:** it appeared in his novel *Anandamath*, set against the Sannyasi rebellion in late 18th-century Bengal.
- **1896:** Rabindranath Tagore sang it at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress.
- **1905 onwards:** 'Bande Mataram' became the rallying cry of the Swadeshi movement against the Partition of Bengal.
- **1937:** the Congress Working Committee adopted the first two stanzas for national occasions.
- **24 January 1950:** President Rajendra Prasad told the Constituent Assembly it would be honoured equally with the national anthem.

Year	Event	Why it matters
1875 / 1882	Song written; published in *Anandamath*	Gave the national movement an emotional image of the motherland
1905-1911	Swadeshi and anti-partition protests	Turned the song into a mass slogan; the colonial government tried to ban it in public
1907	Bhikaiji Cama's flag at Stuttgart	The flag she raised carried the words 'Vande Mataram'
1937	Two stanzas adopted	A compromise over objections to the later stanzas' imagery
1950	Recognised as national song	Equal honour with Jana Gana Mana, which is the national anthem

Did you know?

The English daily *Bande Mataram*, started in 1906, carried some of the most forceful nationalist writing of the Swadeshi years, with Aurobindo Ghose among its editors.

Analysis

The song shows how culture and politics fed each other in the freedom struggle. Its power came from turning a political idea, the nation, into a sacred image that ordinary people could feel. The same imagery made its later stanzas contested, which is why the 1937 compromise kept only the first two. For Mains, link it to the role of literature, the press and symbols in mass mobilisation.

Prelims Pointers

- Author: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay; novel: *Anandamath* (1882).
- The national song and the national anthem were both adopted on 24 January 1950.
- Article 51A(a) and the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 cover the anthem and the flag, not the national song.

02 | ART AND CULTURE GS 1

Republic Day 2026: 150 Years of Vande Mataram, and the Padma Awards

Syllabus Mapping: GS1: Indian culture; Modern Indian history (freedom struggle); GS2: Constitutional provisions (national symbols)

Context

India celebrated its **77th Republic Day** on 26 January 2026 with the theme **'150 Years of Vande Mataram'**. The chief guests were European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Tableaux were organised under two themes: 'Swatantrata ka Mantra - Vande Mataram' and 'Samriddhi ka Mantra - Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. About 10,000 special guests from different walks of life were invited, around 2,500 artists performed, and the Army showcased a battle-array format for the first time. Paintings made by Tejendra Kumar Mitra in 1923 illustrating the song's verses were displayed along Kartavya Path.

The Ministry of Culture's tableau, made by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), carried a replica of the original manuscript, folk artists from across the country, and a young group performing the song in a style inspired by Vishnupant Pagnis's historic recording.

Vande Mataram: the essentials

- Written by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** in 1875 and later included in his novel **Anandamath** (1882).
- Rabindranath Tagore sang it at the 1896 Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress.
- It became a rallying cry of the Swadeshi movement after the 1905 Partition of Bengal.
- On 24 January 1950, President Rajendra Prasad told the Constituent Assembly that it would be honoured equally with the national anthem, Jana Gana Mana.
- A year-long commemoration of its 150th year began on 7 November 2025.

Did you know?

The Padma Awards are civilian honours, not titles. In *Balaji Raghavan* (1995) the Supreme Court held they do not breach Article 18, but recipients should not use them as prefixes or suffixes to their names.

Padma Awards 2026 (announced 25 January)

- **131 awards:** 5 Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan, 113 Padma Shri. 19 recipients are women, 16 awards are posthumous, and 6 go to foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI.
- **Padma Vibhushan:** Dharmendra (posthumous), V.S. Achuthanandan (posthumous), Justice K.T. Thomas, violinist N. Rajam and P. Narayanan.
- **Padma Bhushan (selected):** Shibu Soren (posthumous), Piyush Pandey (posthumous), Mammootty, Alka Yagnik, Uday Kotak and Vijay Amritraj.
- **Padma Shri (selected):** cricketers Rohit Sharma and Harmanpreet Kaur, alongside many grassroots 'unsung heroes'.

Analysis

The national song carries great symbolic weight, but its legal status differs from the anthem's. Fundamental Duty Article 51A(a) mentions the flag and the anthem, and the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 protects the flag, the Constitution and the anthem, not the national song. The 150th year has revived debate on whether that should change, and on the use of the song's later stanzas. A good answer presents the song's role in the freedom struggle alongside the Congress Working Committee's 1937 decision to adopt only the first two stanzas, which is the form recognised as the national song.

Prelims Pointers

- Padma Awards were instituted in 1954; they are announced on the eve of Republic Day and are not 'titles' under Article 18 (*Balaji Raghavan*, 1995).
- National song: Vande Mataram; national anthem: Jana Gana Mana (written by Tagore); both adopted on 24 January 1950.
- Kartavya Path was earlier called Rajpath.

03 | GEOGRAPHY GS 1

Aravalli Definition Case: Supreme Court Extends Stay, Moves to an Expert Review

Syllabus Mapping: GS1: Physical geography (mountain systems); GS3: Conservation, environmental degradation; GS2: Judiciary

Context

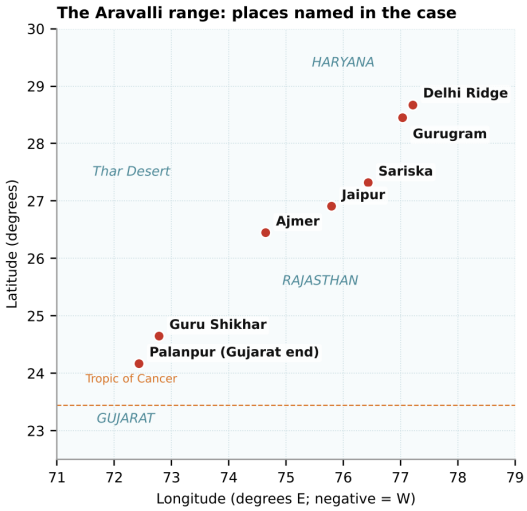
On 20 November 2025 the Supreme Court accepted a uniform definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges recommended by a committee of the Environment Ministry, tied to landforms rising at least **100 metres** above the local terrain, and barred fresh mining leases in the range. Experts and citizens' groups warned the elevation test could leave much of the range outside protection, and protests followed in Rajasthan and Haryana. Taking suo motu cognisance, the Court on 29 December 2025 kept its own November directions in abeyance and proposed a high-powered expert committee.

On **21 January 2026** a Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M. Pancholi extended that abeyance. It said it would set up a committee of domain experts, working under the Court's supervision, to examine mining and related issues comprehensively, and asked the Additional Solicitor General and the amicus curiae to suggest names of environmentalists and mining scientists within four weeks. The Court observed that illegal mining can cause irreversible damage and recorded Rajasthan's assurance that no unauthorised mining would take place.

Questions before the Court

- Does a 100-metre elevation threshold, with hills grouped as a range only within 500 metres of each other, shrink the protected area?
- Could 'regulated mining' be allowed in the gaps between hills without breaking ecological continuity?
- How should the definition balance mining revenue for States against the range's ecological functions?

Why the Aravallis matter



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. The range runs south-west to north-east for about 690 km, from Gujarat to Delhi.

- **Barrier against desertification:** the range slows the eastward spread of the Thar desert and dust towards the Indo-Gangetic plain.
- **Water:** fractured rocks recharge groundwater for parts of Rajasthan, Haryana and the National Capital Region.
- **Biodiversity and climate:** it forms wildlife corridors (for example around Sariska) and the Delhi Ridge, and moderates NCR's air quality and heat.

Analysis

The case shows the limits of defining an ecosystem by a single physical measure. An elevation rule is simple to enforce, but ecological value lies in continuity, low hills and the land between them. The Court's turn to an expert body reflects the precautionary principle. A durable answer would combine a science-based map, strict enforcement against illegal mining, and

restoration under the Aravalli Green Wall Project.

Prelims Pointers

- Aravallis: one of the world's oldest fold mountain systems, running about 690 km from Gujarat through Rajasthan and Haryana to Delhi.
- Highest peak: Guru Shikhar (about 1,722 m), Mount Abu, Rajasthan.
- Aravalli Green Wall Project (2023): Environment Ministry initiative to green a buffer around the range across four States.

04 | INDIAN SOCIETY GS 1

Digital Addiction and Student Mental Health

Syllabus Mapping: GS1: Social issues, youth; GS2: Health, education

Context

The **Economic Survey 2025-26** (29 January) flagged digital addiction as a growing public health and productivity problem. In the same month the Supreme Court issued interim directions on student suicides in higher education in *Amit Kumar v Union of India*, based on the work of the National Task Force it set up in 2025 under former judge S. Ravindra Bhat.

Digital addiction: the Survey's concerns

- Near-universal smartphone and internet access means constant exposure, especially for teenagers and young adults.
- Platforms are designed for engagement (autoplay, infinite scroll, notifications), which can encourage compulsive use.
- Linked harms include poor sleep, anxiety, lower attention and learning, cyberbullying and online gambling losses.

The Supreme Court's interim directions (as reported)

- Higher education institutions must report student suicides and file annual compliance reports to regulators; data for the 15-29 age group should be collected centrally.
- Vacant leadership and faculty posts in institutions should be filled within four months.
- Strict compliance with existing safeguards: anti-ragging committees, anti-discrimination officers, internal complaints committees, and access to counsellors and medical help.
- NCRB recorded about 13,000 student suicides in 2022, and student suicides have been rising faster than overall suicides.

Policy tools available

- **Online Gaming (Promotion and Regulation) Act, 2025:** bans real-money online games and promotes e-sports and social games.
- **DPDP Rules, 2025:** require verifiable parental consent before processing children's personal data.
- **Health system:** the National Mental Health Programme, Tele-MANAS helpline (14416) and the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.
- **Campuses:** the UMMEED guidelines (2023) for schools on suicide prevention and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022), which aims to cut suicide deaths by 10% by 2030.

Way forward

Digital well-being education in schools and colleges, age-appropriate design rules for platforms, more trained counsellors on campuses, reducing academic and financial pressure (including at coaching hubs), and tackling caste and other discrimination, which the Court and the Task Force identified as a factor. Family and peer support remain the first line of help.

Prelims Pointers

- Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 decriminalised attempted suicide by presuming severe stress (Section 115).
- National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022) was India's first.
- Tele-MANAS helpline: 14416 or 1-800-891-4416.

05 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

India-EU FTA Concluded: The 'Mother of All Deals' and What Comes Next

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings; GS3: External sector, trade agreements

Context

On 27 January 2026, at the 16th India-EU Summit in New Delhi, India and the European Union announced the conclusion of negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. The EU's top leaders, European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, had been chief guests at the Republic Day parade the day before. The talks began in 2007, stalled in 2013 and were relaunched in June 2022. Von der Leyen called it the 'mother of all deals'. The summit also saw an EU-India security and defence partnership signed and a mobility and migration agreement agreed.

Key Points

- **Scale:** a free trade zone covering about 2 billion people, roughly a quarter of global GDP and a third of world trade, as presented by the EU.
- **Tariffs:** the EU says its exporters would save about EUR 4 billion a year in duties, and that coverage reaches about 96.6% for India's liberalisation and 99.3% for the EU's.
- **Beyond tariffs:** chapters on services, digital trade, intellectual property, standards and professional mobility. India does not join the WTO Government Procurement Agreement under the deal.
- **Not yet done:** the legal text was unpublished at announcement; entry into force needs signature, European Parliament consent and ratification by India. A separate Investment Protection Agreement is still under negotiation.

Why it matters

- **Diversification.** Facing tariff uncertainty with the United States, India has pushed a wider FTA programme: UK, EFTA (in force since October 2025), and now the EU. The EU was already among India's largest trading partners, with goods trade of roughly EUR 124 billion in 2024.
- **Labour-intensive exports.** Textiles, apparel, leather and similar sectors expect better access to a large import market, where several competitors already enjoy preferential access.
- **Strategic layer.** The defence and security partnership, along with the Germany visit that preceded it, shows Europe treating India as a 'reliable partner' in a fragmenting order.

Concerns and the road ahead

- **Carbon border.** The deal does not remove the EU's CBAM, which began charging in January 2026 (see the CBAM article). Exporters of steel and aluminium remain exposed.
- **Sensitive sectors.** Domestic agriculture and dairy were protected in the offer, but the detail will matter once the text is public.
- **Ratification risk.** EU approval involves the European Parliament and may take time. Watch for the investment agreement and for the rules of origin.

Did you know?

The EU is a customs union: its 27 members share one external tariff, so the European Commission negotiates trade agreements on behalf of all of them.

Prelims Pointers

- India-EFTA TEPA (Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement) came into force in October 2025.
- EU members: 27 states. The European Commission negotiates trade deals; the European Parliament gives consent.
- India-EU talks: launched 2007 as BTIA, suspended 2013, resumed 2022.

06 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

The US Operation in Venezuela and India's Careful Words

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Effect of policies of developed countries on India; Important international institutions (UN)

Context

On 3 January 2026 the United States carried out what President Trump called 'Operation Absolute Resolve': strikes on Caracas and other locations, and the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, who were flown to New York. US authorities have charged Maduro with narco-terrorism and drug-trafficking conspiracy, which he denies. Trump said the US would 'run' Venezuela until a transition. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the action a dangerous precedent, and the Security Council meeting was scheduled for 5 January.

India's response

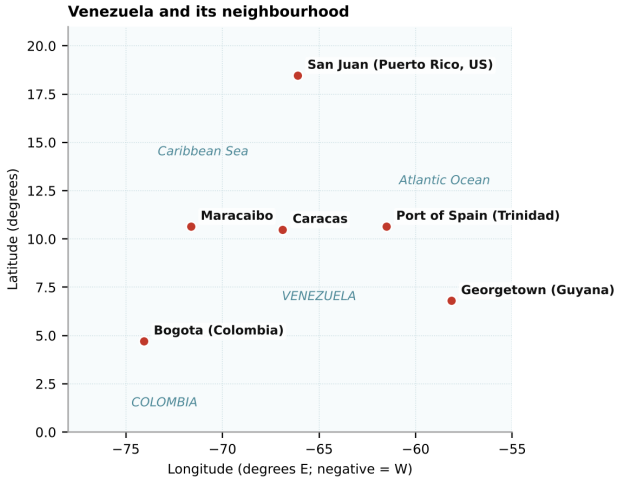
India's Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement on 4 January saying developments were a 'matter of deep concern', that India was monitoring the situation, and that issues should be resolved through dialogue. It did not name the United States or condemn the strikes. The ministry also advised Indian nationals to avoid non-essential travel to Venezuela. India's Left parties criticised the US action, while a trade-research group noted that India's direct trade exposure to Venezuela is limited.

Key Points

- **Legal question:** Article 2(4) of the UN Charter bars the threat or use of force against another state's territorial integrity or political independence. Self-defence under Article 51 and Security Council authorisation are the main exceptions.
- **Head-of-state immunity and extradition:** capturing a sitting leader for trial in another country raises questions about immunity and due process.
- **Regional angle:** the move revives debate about the Monroe Doctrine and great-power influence in Latin America.
- **Energy:** Venezuela holds large oil reserves, so the transition affects global supply and sanctions policy.

Analysis

- **Strategic autonomy.** India avoided taking sides. It values stable ties with Washington (trade deal talks, technology partnerships) and has a long record of upholding sovereignty in principle. The wording balances both.
- **Principle versus pragmatism.** Critics say silence on a use of force weakens India's claim to speak for the Global South and for a rules-based order. Defenders say calibrated language protects national interests.
- **Consistency test.** India's positions on past interventions have varied with circumstances, which makes a claim of strict consistency hard to sustain.
- **What to watch.** The transition in Caracas, US oil policy toward Venezuela, and whether India's energy companies see new opportunities or new sanctions risk.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. Venezuela lies on the Caribbean coast of South America, between Colombia and Guyana.

Did you know?
Venezuela holds the world's largest proven crude oil reserves, about 300 billion barrels, most of it heavy oil in the Orinoco Belt.

Prelims Pointers
- Venezuela: capital Caracas; member of OPEC; in South America.
- Monroe Doctrine (1823): US opposition to European colonisation in the Western Hemisphere.
- UN Charter Article 2(4): prohibition on use of force; Article 51: right of self-defence.

07 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

Greenland, Davos and the Board of Peace: Tariffs on Allies and a New Global Body

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Effect of policies of developed countries on India; Important international institutions; GS1: Geography (Arctic)

Context

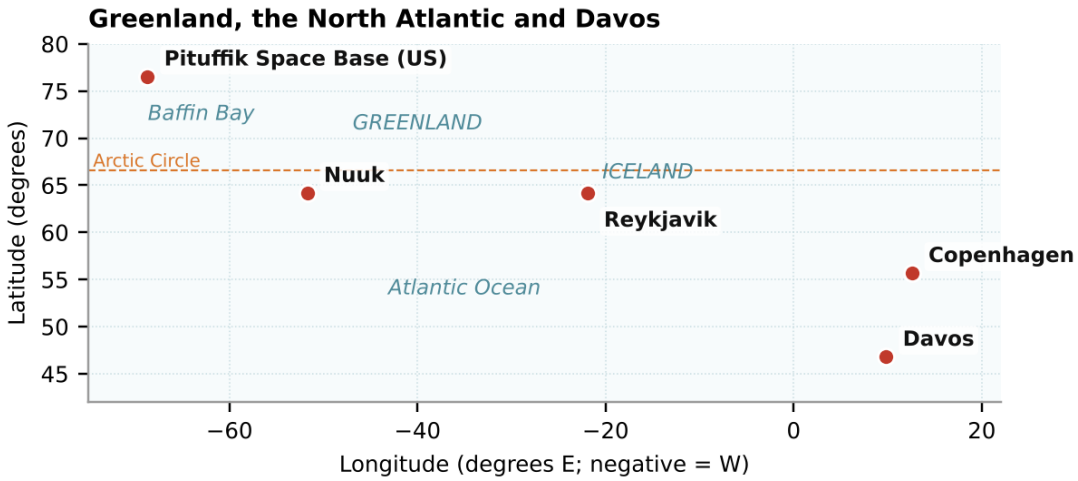
January saw the United States press harder for control of Greenland, a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. On 6 January, leaders of five large EU states joined Denmark and the UK in a statement stressing sovereignty and territorial integrity, and saying only Denmark and Greenland could decide Greenland's future. After several European states sent small military contingents to Greenland for an Arctic exercise, President Trump announced on 17 January an extra 10% tariff from 1 February on eight countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Finland. He said it would rise to 25% on 1 June unless a deal for the 'purchase' of Greenland was reached.

The pressure eased at the World Economic Forum in Davos. On 21 January, after meeting NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, Trump announced the 'framework of a future deal' on Greenland and the wider Arctic, dropped the tariff threat and said he would not use force. The next day, 22 January, he signed the Charter of the **Board of Peace**, a new international body built around the Gaza peace plan.

Key Points
- **Greenland's value:** the world's largest island sits on Arctic shipping routes and early-warning paths, and holds critical minerals. Trump linked it to the planned 'Golden Dome' missile defence system.
- **The framework:** details were not made public. NATO described it as collective allied work on Arctic security, and Rutte said mineral resources were not discussed.
- **Board of Peace:** proposed in September 2025 and welcomed in the Gaza context by UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (November 2025). Its charter makes Trump chairman with wide powers over membership and decisions. About 60 countries were invited; a USD 1 billion contribution buys permanent membership, while others get three-year terms.
- **Reactions:** several European states declined to join, and the UK cited the invitation to Russia's President. India was invited but stayed away from the Davos launch and said it was examining the proposal; Pakistan's Prime Minister attended.

Analysis

- **Trade as a security weapon.** Using tariffs against NATO allies over territory shows how trade tools now serve strategic goals. This is the 'geoeconomic confrontation' that the WEF ranked as the top risk for 2026 (see the Global Outlook article).
- **Sovereignty principle.** Europe's defence of Danish sovereignty rests on the same principle India invokes on its own borders. India said little publicly, as with Venezuela.
- **A rival to the UN?** Critics worry a chairman-centred body could bypass the UN system. India supports Gaza reconstruction and West Asian stability (IMEC depends on it), but also backs a UN-centred order and Security Council reform. Joining or staying out each carries costs.
- **The Arctic and India.** Melting ice opens new routes and resources. India has observer status in the Arctic Council and an Arctic Policy, so great-power rivalry there is not a distant issue.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. Greenland is a self-governing territory of Denmark; most of it lies north of the Arctic Circle.

Did you know?

Greenland is the world's largest island. An ice sheet covers about four-fifths of it, and only about 57,000 people live there.

Prelims Pointers

- Greenland: capital Nuuk; autonomous territory of Denmark; hosts the US Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule).
- India: Arctic Council observer since 2013; Arctic Policy released 2022; research station Himadri at Ny-Alesund, Svalbard (Norway).
- WEF Annual Meeting 2026: Davos, 19-23 January, theme 'A Spirit of Dialogue'. UNSC Resolution 2803 concerns the Gaza peace framework.

08 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

Iran Unrest and the 25% Secondary Tariff: A Test for India's Balancing

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Effect of policies of developed countries on India; India and its neighbourhood (extended); GS3: External sector

Context

Protests that began in Iran in late December 2025 over inflation and economic hardship spread across all 31 provinces in January and took on an openly anti-government tone. Rights groups based outside Iran reported hundreds of deaths and more than 10,000 arrests by mid-January, while Iranian officials blamed foreign interference. On 12 January President Trump announced that any country 'doing business' with Iran would pay a 25% tariff on its trade with the United States, 'effective immediately'. The scope, the meaning of 'doing business' and the legal basis were not spelled out.

Key Points

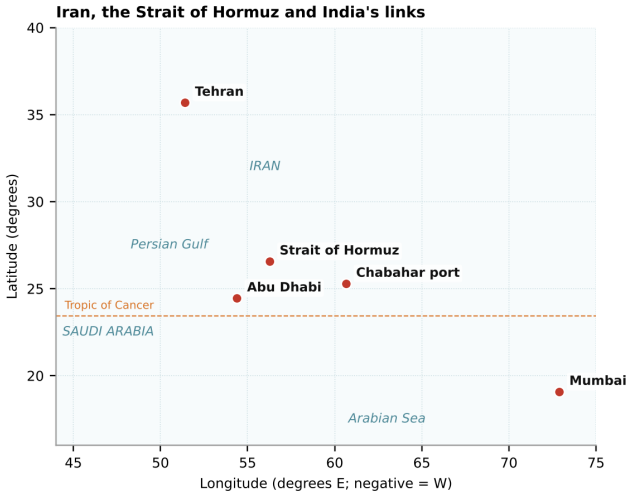
- **Secondary tariffs:** the measure penalises third countries for their dealings with Iran, extending the logic of secondary sanctions into trade policy.
- **Legal doubt:** the US Supreme Court was at the time still to rule on tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), so the basis for such tariffs was uncertain.
- **Who is exposed:** Iran's main partners include China, Turkey and the UAE; India also trades with Iran (rice, tea, pharmaceuticals) and is invested in Chabahar port.
- **Military threat:** Washington said all options, including force, remained open; Tehran said it was ready to respond to any attack.

Why it matters for India

- **Connectivity:** Chabahar (Shahid Beheshti terminal, run under a 10-year India-Iran contract signed in 2024) is India's route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and links to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- **Energy and shipping:** instability near the Strait of Hormuz affects oil prices, insurance and the safety of Indian sailors and ships.
- **People:** Indian students and workers in Iran need evacuation planning when unrest grows.
- **US trade talks:** any tariff on 'Iran business' would complicate India's negotiations with Washington.

Analysis

India's position has been to avoid comment on internal affairs while protecting its interests. The secondary tariff makes that harder, because it asks partners to choose between a modest market and the large American one. In trade-law terms, tariffs that differ by a partner's dealings with a third country sit uneasily with the WTO's Most Favoured Nation rule unless justified under the national security exception (GATT Article XXI). For India the practical path is to keep Chabahar's humanitarian and connectivity case alive, diversify energy supply, and seek clarity from Washington on scope.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. India-run terminals at Chabahar give India a route to Afghanistan and Central Asia that bypasses Pakistan.

Did you know?

About a fifth of the world's oil consumption passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which links the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman.

Prelims Pointers

- Chabahar: on the Gulf of Oman in Sistan-Baluchestan province, Iran. INSTC: multimodal corridor linking India, Iran, Russia and beyond.
- Strait of Hormuz: joins the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- Iran joined the SCO in 2023 and BRICS in 2024.

09 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

India-UAE: A Three-Hour Visit and a Path to a Strategic Defence Partnership

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: India and its neighbourhood (West Asia); Bilateral agreements; GS3: Energy security, investment

Context

UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan paid an official visit to New Delhi on 19 January 2026, staying about three hours. It was his fifth visit to India in ten years and his third as President. Prime Minister Modi received him at the airport. Despite its length, the visit produced a wide set of outcomes, led by a Letter of Intent (LoI) on a Strategic Defence Partnership.

Key Outcomes

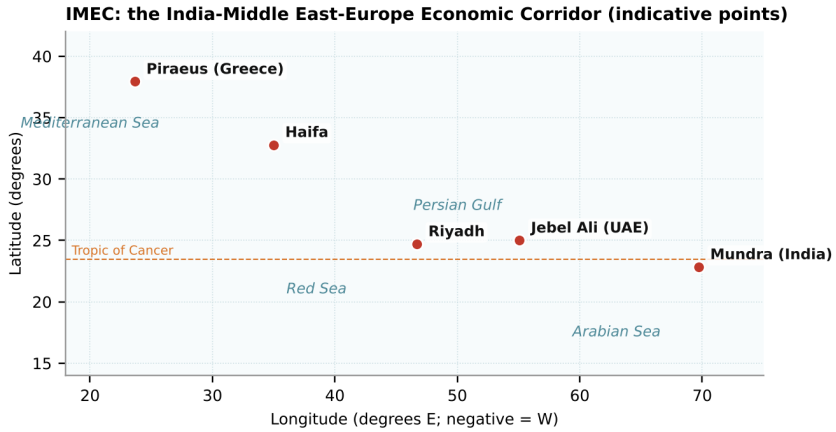
- **Defence:** an LoI to work towards a Strategic Defence Partnership Framework Agreement, covering defence industry, innovation and advanced technology, training, special operations and interoperability, cyberspace and counter-terrorism.
- **Energy:** a sales and purchase agreement under which HPCL will buy 0.5 million tonnes a year of LNG from ADNOC Gas for 10 years from 2028.
- **Investment:** an LoI between Gujarat and the UAE Ministry of Investment on developing the Dholera Special Investment Region.
- **Space and AI:** an IN-SPACe and UAE Space Agency LoI; in-principle agreement for C-DAC and UAE firm G42 to set up a supercomputing cluster in India.
- **Trade and finance:** a target to double bilateral trade to USD 200 billion by 2032; First Abu Dhabi Bank and DP World set up in GIFT City. The UAE welcomed India's new SHANTI nuclear law.

Why it matters

- **Energy security.** Long-term LNG contracts help India's plan to raise gas in its energy mix, and India is now a leading buyer of UAE LNG.
- **A changing Gulf.** The visit came after the Saudi-Pakistan defence pact of 2025 and amid unrest in Iran. A defence framework with the UAE widens India's options in the region.
- **Connectivity.** Both sides backed the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), in which the UAE is a key link.

Analysis

The Foreign Secretary stressed that the LoI does not mean India will be drawn into regional conflicts. That caveat matters: India keeps working ties with Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE at once. The challenge is to institutionalise defence cooperation (exercises, joint production, training) without operational commitments that would limit strategic autonomy. The economic side builds on a strong base: the CEPA, the Bilateral Investment Treaty and rupee-dirham settlement.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. IMEC was announced at the G20 New Delhi Summit (2023): a sea link from India to the UAE, rail across Arabia, then sea to Europe.

Prelims Pointers

- India-UAE CEPA: signed February 2022, in force from 1 May 2022. Bilateral Investment Treaty signed 2024.
- Dholera SIR: a greenfield industrial city in Gujarat on the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.
- SHANTI Act (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India), passed December 2025, opens civil nuclear energy to wider participation.

10 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

India-Arab League: Delhi Hosts the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: India and its neighbourhood (West Asia and North Africa); Regional groupings

Context

On **31 January 2026** India hosted the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (IAFMM) in New Delhi, co-chaired by India and the UAE, with ministers and senior officials from all 22 member states of the League of Arab States and the League's Secretary General. It was the first such meeting held in India and came ten years after the first, held in Bahrain in 2016. The 4th India-Arab Senior Officials' Meeting took place the day before.

Key Points

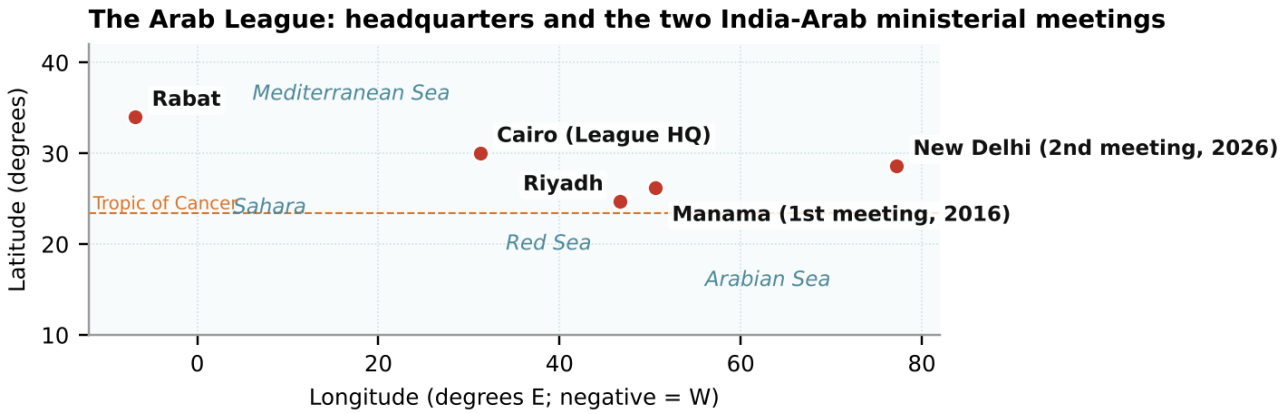
- **Institutional base:** India and the Arab League signed an MoU in March 2002 to institutionalise dialogue; the Arab-India Cooperation Forum followed in 2008. The IAFMM is the highest mechanism of this partnership.
- **Five priority verticals** identified in 2016: economy, energy, education, media and culture.
- **Representation:** India's Ambassador to Egypt also serves as Permanent Representative to the Arab League; India holds observer status with the League.
- **Economic weight:** Arab states are major sources of India's crude oil and LNG, host a large share of the Indian diaspora, and send significant remittances and investment.

Why it matters

- **A turbulent region.** The meeting came amid the Gaza ceasefire's second phase, unrest in Iran, Yemen's conflict and Syria's transition. Collective engagement lets India speak to the whole Arab world, not only to Gulf partners.
- **Connectivity.** IMEC, announced at the G20 Summit in New Delhi in 2023, runs through Arab states; their buy-in is essential.
- **Balancing.** The format helps India keep ties with Arab states alongside its partnerships with Israel and Iran, and show support for a two-state solution in Palestine.

Analysis

Regular ministerial meetings have been rare: a ten-year gap shows how bilateral ties with the Gulf grew faster than the multilateral track. A Delhi-hosted meeting with full attendance signals that India wants a structured, region-wide relationship. The test will be follow-through: a regular calendar of meetings, trade and investment initiatives, and coordination on maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. The League's 22 members stretch from Morocco on the Atlantic to Oman on the Arabian Sea.

Prelims Pointers

- League of Arab States: founded in Cairo on 22 March 1945; 22 members; headquarters Cairo.
- First India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting: Manama, Bahrain (2016). Second: New Delhi (31 January 2026), co-chaired by India and the UAE.
- IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor): announced at the G20 New Delhi Summit, September 2023.

11 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GS 2

India Takes the BRICS Chair: Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings; Important international institutions

Context

India assumed the BRICS chairship from Brazil on 1 January 2026. On 13 January, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar launched the logo, theme and website. The theme is **'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability'**, whose initials spell the grouping's name. The logo is a lotus, India's national flower, with a 'Namaste' motif at the centre. India described its approach as 'humanity-first' and 'people-centric'. This is India's fourth chairship (after 2012, 2016 and 2021), and India will host the 18th BRICS Summit later in 2026. The grouping marks 20 years since the first BRIC ministerial meeting in 2006.

Key Points

- **Expanded membership:** Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE joined in 2024 and Indonesia in 2025, alongside the original five. A 'partner country' category was created at the 2024 Kazan summit.
- **Institutions:** the New Development Bank (headquartered in Shanghai) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, both agreed at Fortaleza in 2014.
- **India's priorities:** reformed multilateralism, Global South concerns, digital public infrastructure, climate and development finance, and counter-terrorism.

Challenges for the chair

- **Divergent agendas.** China and Russia tend to see BRICS as a counterweight to the West; India sees it as a platform for reform, not confrontation.
- **US pressure.** Washington has threatened tariffs on countries aligning with 'anti-American' BRICS policies. India has said it does not seek to replace the dollar.
- **Security frictions.** India stayed out of the BRICS Plus naval exercise 'Will for Peace 2026' off Simon's Town, South Africa (9-16 January), showing limits to military cooperation within the group.

- **Consensus in a bigger club.** More members mean more interests, including those of Iran, Egypt and the UAE, which complicates joint statements.

Analysis

India's chairship is a chance to steer BRICS towards practical deliverables (development finance, health, digital and climate cooperation) and away from bloc politics. Doing so while keeping close ties with the US and Europe will be the main test of India's multi-alignment.

Did you know?

This is India's fourth BRICS chairship, after 2012, 2016 and 2021. BRICS now has ten full members after expansions in 2024 and 2025.

Prelims Pointers

- BRIC foreign ministers first met in 2006; first leaders' summit: Yekaterinburg, 2009. South Africa joined in 2010-11.
- India's BRICS chairships: 2012, 2016, 2021 and 2026.
- NDB: established under the Fortaleza Declaration (2014); headquarters Shanghai.

12 | POLITY GS 2

Section 17A of the PC Act: A Split Verdict on Prior Approval to Probe Public Servants

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Judiciary; Executive and accountability; GS4: Probity in governance

Context

On 13 January 2026 a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, Justices B.V. Nagarathna and K.V. Viswanathan, delivered a split verdict in *Centre for Public Interest Litigation v Union of India* on the validity of **Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**. Section 17A was inserted by the 2018 amendment. It requires prior approval from the competent government before any enquiry or investigation into a decision or recommendation made by a public servant in the discharge of official functions. Because the judges differed, the matter goes to the Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, for a larger Bench.

The two views

- **Justice Nagarathna:** Section 17A is unconstitutional. It violates Article 14, runs against the purpose of the Act, and in effect shields the corrupt by blocking inquiry at the threshold. Honest officers do not need such statutory protection.
- **Justice Viswanathan:** the provision is valid, but approval should come from the Lokpal or Lokayukta rather than the government. Striking it down would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater, because honest officers need protection from frivolous or motivated probes.

Key term	Meaning
Prior approval	Permission from the competent authority before police can enquire into a public servant's official decision
Manifest arbitrariness	A test under Article 14 for striking down a law that is irrational or without an adequate principle
Split verdict	When two judges disagree, the case goes to a larger Bench on the Chief Justice's orders

Background

- **Vineet Narain (1997):** the Court struck down the 'Single Directive', which had required prior government permission to investigate senior officers.
- **Subramanian Swamy (2014):** the Court struck down Section 6A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, which required approval for probing officers of Joint Secretary rank and above, as discriminatory under Article 14.
- **2018 amendment:** Parliament inserted Section 17A, extending an approval requirement to all public servants, with an exception for arrests on the spot in cases of accepting undue advantage.

Analysis

- **Accountability versus policy paralysis.** Officers may avoid taking decisions if every file can trigger a criminal probe, but approval requirements can also delay or block genuine investigations.

- **Who should decide?** The compromise of routing approval through an independent body, the Lokpal or Lokayukta, tests whether independence can cure the Article 14 problem seen in *Subramanian Swamy*.
- **Institutional point.** Split verdicts push contested questions to larger Benches, which adds to delay in deciding constitutional issues.
- **Way forward.** A time-bound decision by a larger Bench, clear timelines for approval decisions, and strengthening Lokpal and Lokayukta institutions.

Prelims Pointers

- Section 17A: prior approval for enquiry or investigation into official decisions; inserted by the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018.
- Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 created the anti-corruption ombudsman bodies.
- Article 14: equality before law and equal protection of the laws; 'manifest arbitrariness' is a ground to strike down legislation.

13 | POLITY GS 2

When Governors Walk Out: Article 176 and the Governor's Address

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Executive (Governor); State legislature; Centre-State relations

Context

In January 2026 the opening sessions of three State Assemblies were disrupted by Governors. On 20 January, Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi left the Assembly without delivering the customary address for the third year running, objecting that the session opened with the State song rather than the national anthem; the Speaker read the Tamil text and the House resolved to treat the government's English address as read. In Kerala the Governor left out parts of the cabinet-approved address, and in Karnataka the Governor delivered a two-line speech instead of the full text. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said his party would seek a constitutional amendment to drop the customary address.

Constitutional position

- **Article 176(1):** the Governor *shall* address the Assembly (or both Houses) at the start of the first session after each general election and at the start of the first session each year, informing it of the causes of its summons.
- **Article 175:** the Governor *may* address the House and send messages at other times.
- **Article 163:** the Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, except where the Constitution requires discretion.
- **Judicial view:** in *Nabam Rebia* (2016), the Supreme Court treated the addresses under Articles 175 and 176 as functions performed on ministerial advice. In *State of Tamil Nadu v Governor of Tamil Nadu* (2025) it held that gubernatorial discretion cannot be used to obstruct an elected government.

Arguments on both sides

- **Governors' view:** the address is delivered in the Governor's name, so the Governor should not be made to read statements he considers false, partisan or critical of the Union; the Constitution does not say the text must be read word for word.
- **States' view:** the address is the government's policy statement, as the Constituent Assembly intended. Skipping or editing it breaches Article 176 and the parliamentary convention that the head of state speaks for the ministry, as the President does in Parliament.

Analysis

The walkouts are part of a wider Governor-State conflict seen in delays over assent to Bills and university appointments. Possible remedies include clear rules of procedure deeming the address read, codified conventions (as recommended by the Sarkaria and Punchhi Commissions on the Governor's role), or judicial clarification. Removing the address altogether would weaken a symbolic link between the constitutional head and the legislature, so most experts favour restoring the convention rather than abolishing it.

Did you know?
Article 176 requires the Governor to address the Legislature at the start of the first session after each general election and of the first session of each year.

Prelims Pointers
- Article 176: special address by the Governor; Article 175: right to address and send messages; Article 163: Council of Ministers to aid and advise the Governor.
- The President's equivalent duty for Parliament is in Article 87.
- Sarkaria Commission (1983-88) and Punchhi Commission (2007-10) examined Centre-State relations, including the Governor's office.

14 | POLITY GS 2

Can the ED File a Writ? The Supreme Court Examines Agency Standing

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Statutory and quasi-judicial bodies; Judiciary; Centre-State relations

Context

On **20 January 2026**, a Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma agreed to decide whether the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** can file writ petitions before High Courts under **Article 226** as a 'juristic person'. The issue arose when Kerala set up a judicial commission in 2021 to inquire into allegations that ED officials pressured accused persons in the 2020 diplomatic-baggage gold smuggling case to name political leaders. The ED challenged the commission in the Kerala High Court and obtained a stay; Kerala and Tamil Nadu appealed.

The legal question

- Writs mainly protect rights against the State. Can a department of the Union government itself claim such remedies against a State government?
- Is the ED, a directorate under the Department of Revenue rather than a body set up by its own statute, a 'person' that can sue in its own name?
- If the Union and a State are in dispute, should the matter go instead to the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction under **Article 131**?

Why it matters

- **Federalism:** clashes between central agencies and opposition-ruled States have grown, including over CBI consent and ED raids. The ruling will shape how these disputes reach court.
- **Accountability of agencies:** States argue they must be able to inquire into alleged misconduct by central officers on their territory; the ED argues such inquiries obstruct investigations.
- **Writ jurisdiction:** a broad reading could let many government bodies litigate against each other through writs, crowding High Courts.

Prelims Pointers
- Article 226: High Courts can issue writs for fundamental rights 'and for any other purpose' (wider than Article 32).
- Article 131: Supreme Court's exclusive original jurisdiction in disputes between the Union and States, or between States.
- The ED enforces the PMLA, 2002 and FEMA, 1999. Commissions of inquiry are set up under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952.

15 | GOVERNANCE GS 2

Census 2027: Phase One Notified, India's First Digital Census

Syllabus Mapping: GS1: Population and associated issues; GS2: Government policies; Governance

Context

On 7 January 2026 the Ministry of Home Affairs notified the first phase of the Census of India 2027. **Houselisting and Housing Census** will run between 1 April and 30 September 2026, in a 30-day window fixed by each State and Union Territory, preceded by a 15-day **self-enumeration** option. The second phase, **Population Enumeration**, is set for February 2027, with 1 March 2027 as the reference date for most of the country (1 October 2026 for snow-bound areas such as Ladakh). This is the 16th Census and the first since 2011.

Key Points

- **Digital first:** data collected through mobile apps (Android and iOS) with a self-enumeration portal; about 30 lakh field functionaries will be deployed.
- **Budget:** the Union Cabinet approved Rs 11,718.24 crore for the exercise on 12 December 2025.
- **Questionnaire:** 33 questions for phase one were notified on 22 January, covering house type, materials, rooms, amenities, assets such as phones and internet access, and the main cereal consumed.
- **Caste:** the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs decided on 30 April 2025 to enumerate caste, to be recorded in the population enumeration phase. Caste, other than SC and ST, has not been counted in a Census since 1931.

Why it matters

- **Evidence for policy.** Housing, amenities and asset data guide schemes on housing, sanitation, power and digital access. The population count underpins welfare targeting and demographic planning.
- **Delimitation and representation.** Constitutional limits on readjusting Lok Sabha and Assembly seats are tied to the first Census after 2026, so Census 2027 data feeds the delimitation debate between the North and the South.
- **Social justice.** A caste count could inform reservation and welfare policy and revive demands to revisit the 50% ceiling set by judicial precedent. It also raises concerns about data quality and privacy.
- **Delayed data.** The 2021 Census was postponed (Covid), so many indicators still rely on 2011 numbers, which weakens planning.

Challenges

Digital exclusion in remote areas, data protection, training a very large workforce, consistent caste classification across states, and building public trust in the process are the main risks.

Census	Year	Note
First synchronous census	1881	Conducted under W.C. Plowden; the decennial series runs from here
Last full caste count	1931	Caste data beyond SC/ST were not published after this
15th Census	2011	Last completed census; 121 crore population
Census 2027	2026-27	First digital census; includes caste enumeration

Prelims Pointers

- Census is on the Union List (Entry 69, Seventh Schedule); conducted under the Census Act, 1948 by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.
- Phases: Houselisting (April-September 2026) and Population Enumeration (February 2027).
- Last caste enumeration across communities: 1931. Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 was separate and not under the Census Act.

16 | GOVERNANCE GS 2

Cooperatives: From Scale to Strength

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Government policies; Constitutional provisions; GS3: Inclusive growth, agriculture

Context

After the UN International Year of Cooperatives (2025) and the **National Cooperation Policy, 2025**, January 2026 saw renewed debate on how to turn India's very large cooperative network into stronger, better-run businesses. India has more than 8 lakh registered cooperatives with roughly 30 crore members, among the largest networks in the world, according to the National Cooperative Database.

Where cooperatives matter

- **Rural credit:** Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) lend to small farmers; the government is computerising them and allowing them to run more businesses (fertiliser, LPG, petrol pumps, common service centres).
- **Dairy and inputs:** Amul and other dairy cooperatives handle a large share of marketed milk; IFFCO and KRIBHCO supply a significant part of India's fertiliser.
- **Sugar and processing:** cooperatives produce a large share of sugar in Maharashtra and other States.
- **Women:** many self-help groups and women's dairy cooperatives bring women into formal finance.

Legal and institutional framework

- **97th Constitutional Amendment (2011):** right to form cooperatives under Article 19(1)(c), Directive Principle in Article 43B, and Part IXB on cooperative governance.
- **Rajendra N. Shah case (2021):** the Supreme Court held that Part IXB applies only to multi-State cooperatives, because cooperatives are a State subject (Entry 32, State List).
- **Ministry of Cooperation (2021);** Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Act, 2023; three new national cooperatives for exports, seeds and organic produce (2023); Tribhuvan Sahkari University (2025) for cooperative education.

Key term	Meaning
PACS	Primary Agricultural Credit Society: village-level cooperative that lends to farmers
Multi-State cooperative	A cooperative working in more than one State, regulated by the Centre
Part IXB	Constitutional chapter on cooperative societies, added by the 97th Amendment (2011)

Problems

- Political capture and irregular elections in many societies, especially credit and sugar cooperatives.
- Weak professional management, poor audits and frauds, as seen in failures of some urban cooperative banks.
- Large regional imbalance: strong networks in Maharashtra and Gujarat, weak ones in the East and North-East.
- Overlap between Centre and States, since the Union now runs a ministry for a State subject.

Way forward

Professional boards, digital accounts and independent audits; easier access to equity and credit; and partnerships between cooperatives and private firms for processing and exports. Cooperative federalism matters: the Centre's role works best through model laws, funding and technology, while States keep control of local societies.

Prelims Pointers

- 'Cooperative societies' is Entry 32 of the State List; multi-State cooperatives fall under Entry 44 of the Union List.
- Article 43B (Directive Principle): the State shall promote voluntary formation, autonomous functioning, democratic control and professional management of cooperatives.
- International Day of Cooperatives: first Saturday of July.

17 | SOCIAL JUSTICE GS 2

VB-G RAM G Act: India Replaces MGNREGA with a 125-Day Guarantee

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Welfare schemes, federalism; GS3: Rural employment, inclusive growth

Context

In December 2025 Parliament passed, and the President assented to, the **Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025** (VB-G RAM G), which repeals and replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA). Through January 2026 the Centre and States prepared rules and transition arrangements; until the new law commences, MGNREGA's provisions continue.

Key Features

- **Guarantee:** 125 days of wage employment a year for every rural household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work (up from 100 days).
- **Funding:** a centrally sponsored model with 60:40 Centre-State cost sharing; 90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan States; full central funding for Union Territories without legislatures. Under MGNREGA the Centre bore the full wage cost.
- **Seasonal pause:** States may notify pauses totalling up to 60 days a year during peak sowing and harvest so farm labour is available.
- **Focus of works:** durable assets linked to Viksit Gram Panchayat plans, in areas such as water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood assets and climate resilience.
- **Funding design:** a shift to normative (budget-based) allocations rather than a purely demand-driven model.

The debate

- **For the change:** more guaranteed days, stronger asset quality, better digital monitoring, and alignment with village development plans.
- **Against the change:** States, many already fiscally stretched, now carry 40% of costs; capped allocations could weaken the demand-driven right to work; renaming a flagship scheme drew political criticism.
- **Federal question:** poorer States with the highest demand may find it hardest to fund their share, which could widen regional gaps.

Analysis

MGNREGA's strength was its legal, demand-driven guarantee, which acted as an automatic stabiliser in crises such as Covid-19. Its weaknesses were wage delays, low average days actually provided, and assets of uneven quality. The new law raises the promise but changes who pays. Whether 125 days becomes real will depend on State budgets, timely wage payments, strong social audits and the transparency of the unemployment allowance when work is not provided.

Prelims Pointers

- MGNREGA was enacted in 2005 and launched in February 2006 (Bandlapalli, Andhra Pradesh). It is now repealed by the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025.
- Cost sharing under VB-G RAM G: 60:40 (general States), 90:10 (North-Eastern and Himalayan States), 100% Centre (UTs without legislature).
- Social audit of rural employment works is conducted through Gram Sabhas.

18 | SOCIAL JUSTICE GS 2

UGC Equity Regulations, 2026: Notified on 13 January, Stayed on 29 January

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Education; Welfare of vulnerable sections; Judiciary; GS1: Social empowerment

Context

On 13 January 2026 the University Grants Commission notified the **UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026**, to replace the 2012 anti-discrimination rules. They followed a Supreme Court-monitored public interest petition filed by the mothers of Rohit Vemula and Payal Tadvi, two students who died by suicide after alleged caste discrimination. Every institution was to set up an Equity Committee under its Equal Opportunity Centre. After protests and petitions, the Supreme Court on **29 January 2026** stayed the 2026 Regulations.

The Court's order

- A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi found the language prima facie vague and capable of misuse, with possibly 'sweeping consequences'.
- Using Article 142, the Court revived the 2012 Regulations as the interim framework, to avoid a vacuum, and issued notice to the Centre and UGC.
- The matter was listed for further hearing on 19 March 2026. The Court also suggested expert reconsideration of the text.

The arguments

- **Against the Regulations.** Petitioners from general-category backgrounds said the definition of caste-based discrimination was narrow in who it protects and could lead to complaints being misused against them.
- **For the Regulations.** Supporters, including student groups and the original petitioners' side, said the 2012 framework had failed to prevent harm, and that clearer duties on institutions were overdue. Some critics also called the 2026 text too diluted.
- **The wider concern.** Discrimination complaints, weak grievance redress and student distress on campuses make an effective framework urgent, whatever its final shape.

Analysis

The case sits at the meeting point of Articles 14, 15 and 21 and the UGC Act. A good framework needs a clear definition of discrimination, protection against both discrimination and false complaints, time-bound grievance procedures, independent members on committees, and monitoring with consequences for institutions that fail. The redrafting process is likely to decide whether the dispute narrows or widens.

Prelims Pointers

- UGC is a statutory body under the UGC Act, 1956, which regulates standards in higher education.
- Article 142: Supreme Court's power to pass orders necessary for 'complete justice'.
- Articles 15(1) and 17 prohibit discrimination on grounds including caste and abolish untouchability.

19 | SOCIAL JUSTICE GS 2

Menstrual Health Is Part of the Right to Life: Supreme Court Orders Free Pads and Toilets in Schools

Syllabus Mapping: GS2: Fundamental rights, judiciary, education; GS1: Issues relating to women

Context

On **30 January 2026**, in a petition filed by Dr. Jaya Thakur, a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan held that the right to menstrual health and access to menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in schools is part of the right to life and dignity under **Article 21**. The Court issued a continuing mandamus to the Union, States and Union Territories.

Key directions

- Every school, whether government, aided or private, in urban and rural areas, must provide **free biodegradable sanitary napkins** to girl students (Classes 6 to 12), preferably through vending machines inside toilets or a designated point.
- Functional, **gender-segregated toilets** with water and soap, and safe disposal of menstrual waste in line with solid waste rules.
- **MHM corners** in schools with spare innerwear, uniforms and supplies for emergencies.
- Menstrual and puberty education in the curriculum (through NCERT and SCERTs) and teacher training. Private schools that fail to comply risk losing recognition under the RTE Act.

The Court's reasoning

- **Article 21:** dignity and health are part of the right to life; a girl who must miss school or use unsafe materials is denied both.
- **Article 14 (substantive equality):** treating unequal students alike entrenches disadvantage; the State has a positive duty to provide support so that girls are on an equal footing.
- **Article 21A and the RTE Act:** 'free' education means removing barriers to attendance, including those linked to menstruation.

Analysis

The ruling turns menstrual hygiene from a welfare scheme into an enforceable right, building on schemes such as the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme and State programmes in Kerala and Rajasthan. Implementation will depend on budgets, supply chains for biodegradable products, maintenance of toilets and breaking stigma through education. It also links to the environment: safe disposal of sanitary waste is a growing challenge for urban local bodies.

Prelims Pointers

- Article 21A (inserted by the 86th Amendment, 2002): free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14.
- RTE Act, 2009: Section 12(1)(c) requires private unaided schools to reserve 25% of entry-level seats for disadvantaged children.
- Menstrual Hygiene Day is observed on 28 May.

20 | ECONOMY GS 3

Economic Survey 2025-26: Steady Growth, a Higher Potential and the Adaptation Argument

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Indian Economy and planning; Inflation; Fiscal policy; Climate adaptation

Context

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Economic Survey 2025-26 in Parliament on **29 January 2026**, a few days before the Union Budget on 1 February. Prepared under Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran, it estimates real GDP growth of **7.4%** for 2025-26 and projects **6.8-7.2%** for 2026-27.

Key Numbers

- **Potential growth:** India's medium-term potential growth is now assessed at about 7%, up from about 6.5% earlier.
- **Consumption:** private final consumption rose to 61.5% of GDP in 2025-26, the highest since 2011-12.
- **Inflation:** retail inflation fell from 4.6% in 2024-25 to 1.7% in April-December 2025.
- **External sector:** current account deficit 0.8% of GDP in H1 2025-26 (1.3% a year earlier). Fiscal deficit expected below 4.5% of GDP in 2025-26.
- **Banking:** gross NPAs at a multi-decade low of 2.2% (September 2025), as cited in bank research summaries of the Survey.

Themes worth noting

- **Finance as an enabler.** The Survey argues that finance should be rethought as the architecture of transformation: trust, competition and innovation in financial systems drive development.
- **Development as adaptation.** The Survey presents economic development itself as a form of climate adaptation, since richer, better-connected economies are more resilient. It reports that domestic adaptation spending rose to about 5.6% of GDP by 2022, as noted in secondary summaries.
- **Risks.** Tariff-related trade disruption, slower growth in key partners and volatile capital flows could weigh on exports and sentiment. The Survey also expects inflation to rise from very low levels in FY27.

Analysis

Low inflation and strong consumption give policymakers room, yet very low inflation partly reflects soft food prices, so it may not last. The 'development as adaptation' framing is useful but contested: it can understate the need for targeted adaptation finance for the poorest regions and for loss-and-damage support. Aspirants should be ready to present both views.

Prelims Pointers

- The Economic Survey is tabled before the Budget (Budget 2026 was on 1 February); it is not a legal document but a policy review by the Department of Economic Affairs.
- GDP at market prices = GVA + product taxes - product subsidies.
- The First Advance Estimates of GDP for FY26 (released 7 January) put growth at 7.4%, the same figure the Survey adopts.

21 | ECONOMY GS 3

The Global Outlook: IMF, World Bank, UN and WEF Reports of January 2026

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Indian Economy; Growth and development; GS2: Important international institutions

Context

Four reports in January framed the global backdrop for India's Budget season: the UN's **World Economic Situation and Prospects** (8 January), the World Bank's **Global Economic Prospects** (13 January), the WEF's **Global Risks Report 2026** (14 January) and the IMF's **World Economic Outlook Update** (19 January).

IMF WEO Update, January 2026

- India's FY26 growth forecast raised by 0.7 percentage points to **7.3%**, citing a strong July-September quarter (8.2%) and momentum into the final quarter.
- India's FY27 forecast: **6.4%** (up from 6.2%), as cyclical support fades.
- Global growth: 3.3% in 2026 and 3.2% in 2027. Inflation in India expected to return near target after a sharp fall in 2025.
- Risks: US tariffs and uncertainty, and the chance that AI-led investment slows and tightens global financial conditions.

World Bank and UN outlooks (January 2026)

- **World Bank, Global Economic Prospects (13 January):** India's FY26 growth raised by 0.9 points to 7.2%, easing to 6.5% in FY27; global growth to slow to 2.6% in 2026. It notes government debt in emerging and developing economies near a 55-year high.
- **UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2026 (8 January):** global output growth of 2.7% in 2026; India's growth moderating to 6.6% in calendar 2026, keeping it the fastest-growing major economy.

WEF Global Risks Report 2026 (21st edition)

- Based on a survey of more than 1,300 leaders and experts.
- **Top risk for 2026:** geoeconomic confrontation, chosen by 18% of respondents as most likely to trigger a global crisis; followed by state-based armed conflict, extreme weather, societal polarisation and mis/disinformation.
- **Two-year horizon:** geoeconomic confrontation ranks first (up eight places), with misinformation second.
- **Ten-year horizon:** extreme weather tops the list and half of the top ten risks are environmental. Inequality is the most interconnected risk for a second year.

Analysis

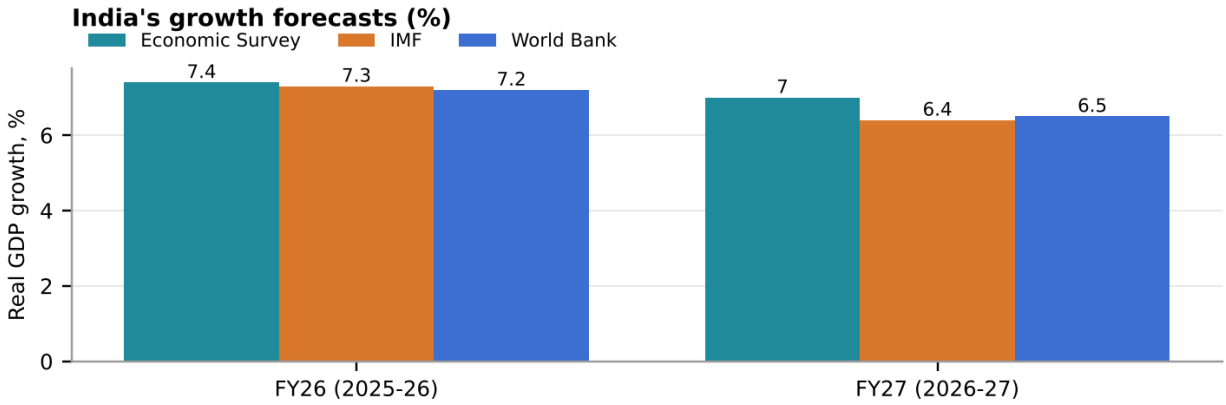


Chart. The Survey's FY27 bar is the midpoint of its 6.8-7.2% range. Source: Economic Survey 2025-26; IMF WEO Update and World Bank GEP, January 2026.

- **Three estimates, one story.** For FY26 the NSO (7.4%), the Economic Survey (7.4%), the IMF (7.3%) and the World Bank (7.2%) broadly agree. For FY27 the Survey's 6.8-7.2% is notably higher than the IMF's 6.4% and the World Bank's 6.5%, a gap worth noting in answers.

- **Domestic engine.** Growth rests on consumption and public investment, which cushions India from weak external demand but not from tariff shocks to exports.
- **Risks are already visible.** The Greenland tariffs, the Iran secondary tariff and the EU's CBAM all illustrate geoeconomic confrontation in a single month.

Prelims Pointers

- IMF's World Economic Outlook: full editions in April and October, updates in January and July.
- Global Risks Report: published by the WEF (headquartered in Cologny, Geneva) using its Global Risks Perception Survey.
- World Bank's Global Economic Prospects: published twice a year (January and June). UN DESA publishes the World Economic Situation and Prospects.

22 | ECONOMY GS 3

Startup India at Ten: National Startup Day 2026

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Indian Economy, growth, employment; Science and technology (innovation); Government policies

Context

India observed National Startup Day on **16 January 2026**, marking ten years since the Startup India Action Plan was launched on 16 January 2016. The government declared the date National Startup Day in 2022. The Prime Minister addressed founders and innovators at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, where results of the fifth National Startup Awards and the fifth States' Startup Ranking were announced.

Key Numbers (as reported for December 2025 - January 2026)

- More than **2 lakh** startups recognised by DPIIT (about 2.09 lakh by December 2025), making India the world's third-largest startup ecosystem.
- Around half of recognised startups come from Tier-II and Tier-III cities.
- More than 45% of recognised startups have at least one woman director.
- The Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), with a Rs 10,000 crore corpus, is managed by SIDBI and invests through SEBI-registered funds rather than directly.

What the scheme offers

- **Recognition:** an entity can be recognised as a startup by DPIIT for up to ten years from incorporation.
- **Incentives:** income tax holiday for three consecutive years (for eligible startups), self-certification under certain labour and environmental laws, faster patent examination and fee rebates, and relaxed public procurement norms.
- **Finance:** FFS, the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme and the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups.

Analysis

The first decade spread entrepreneurship well beyond the metros and brought more women founders in. The next decade has harder problems: funding cycles that dry up for early-stage firms, a thin deep-tech pipeline in a country whose R&D spending stays below 1% of GDP, and regulatory friction for firms that scale. Policy is shifting towards research-led innovation, including the Rs 1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) scheme approved in 2025. Success will depend on patient capital, university-industry links and domestic exits through public markets.

Prelims Pointers

- DPIIT (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) is under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- National Startup Day: 16 January. Startup India launched: 16 January 2016.
- FFS is operated by SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India).

23 | ENVIRONMENT GS 3

EU CBAM Enters Its Definitive Phase: A Carbon Border for Indian Exporters

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Environment, climate change; External sector; GS2: International trade rules

Context

The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) moved from a reporting-only transitional phase (1 October 2023 to 31 December 2025) to its **definitive phase on 1 January 2026**. EU importers of covered goods must now obtain CBAM certificates that reflect the carbon price that would have been paid had the goods been made under EU rules. Emissions data must be verified by an accredited verifier. Covered sectors are iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

Why India is exposed

- Iron and steel and aluminium are the biggest Indian CBAM-covered exports to the EU. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) reports that India's steel and aluminium exports to the EU fell 24.4%, from USD 7.71 billion in FY24 to USD 5.82 billion in FY25, even during the reporting phase.
- GTRI estimates exporters may have to cut prices by 15-22% so that EU buyers can absorb the carbon cost.
- Smaller firms face compliance costs for tracking fuel, electricity and production data in the EU's format.

India's arguments

- **Common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).** India argues that a unilateral border measure ignores the principle that developed countries should lead on emissions cuts and that developing countries need policy space.
- **Trade rules.** CBAM is described by critics as a possible disguised restriction on trade. The EU says it is an environmental measure that prevents 'carbon leakage' and protects its own carbon market (EU ETS).
- **Per capita view.** India's per capita emissions are low, but its steel route is coal-intensive, which raises embedded emissions per tonne.

Responses and way forward

- Decarbonise production: green hydrogen-based steel, scrap-based electric arc furnaces and renewable power for aluminium smelting.
- Build a domestic carbon price and measurement system (the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme) so that carbon paid in India can be recognised by the EU.
- Use the India-EU FTA process and WTO forums to seek recognition of equivalent measures, transition support and predictable rules.
- Diversify markets and move up the value chain, since CBAM applies to basic materials.

Prelims Pointers

- CBAM: EU law; covers imports of selected carbon-intensive goods; definitive phase from 1 January 2026.
- Carbon leakage: relocation of emissions-intensive production to places with weaker climate rules.
- EU ETS: the EU Emissions Trading System, a cap-and-trade carbon market.

24 | ECONOMY GS 3

Bank Frauds: Fewer Cases, Much Bigger Money

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Indian economy, banking sector, mobilisation of resources

Context

The RBI's **Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25**, published around the turn of the year, showed the number of frauds falling sharply while the money involved tripled.

Key Numbers

- Cases fell from 36,052 (2023-24) to **23,879** (2024-25), but the amount rose from Rs 11,261 crore to **Rs 34,771 crore**.
- The jump was largely due to **122 old cases worth Rs 18,336 crore** being reported again after banks re-did fraud classification to follow the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling that borrowers must be heard before an account is declared fraudulent.
- In April-September 2025, cases fell to 5,092 but the amount rose to Rs 21,515 crore.
- By number, card and internet frauds were about 67% of cases; by value, loan (advances) frauds dominated.
- Private banks reported most cases by number (59%), but public sector banks accounted for most of the money (71%).

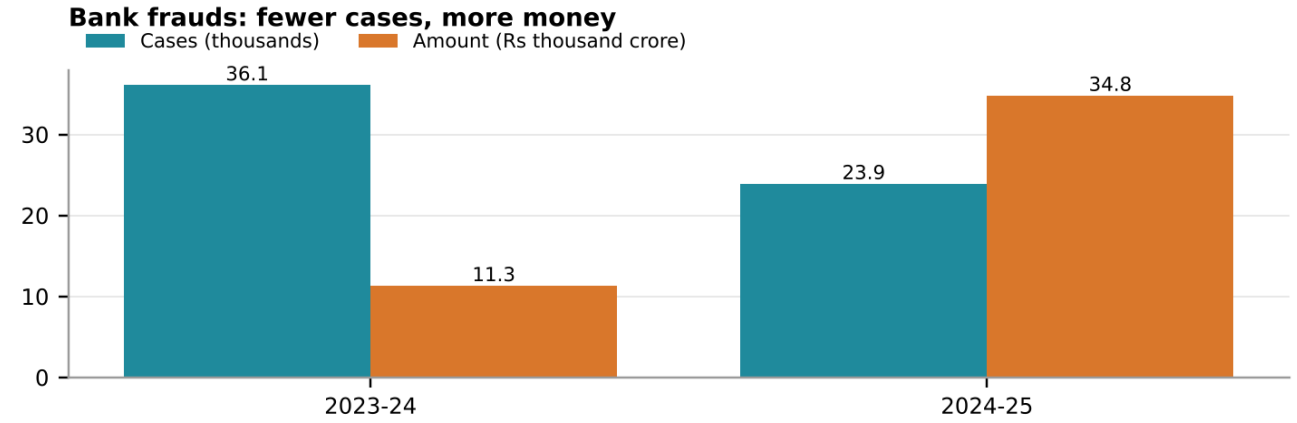


Chart. Cases fell by about a third while the money involved tripled. Source: RBI Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25.

Reading the trend

- **Small digital frauds are falling** thanks to better transaction monitoring, risk-based authentication, re-KYC and the crackdown on 'mule' accounts.
- **Big losses come from loans:** large corporate loan frauds take years to detect, so they show up late and inflate later figures.
- **Process matters:** the Supreme Court ruling in *SBI v Rajesh Agarwal* (2023) requires a hearing before an account is classified as fraud, which improves fairness but slows classification.

Way forward

- Earlier detection of loan frauds through forensic audits, data sharing across banks (the RBI's Central Repository of Information on Large Credits) and early warning signals.
- Faster investigation and recovery, including through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and better coordination with the CBI and ED.
- Stronger governance and accountability in public sector banks, where most of the money is lost.
- Continued public awareness on digital fraud, including 'digital arrest' scams, and fast reporting through the 1930 helpline.

Prelims Pointers

- National Cybercrime Reporting Portal and helpline 1930 are run under the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Mule account: a bank account used to move stolen money, often opened or rented in another person's name.
- The RBI's Trend and Progress report is a statutory report under Section 36(2) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

25 | ECONOMY GS 3

Inflation Below the Comfort Zone: Relief or Risk?

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Inflation, monetary policy, growth

Context

Retail inflation (CPI) stayed below the RBI's lower tolerance limit of 2% for a fourth straight month: **0.71% in November 2025** and **1.33% in December 2025**, with food prices falling year-on-year for seven straight months. The RBI cut its repo rate to **5.25%** in December 2025, its fourth cut that year. Very low inflation with strong growth looks ideal, but it raises its own questions.

Why inflation fell so low

- A good monsoon in 2025, full reservoirs and record wheat sowing kept food supplies strong; vegetable and pulse prices fell sharply.
- GST rate cuts in September 2025 lowered prices of many consumer goods.
- A high base: food inflation had been high a year earlier, so year-on-year changes look very low.
- Soft global commodity prices, including crude oil.

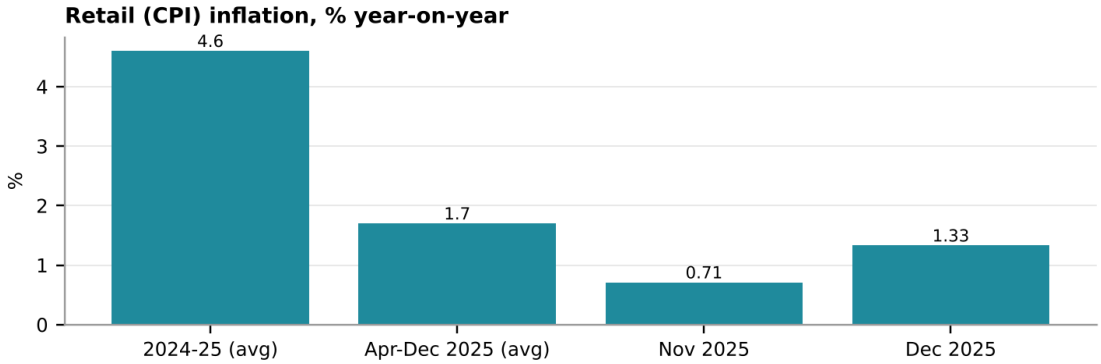


Chart. The RBI's target is 4%, with a tolerance band of 2-6%. Source: Economic Survey 2025-26; MoSPI CPI releases.

Why very low inflation is a concern

- **Farm incomes:** falling crop prices hurt farmers even as consumers gain (potato wholesale prices in Uttar Pradesh fell to about half of the previous year's level).
- **Nominal growth and tax revenue:** low inflation drags down nominal GDP growth (about 8% in 2025-26, a multi-year low), which squeezes tax collections and makes debt ratios harder to reduce.
- **Policy credibility:** RBI surveys show households still expect much higher inflation than official data, so very low readings may not change behaviour.
- **Reversal risk:** when the base effect fades, inflation could rise quickly, forcing a policy U-turn.

Analysis

The flexible inflation targeting framework treats inflation below 2% as a target miss, just like inflation above 6%. The RBI's cuts reflect that. The new CPI series with 2024 as base year (released in February 2026) lowers the weight of food, which may change how volatile headline inflation looks in future.

Prelims Pointers

- Inflation target: 4% CPI with a band of 2% to 6%, set by the Government under Section 45ZA of the RBI Act, 1934 for five-year periods. The Monetary Policy Committee has six members.
- Core inflation excludes food and fuel; headline inflation includes all items.
- Deflation: a sustained fall in the general price level; disinflation: a fall in the rate of inflation.

26 | ECONOMY GS 3

Land Acquisition: The Biggest Brake on Infrastructure

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Infrastructure, investment models, land reforms

Context

A review of large projects monitored through **PRAGATI**, the Prime Minister's platform for tracking major projects, reported land acquisition as the single largest cause of delay, ahead of environmental and forest clearances and right-of-way problems. This comes as public capital spending is at a record of about Rs 11.2 lakh crore (2025-26).

Legal framework

- **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013** (RFCTLARR) replaced the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.
- Requires a Social Impact Assessment for most projects, and consent of 80% of affected families for private projects and 70% for public-private partnerships.
- Compensation up to four times market value in rural areas and two times in urban areas, plus rehabilitation and resettlement.
- 'Acquisition and requisitioning of property' is Entry 42 of the Concurrent List; several States have passed their own amendments or land-purchase policies.

Why delays persist

- Unclear and outdated land records lead to title disputes and litigation.
- Social Impact Assessments and consent processes take time, and compensation disputes often go to court.
- Small, fragmented holdings mean dealing with thousands of owners for one linear project.
- Protests where livelihoods, forests or tribal land are affected; the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and PESA, 1996 add gram sabha consent requirements.

Way forward

- Digitise and clean land records under DILRMP, using unique land parcel numbers (Bhu-Aadhaar) and conclusive titling.
- Use land pooling (as in Amaravati) and negotiated purchase with fair, quick payment.
- Time-bound dispute resolution and dedicated land tribunals.
- Plan corridors early, using GIS and PM Gati Shakti, to avoid sensitive land.

Prelims Pointers

- PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) was launched in 2015.
- Article 300A: right to property is a constitutional right (not a fundamental right since the 44th Amendment, 1978).
- PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (2021) is a GIS-based platform for infrastructure planning.

27 | AGRICULTURE GS 3

Farm Distress: What the Suicide Data Show

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Agriculture, agrarian distress; GS1: Social issues

Context

Analysis published in January revisited farm-sector suicides using NCRB's *Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2023* (released September 2025). In 2023, **10,786** people in the farm sector died by suicide: **4,690 farmers/cultivators** and **6,096 agricultural labourers**, about 6.3% of all suicides in India. Farmer suicides fell about 10% from 2022, while labourer suicides were nearly unchanged.

Patterns

- **Labourers now outnumber cultivators** among farm-sector suicides, pointing to landless and casual workers as the most vulnerable.
- **Concentration:** Maharashtra (about 4,150 farm-sector suicides) and Karnataka (about 2,400) report the most, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Long-term:** farm-sector suicides peaked in the early 2000s and have declined since, but remain high in rainfed, cotton and soybean belts.

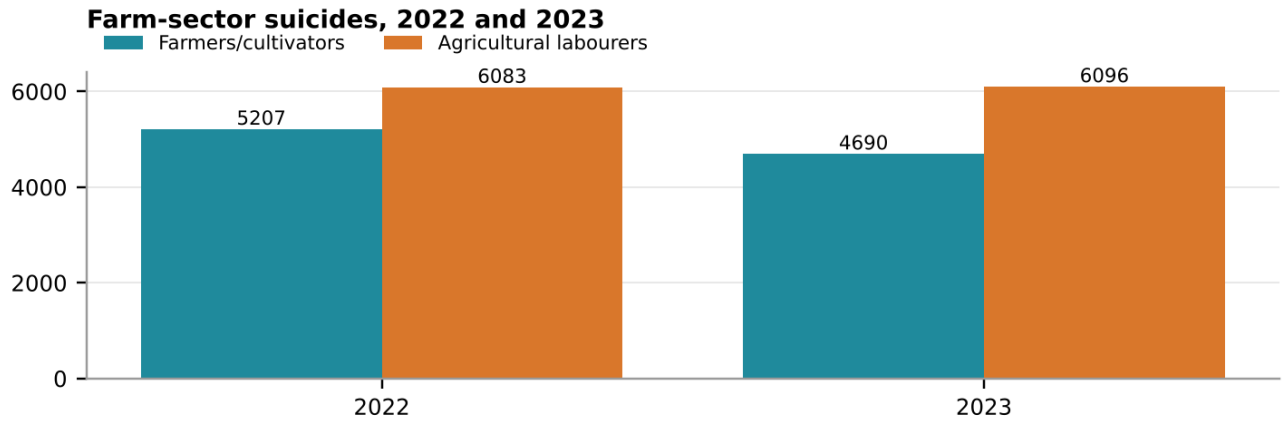


Chart. Labourers now account for the larger share. Source: NCRB, Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India 2023.

Causes

- **Debt:** repeated crop failures and borrowing from informal lenders at high interest.
- **Rainfed farming:** about half of net sown area depends on rain, so drought or erratic monsoons hit incomes hard.
- **Price volatility:** crashes in crop prices after good harvests (as with potatoes in 2025) and rising input costs.
- **Small holdings:** most farmers own less than 2 hectares, limiting income and access to credit.
- **Weak safety nets:** limited crop insurance payouts, and mental health support that is scarce in rural areas.

What helps

- Rural employment guarantees: studies link expanded MGNREGA work to falling distress; the new VB-G RAM G Act (Section 17) must deliver work on time.
- Irrigation, crop diversification and price stabilisation (MSP operations, the Price Stabilisation Fund).
- Faster, fairer crop insurance under PMFBY and institutional credit through Kisan Credit Cards.
- Community mental health support under the National Mental Health Programme and Tele-MANAS (14416).

Prelims Pointers

- NCRB is under the Ministry of Home Affairs; it publishes Crime in India and Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI).
- PM-KISAN gives Rs 6,000 a year to eligible landholding farmers in three instalments.
- Tele-MANAS: national tele-mental health helpline 14416 (launched 2022).

28 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GS 3

After PSLV-C62: Gaganyaan's Timeline and India's Space Capacity Problem

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Space technology; Indigenisation of technology; Achievements of Indians in S and T

Context

January 2026 opened with a setback and closed with a timetable. PSLV-C62 failed on 12 January, the second consecutive anomaly in the PSLV's third stage (see Section 29). On 30 January, ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan said the first uncrewed Gaganyaan flight, **G1**, carrying the humanoid robot **Vyommitra**, was targeted for March 2026 and was about 90% ready after more than 8,000 ground tests. The crewed flight is now planned for **2027**, after three uncrewed missions. He said the PSLV failure analysis runs separately and would not delay Gaganyaan. Together, these raise a bigger question: can ISRO deliver a crowded roadmap while also opening the sector to private firms?

Key Points

- **Gaganyaan:** three crew members in a roughly 400 km orbit for up to three days, launched on a human-rated LVM3. The four astronaut-designates are Group Captains Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Ajit Krishnan, Angad Pratap and Shubhanshu Shukla, who flew to the ISS on Axiom-4 in 2025.
- **Long-term roadmap:** Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) by 2035 and an Indian crewed Moon landing by 2040.
- **Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV):** approved in September 2024 at Rs 8,240 crore, with a reusable first stage and up to 30 tonnes to low Earth orbit, about three times today's capacity. Development is planned over 96 months with three test flights.
- **Reusability tests:** ISRO's RLV-LEX series, completed in 2024, demonstrated autonomous runway landing of a winged vehicle ('Pushpak').
- **Sector reforms:** IN-SPACe (2020) authorises private activity; NSIL is the commercial arm; the Indian Space Policy 2023 sets roles; FDI rules were eased in 2024.

The capacity problem

- **Launch cadence.** ISRO flew only a handful of missions in 2025, well short of its plan. Flagship projects (Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan-4, NISAR follow-ons, BAS modules) compete for the same teams, test stands and launch pads.
- **Shared infrastructure.** Private launch firms such as Skyroot and Agnikul still depend on ISRO facilities at Sriharikota and on ISRO testing. A failure investigation can slow the whole ecosystem.
- **Medium-lift dependence.** PSLV and GSLV are expendable medium-lift rockets in a market moving to heavy-lift reusable vehicles, which cut cost per kilogram sharply.
- **Legal gaps.** India has no national space law. Under the 1972 Liability Convention, the launching state is liable for damage, so the government carries private risk without a statute to share it. A Space Activities Bill has been pending in draft form since 2017.

Way forward

- Pass a national space activities law covering licensing, liability, insurance and dispute resolution.
- Build a second launch complex (the Kulasekarapattinam spaceport in Tamil Nadu, mainly for SSLV) and more private test and integration facilities.
- Move routine launches and satellite production to industry (as with the PSLV and SSLV technology transfers) so ISRO can focus on research and human spaceflight.

Prelims Pointers

- Vyommitra: half-humanoid robot to fly on the uncrewed Gaganyaan missions.
- NGLV: reusable first stage, up to 30 t to LEO (about 1.5 times LVM3's cost for three times its payload).

29 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GS 3

PSLV-C62: A Second Third-Stage Anomaly in Under a Year

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Science and Technology; Achievements of Indians in S and T; Space

Context

On 12 January 2026, ISRO's first launch of the year, PSLV-C62, lifted off from the First Launch Pad at Sriharikota at about 10:17 am IST on the 64th flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle. It carried the Earth observation satellite **EOS-N1 (Anvesha)** and 15 co-passenger satellites, eight of them foreign, in a mission by NewSpace India Limited (NSIL). Near the end of the third stage (PS3), ISRO observed a disturbance in the vehicle's roll rates followed by a deviation from the flight path, and the satellites did not reach their intended orbit. ISRO began a detailed analysis.

Key Points

- **Vehicle:** PSLV is a four-stage rocket with alternating solid and liquid stages: solid first stage with strap-ons, liquid second, solid third (PS3), liquid fourth (PS4).
- **Pattern:** PSLV-C61 in May 2025 also suffered a technical anomaly in the third stage, which makes PSLV-C62 the second consecutive PS3 problem.
- **Commercial angle:** this was the 9th dedicated commercial mission by NSIL, so confidence of foreign customers is at stake.
- **Mission purpose:** EOS-N1 was meant to enhance remote sensing for agriculture, urban mapping and environmental monitoring.

Analysis

- **Reliability.** PSLV has been India's workhorse with a strong long-term record, including a world-record launch of 104 satellites in 2017. Back-to-back failures in the same stage point to a design or quality issue rather than bad luck.
- **Failure analysis.** A Failure Analysis Committee should identify the root cause, publish findings appropriately and fix the stage before the next flight. Transparency builds trust with customers and the public.
- **Economics.** The loss of 16 satellites carries insurance, reputation and schedule costs for NSIL and for Indian start-ups that fly on PSLV rideshare missions.
- **Wider programme.** Gaganyaan, NavIC replenishment and commercial launches depend on a healthy launcher fleet. Private launchers and new vehicles such as SSLV can add redundancy.

Did you know?

The PSLV has four stages that alternate solid and liquid propulsion: solid (PS1), liquid (PS2), solid (PS3) and liquid (PS4). Both recent anomalies were in the solid third stage.

Prelims Pointers

- PSLV: Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, four stages (solid-liquid-solid-liquid); launched from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.
- NSIL: commercial arm of ISRO, under the Department of Space.
- IN-SPACe: authorises and promotes private space activity.

30 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GS 3

Governance by Design: India's Techno-Legal Approach to AI

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Developments in IT and AI; GS2: Government policies and interventions

Context

In January 2026 the **Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser** (PSA) released a white paper, *Strengthening AI Governance Through a Techno-Legal Framework*. It argues against a single, standalone AI law. Instead it proposes a 'law-plus-technology' model: legal duties are built into how AI systems are designed, tested and deployed. It builds on the India AI Governance Guidelines released by MeitY in November 2025 and comes ahead of the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi (19-20 February 2026).

Key Proposals

- **Governance by design:** privacy, safety, fairness and accountability safeguards embedded in the system rather than checked only after harm occurs.
- **Lifecycle approach:** controls at five stages: data collection, protection of data in use, model training and assessment, safe inference (outputs), and agentic AI that acts on its own.
- **Proportionality:** obligations scale with risk instead of applying uniformly to every system.
- **Institutions:** an AI Governance Group chaired by the PSA, a Technology and Policy Expert Committee under MeitY, an AI Safety Institute for testing and evaluation, and a national AI incident database.
- **Digital public infrastructure:** tools such as Aadhaar, DigiLocker, UPI and the Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA) used for consent, verification and audit trails.

Why India prefers this model

- **Innovation room.** A heavy, EU-style statute could burden startups and slow the IndiaAI Mission (approved 2024, about Rs 10,372 crore), which is building compute capacity and Indian foundation models.
- **Existing laws already apply.** The IT Act, 2000, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and its 2025 Rules, consumer law and sectoral regulators (RBI, SEBI) already cover many AI harms.
- **Speed of change.** Technical standards and tools can be updated faster than legislation.

Concerns

- **Enforcement.** Without a statute, it is unclear which regulator acts when an AI system causes harm across sectors.
- **Remedies for people.** There are few clear ways for an affected person to contest an automated decision or deepfake harm.
- **Capacity.** Small firms and State agencies may lack the skills and money to run audits and technical safeguards.
- **Voluntary versus mandatory.** Thresholds at which compliance becomes compulsory remain undefined.

Analysis

The approach suits a country that wants to be a large AI user and builder while keeping costs low. It fits India's record of governing through digital public infrastructure. Its success will depend on whether the AI Safety Institute gets real testing powers, whether incident reporting is mandatory for high-risk uses, and whether citizens get a simple grievance route. Small language models, which run on phones and in Indian languages at low cost, may make governance by design easier to apply at scale.

Prelims Pointers

- Principal Scientific Adviser: Ajay K. Sood. MeitY released the India AI Governance Guidelines in November 2025.
- IndiaAI Mission: approved March 2024; seven pillars, including compute capacity, foundation models, datasets and safe and trusted AI.
- India AI Impact Summit: Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, 19-20 February 2026.

31 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GS 3

SHANTI Act and Light Water Reactors: India's Two-Track Nuclear Path

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Energy; Nuclear technology; Infrastructure; GS2: Government policies

Context

The **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025**, passed in December, repeals the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010. Through January 2026 attention turned to what comes next, including foreign and private **light water reactors (LWRs)** alongside India's home-grown pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs). The India-EU summit on 27 January also backed wider cooperation under the 2020 India-Euratom agreement.

What SHANTI changes

- Allows limited private participation, under licence, in building and operating plants, making equipment and some fuel-cycle activities.
- Gives the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) statutory status, strengthening its independence.
- Replaces the single liability cap with a graded structure that varies by type and size of installation. Supplier liability concerns under the 2010 law had kept foreign vendors away.
- Supports the national target of **100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047**, from about 8.8 GW today (planned to reach about 22 GW by 2031-32).

LWR versus PHWR

- **LWR:** ordinary water as both coolant and moderator; needs enriched uranium; the global standard (most of the world's reactor fleet). Types include pressurised water reactors (PWRs) and boiling water reactors (BWRs).
- **PHWR:** heavy water (D O) as moderator and coolant; runs on natural uranium; India's indigenous mainstay (220 MW and 700 MW designs).
- **India's LWRs today:** Tarapur 1 and 2 (BWRs, 1969) and Kudankulam (Russian VVER PWRs). Planned imports include Jaitapur (France) and Kovvada (USA).

Why LWRs now

- **Scale and speed:** large LWR units (1,000 MW and above) add capacity quickly toward the 2047 goal.
- **Small modular reactors:** the Budget 2025-26 Nuclear Energy Mission (Rs 20,000 crore) aims for at least five indigenous SMRs by 2033, including the PWR-based BSMR-200 and SMR-55. These are LWR technologies.
- **Exports and diplomacy:** an Indian LWR design would let India offer reactors to Global South partners.

Concerns

- **Cost:** imported reactors have high capital costs, which can mean costly power.
- **Fuel dependence:** enriched uranium must largely be imported; PHWRs use natural uranium and fit India's three-stage programme leading to thorium.
- **Liability and safety:** critics worry graded liability may leave victims under-compensated after a serious accident; public trust needs a truly independent regulator.

Prelims Pointers

- Three-stage programme (Homi Bhabha): PHWRs (natural uranium) to fast breeder reactors (plutonium) to thorium-based reactors. The 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor is at Kalpakkam.
- Moderator slows neutrons; coolant removes heat. Heavy water absorbs fewer neutrons than ordinary water, so natural uranium can be used.
- AERB was set up in 1983; SHANTI gives it statutory backing.

32 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GS 3

Quantum for Defence: The Military Quantum Mission Policy Framework

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Developments in science and technology; Security; Indigenisation of technology

Context

On **23 January 2026**, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan released the **Military Quantum Mission Policy Framework**. It sets out how the Army, Navy and Air Force will jointly adopt quantum technologies, in step with the civilian **National Quantum Mission** (NQM).

The framework

- **Four pillars:** quantum communication, quantum computing, quantum sensing and metrology, and quantum materials and devices, matching the NQM's four themes.
- **Jointness:** a single tri-service approach instead of separate projects in each service.
- **Civil-military fusion:** drawing on academia, startups, industry and the NQM hubs instead of building everything in-house.
- **Aim:** secure communications, better sensing and navigation, faster decision-making and resilience against cyber and electronic attack.

Did you know?

A quantum key distribution link can reveal an eavesdropper, because measuring a quantum state disturbs it. That is why militaries want it for their most sensitive links.

National Quantum Mission (background)

- Approved on 19 April 2023 with Rs 6,003.65 crore for 2023-24 to 2030-31, run by the Department of Science and Technology.
- **Targets:** quantum computers of 50-1,000 physical qubits within eight years; satellite-based secure quantum communication over 2,000 km within India; inter-city quantum key distribution over 2,000 km; precise magnetometers and atomic clocks.
- **Four thematic hubs:** computing (IISc Bengaluru), communication (IIT Madras with C-DOT), sensing and metrology (IIT Bombay), materials and devices (IIT Delhi).

Military uses

- **Quantum key distribution (QKD):** any eavesdropping on the key disturbs the quantum states and is detected.
- **Post-quantum cryptography:** large quantum computers could break today's public-key encryption, so military networks need quantum-safe algorithms now ('harvest now, decrypt later' risk).
- **Quantum sensing:** magnetometers and gravimeters can detect submarines or tunnels; quantum clocks and inertial sensors allow navigation when GPS is jammed.

Challenges

India's quantum hardware base is small: cryogenics, lasers, single-photon detectors and specialised materials are largely imported. Talent is thin and private investment is modest compared with the US and China. The framework will need dedicated funding, secure supply chains and defence procurement rules that let startups move from prototype to fielded systems.

Prelims Pointers

- Qubit: a quantum bit that can be in a superposition of 0 and 1; entanglement links qubits so their states are correlated.
- QKD is based on the no-cloning theorem: an unknown quantum state cannot be copied exactly.
- Also in January: the DRDO's long-range anti-ship hypersonic missile (LR-AShM) shown on Republic Day has a reported peak speed of about Mach 10.

33 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GS 3

Space for Earth, and the Law in Orbit: Healthcare Spin-offs and Patents in Space

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: S and T applications in everyday life; IPR issues; GS2: International treaties

Context

Two January discussions show how space research reaches daily life and how the law is lagging. One looked at medical technologies that grew out of space programmes. The other asked who owns an invention made on a permanently crewed base on the Moon or in orbit. With India planning the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035, both matter for policy.

Space technology in healthcare

- **Imaging:** digital image processing developed for planetary and astronomical images helped CT, MRI and other scans.
- **Compact diagnostics:** the need to run blood tests in microgravity pushed miniaturised analysers and lab-on-chip devices.
- **Wearables:** astronaut biotelemetry shaped continuous monitoring of heart rate, ECG and breathing.
- **Clean environments:** spacecraft air and water purification informs hospital infection control.
- **Telemedicine:** ISRO's satellite telemedicine network has linked district hospitals and remote areas with specialists since the early 2000s.
- **Scale:** NASA records more than 2,000 commercial spin-offs since 1976; ISRO has transferred many technologies to Indian industry, including biomedical devices.

Why patent law struggles in space

- **Patents are territorial;** they apply within a country's borders. Under Article II of the Outer Space Treaty (1967), no state can claim sovereignty over outer space, the Moon or other bodies.
- **Jurisdiction follows registration.** Article VIII gives the state of registry jurisdiction over its space objects, so an invention made in a registered module is treated as made in that state.
- **The ISS model:** Article 21 of the 1998 ISS Intergovernmental Agreement applies each partner's patent law to its own module. This works for separate modules, not for shared lunar bases built and run jointly.
- **Survival technologies:** on a permanent base, patents on water recycling, oxygen or power could exclude others from essentials, which sits uneasily with the principle that space is free for use by all.
- **'Flags of convenience':** firms could register objects in states with weak rules, as happens with ships.

Way forward

Options include a multilateral IP regime for joint bases, compulsory licensing for survival-critical technologies, and clear rules on jointly created inventions. India, a party to the Outer Space Treaty and a signatory of the Artemis Accords (2023), can push for rules that keep access open for emerging space nations. At home it needs a space law that covers IP for private missions.

Prelims Pointers

- Core UN space treaties: Outer Space Treaty (1967), Rescue Agreement (1968), Liability Convention (1972), Registration Convention (1975), Moon Agreement (1979). India has signed but not ratified the Moon Agreement.
- India signed the US-led Artemis Accords in June 2023.
- UNCOPUOS (UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space) was set up in 1959; India is a founding member.

34 | DISASTER MANAGEMENT GS 3

A Year of Extremes: Himalayan Disasters and Community-Based Risk Reduction

Syllabus Mapping: GS1: Geography (Himalaya), important geophysical phenomena; GS3: Disaster management, environment

Context

A Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and *Down To Earth* assessment of 2025 found extreme weather in India on **331 of the first 334 days** of the year, up from 295 days in 2024. At least **4,419 people** died, about 17.4 million hectares of crops were affected and over 1.8 lakh houses were destroyed. Himalayan States were hit hardest relative to their size: Himachal Pradesh saw extreme events on about 80% of days, and the August 2025 flash flood at Dharali in Uttarakhand became a symbol of the risk. In January the debate moved to how hill States and local bodies can prepare better.

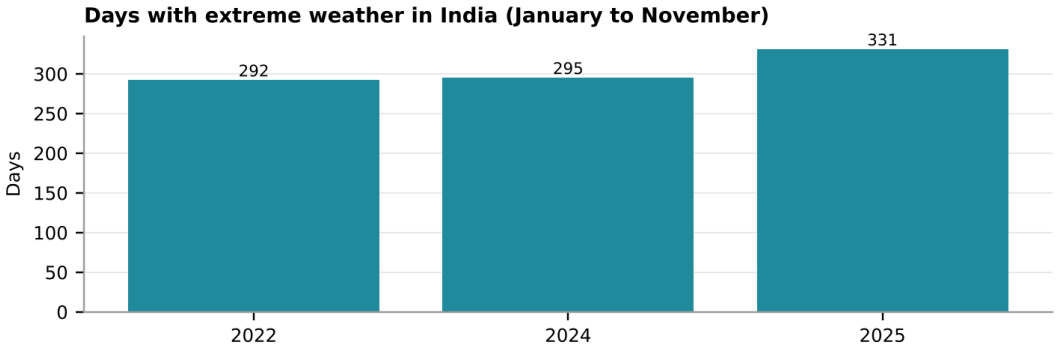
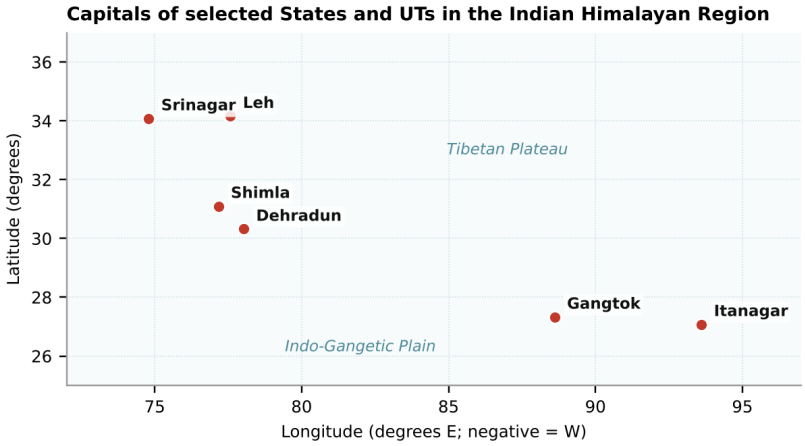


Chart. In 2025, extreme events were recorded on almost every day of the year so far. Source: CSE and Down To Earth, State of Extreme Weather 2025.

Why the Himalaya is so exposed

- **Young, fragile mountains:** steep slopes, weak rock and active seismic zones make landslides and debris flows common.
- **Warming faster than average:** glacier retreat creates glacial lakes that can burst (GLOFs); more intense cloudbursts follow warmer, wetter air.
- **Unplanned construction:** roads cut without slope stabilisation, hydropower tunnels and blasting, buildings on riverbeds and floodplains, and tourism pressure.
- **Scale:** the Indian Himalayan Region covers 13 States and UTs and feeds the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra systems that support hundreds of millions downstream.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. Use it to fix the west-to-east spread of the Himalayan States.

Why communities matter

In most disasters the first responders are neighbours, not national teams. Community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) puts local people and panchayats at the centre: mapping hazards and vulnerable households, running early-warning chains, training volunteers and planning evacuation.

India's framework

- **Disaster Management Act, 2005** (amended 2025): NDMA, SDMAs and DDMAs; the 2025 amendment added urban disaster management authorities and national and State disaster databases.
- **Funds:** following the 15th Finance Commission, disaster risk management funds are split between response and mitigation at national and State levels.
- **Aapda Mitra:** trains community volunteers in disaster-prone districts. Panchayats can include risk reduction in Gram Panchayat Development Plans.
- **International:** the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030; India leads the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI, 2019).

Gaps and way forward

- Make hazard zoning binding for hill construction, with carrying-capacity studies for towns and tourist sites.
- Expand automatic weather stations, Doppler radars and glacial lake monitoring, and turn warnings into village-level SMS and siren alerts.
- Give panchayats trained staff and timely access to mitigation funds; skill gaps and delays are the usual bottlenecks.
- Use ecosystem-based measures: protect forests, wetlands and river corridors that absorb floods and stabilise slopes.

Prelims Pointers

- NDMA is chaired by the Prime Minister; NDRF was raised under the DM Act, 2005.
- GLOF: glacial lake outburst flood. The 2023 South Lhonak GLOF hit the Teesta valley in Sikkim.
- Sendai Framework: adopted at the third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai, Japan (2015).

35 | INTERNAL SECURITY GS 3

Cyber Warfare: From Support Tool to Weapon of War

Syllabus Mapping: GS3: Challenges to internal security through communication networks; cyber security; role of technology in security

Context

Analysis of the US operation in Venezuela (3 January 2026) and of earlier strikes on Iranian nuclear sites in 2025 suggested that cyber and electronic operations were used alongside conventional forces, for example to disrupt power, communications and air defences before strikes. Commentators said this marks a shift: computer network operations are becoming part of the strike package itself, not only tools for spying.

Key Concepts

- **Cyberspace as the fifth domain** of warfare, after land, sea, air and space.
- **Types of operations:** espionage (stealing data), sabotage (disabling systems, as the Stuxnet worm did to Iranian centrifuges around 2010), disinformation, and attacks on critical infrastructure such as power grids, ports and banks.
- **Attribution problem:** attackers can hide behind proxies, so it is hard to prove who acted and to retaliate lawfully.
- **Legal grey zone:** the Tallinn Manual (a NATO-backed expert study) argues international law applies to cyber operations, but there is no binding cyber treaty.

India's exposure and architecture

- **Threats:** power grids, ports, hospitals and payment systems are prime targets; the 2020 Mumbai power outage and the 2022 AIIMS ransomware attack showed the risks.
- **Institutions:** CERT-In (national incident response, under Section 70B of the IT Act), NCIIPC (protects critical information infrastructure, Section 70A), the National Cyber Security Coordinator in the NSCS, and the Defence Cyber Agency (2019) under the Integrated Defence Staff.

- **Policy:** the National Cyber Security Policy dates from 2013; a new national cyber security strategy has long been awaited.

Way forward

- Issue an updated national cyber security strategy with clear roles for civil and military agencies.
- Build offensive and defensive cyber capability under a full cyber command, with clear rules on when it may be used.
- Mandate security standards and incident reporting for critical sectors, and test grids and ports with regular drills.
- Train a much larger cyber workforce and support Indian security products to cut dependence on imported hardware and software.
- Shape global norms through the UN Open-Ended Working Group on ICT security.

Prelims Pointers

- CERT-In: Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, under MeitY; must be told of cyber incidents within six hours under its 2022 directions.
- NCIIPC is under the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO).
- Budapest Convention (2001) on cybercrime: India is not a party.

36 | ETHICS GS 4

Case Study: The Fast-Track File

Syllabus Mapping: GS4: Ethics in public administration; probity; accountability; environmental ethics

The case

You are the District Collector of a Himalayan district hit by landslides last monsoon. A road-widening project, important for tourism and army logistics, needs your clearance this week, or the year's funds will lapse. The contractor is close to a senior political leader, who has called twice to 'expect a quick decision'. A government geologist's note warns that two stretches cut across unstable slopes and need redesign, which would delay work by six months. Some villagers want the road quickly for jobs and hospital access; others fear their homes will slide.

Stakeholders

- Villagers, both those who want faster access and those at risk of landslides.
- Tourists, traders and the armed forces who use the road.
- The contractor and the political leader.
- You and your staff, who carry legal accountability for safety.
- The fragile mountain ecosystem and future residents.

Ethical issues

- **Public safety against speed:** the duty of care for lives outweighs the convenience of a deadline.
- **Integrity under pressure:** political pressure must not override expert advice and due process.
- **Precautionary principle:** where harm may be serious and irreversible, lack of full certainty is no excuse for going ahead.
- **Intergenerational equity:** damaging slopes today raises risk for decades.

Option	Merits	Demerits
Clear the project as it is	Funds used; quick access; political approval	Ignores expert warning; risk to life; personal and legal liability
Reject the project	No immediate risk	Denies needed connectivity; funds lost; looks obstructive
Clear the safe stretches now and redesign the two risky ones	Uses funds; keeps safety; follows evidence	Partial delay; needs negotiation with the department and contractor

A reasoned course of action

Take the third option. Record the geologist's advice and your reasons in writing. Seek a formal extension or a carry-over of funds for the redesigned stretches. Inform the political leader politely, and on record, of the legal and safety basis for the decision. Hold a public meeting so villagers understand the plan, and add slope stabilisation, drainage and an early-warning system to the project. This balances development with the duty of care, and keeps the decision transparent and defensible.

Ethics vocabulary to use

- **Courage of conviction:** standing by a sound decision despite pressure.
- **Accountability:** being answerable for decisions and their reasons, which written records support.
- **Probity:** uprightness and honesty in public office (see also the Section 17A debate on protecting honest decisions).

37 | ETHICS GS 4

Ethics in the News: Values Behind January's Headlines

Syllabus Mapping: GS4: Ethics and human interface; Probity in governance; Ethical issues in international relations; Attitude

Why read the news for ethics

GS Paper IV rewards answers that link abstract values to real situations. Almost every major story this month raised an ethical question. Use these links as ready-made examples, and practise turning each into a short paragraph.

Story (see the article)	Ethical question	Concepts to use
Section 17A split verdict	How do we protect honest decisions without shielding corruption?	Probity; accountability; integrity; fear of decision-making ('policy paralysis')
Menstrual health judgment	Is dignity a matter of charity or of right?	Human dignity; substantive equality; compassion in public policy
US operation in Venezuela	Can a good end justify the use of force across borders?	Sovereignty; just war; means and ends; rule-based order
AI governance by design	Who is responsible when a machine causes harm?	Responsibility; transparency; fairness; the precautionary principle
Farm distress data	What does a society owe those who feed it?	Empathy; social justice; distributive justice
Aravalli definition case	Should nature be protected only where a number says so?	Environmental ethics; intergenerational equity; stewardship
UGC equity rules stayed	How do we balance protection from discrimination with fairness to the accused?	Justice; due process; impartiality

Thinkers to quote

- **Mahatma Gandhi's talisman:** when in doubt, recall the face of the poorest person you have seen and ask whether your step will help them. Use it for welfare and farm-distress answers.
- **Immanuel Kant:** treat people always as ends, never merely as means. Use it for dignity, consent and surveillance questions.
- **John Rawls:** the 'veil of ignorance' asks us to design rules without knowing where we will stand. Use it for reservations, equity rules and social justice.
- **Aristotle:** virtue lies in the mean between extremes. Use it for balance questions, such as speed against safety in development.

How to use these in an answer

- Open with a one-line definition of the value; add one current example; end with a practical step an administrator can take.
- Keep examples balanced: show the competing value as well, then explain how you would reconcile the two.

38 | ESSAY ESSAY

Essay Corner: Themes from This Month

Three essay themes drawn from January's news, with a sample outline. Write one practice essay (1,000-1,200 words) this week.

Themes to practise

- **Mountains do not forgive haste.** Development, disasters and ecology in fragile regions.
- **Rules for machines are rules for people.** Technology, regulation and human responsibility.
- **Trade has become the language of power.** Tariffs, free trade agreements and strategic autonomy.

Sample outline: 'Mountains do not forgive haste'

- **Opening:** a short story of a village rebuilt after a flash flood, then built again in the same riverbed.
- **Ecological dimension:** young mountains, glaciers, cloudbursts; 2025's record of extreme weather (331 of 334 days).
- **Economic dimension:** roads, hydropower and tourism are lifelines; the question is how, not whether.
- **Governance dimension:** hazard zoning, carrying capacity, community-based risk reduction.
- **Ethical dimension:** intergenerational equity and the precautionary principle.
- **Counter-view:** delay also costs lives (no hospital road, no jobs); balance, not paralysis.
- **Conclusion:** development that respects the slope is faster in the long run.

Did you know?

A strong essay uses examples from several dimensions and from different parts of India. Note examples from each month's magazine in a single essay notebook.

39 | HISTORY PRELIMS

History, Art and Culture: Quick Notes

Excavations, anniversaries and personalities in the news.

Archaeology

- **Ratnagiri (Jajpur, Odisha):** new ASI excavations at this Buddhist monastic site found colossal Buddha heads and a shrine complex, and probe links with Southeast Asia. Ratnagiri, Udayagiri and Lalitgiri form Odisha's 'Diamond Triangle'.
- **Rakhigarhi (Hisar, Haryana):** the largest Harappan site in India, on the Ghaggar (Drishadvati) system, being developed as an iconic heritage site.
- **Telugu inscription, Pitikayagulla (Andhra Pradesh):** an early 8th-century inscription recording the building of an embankment, among the earliest Telugu records in the region.
- **Jharkhand megaliths:** the State's large megalithic tradition, including sites with astronomical alignments such as Pakri Barwadih, is being promoted for heritage recognition.

Anniversaries

- **100 years of the CPI:** the Communist Party of India traces its founding to the Kanpur conference of 26 December 1925 (another view dates it to Tashkent, 1920).
- **Shikshapatri bicentenary:** 200 years of the 212-verse Sanskrit text of moral precepts written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1826.
- **Bulleh Shah** (c. 1680-1757): Punjabi Sufi poet of the Qadiri order known for his kafis; a memorial in Mussoorie was vandalised, prompting calls to protect Sufi heritage.

Personalities and days

- **Savitribai Phule** (born 3 January 1831): opened a girls' school in Pune with Jyotirao Phule in 1848 and is regarded as India's first woman teacher.
- **Rani Velu Nachiyar** (born 3 January 1730): queen of Sivaganga who fought the East India Company and regained her kingdom in 1780.
- **Parakram Diwas** (23 January): Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary. **National Girl Child Day**: 24 January. **Martyrs' Day**: 30 January.

40 | ART AND CULTURE

PRELIMS

Culture, Heritage and Personalities: More Prelims Notes

Adds to the History and Culture notes (Section 39).

Ministry of Culture year-end review (2025 highlights)

- **Piprahwa relics:** Buddha relics excavated at Piprahwa (Uttar Pradesh) in 1898 were stopped from auction abroad and brought back to India in 2025.
- **Maratha Military Landscapes:** a series of 12 forts inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in July 2025, India's 44th World Heritage Site.
- **Gyan Bharatam:** a national mission to survey, digitise and preserve India's manuscripts.
- **Kashi Tamil Sangamam:** cultural exchanges between Tamil Nadu and Varanasi under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

Personalities

- **Madhav Gadgil** (died January 2026): ecologist who founded the Centre for Ecological Sciences at IISc Bengaluru and chaired the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (2010-11), which recommended treating the whole Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive in graded zones. He received the Padma Shri (1981), the Padma Bhushan (2006) and the UNEP Champions of the Earth award (2024).
- **Toby Kiers:** US biologist awarded the 2026 Tyler Prize, often called the 'Nobel for the environment', for research on underground fungal networks.
- **INS Sudarshini (Lokayan 26):** the Navy's sail training ship set out on a roughly 10-month, 22,000-nautical-mile voyage, joining events in France and the USA, as part of maritime outreach under India's MAHASAGAR vision (announced in Mauritius in March 2025, building on SAGAR from 2015).

41 | GEOGRAPHY PRELIMS

Geography: Phenomena and Resources in the News

Physical geography concepts that came up in January's news. These are frequent Prelims themes.

Bomb cyclone and polar vortex

- **Bomb cyclone (bombogenesis):** a mid-latitude cyclone whose central pressure falls by about 24 hPa or more within 24 hours, typically where cold continental air meets warm ocean air, as off the US east coast.
- **Polar vortex:** a large area of low pressure and cold air circling the poles, strongest in winter. When it weakens or splits, Arctic air spills south; a severe US winter storm in January was linked to such a disturbance.

Severe (G4) geomagnetic storm

- Geomagnetic storms are rated G1 (minor) to G5 (extreme) on NOAA's scale. They are triggered by coronal mass ejections or fast solar wind striking Earth's magnetosphere.
- A G4 event in January produced auroras at unusually low latitudes; such storms can disturb satellites, GPS, radio and power grids.

Red sprites

- Brief, reddish electrical discharges in the mesosphere (about 50-90 km up) above strong thunderstorms, usually triggered by positive cloud-to-ground lightning. Related 'transient luminous events' include blue jets and ELVES.

Thwaites ('Doomsday') Glacier and Point Nemo

- **Thwaites Glacier** in West Antarctica is unstable because warm ocean water melts it from below; its collapse could raise global sea level by more than half a metre.
- **Point Nemo** in the South Pacific is the oceanic point farthest from any land (about 2,700 km), used as a graveyard for decommissioned spacecraft.

Silver's price surge

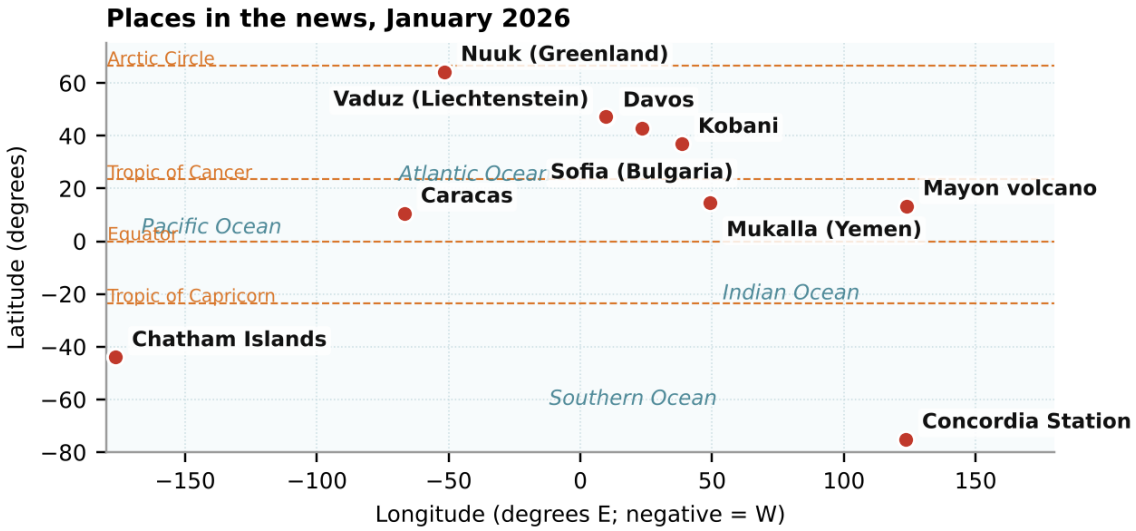
- Silver hit record highs on industrial demand (solar panels, electronics, EVs, data centres) and investment buying. Most silver is mined as a by-product of lead, zinc and copper, so supply responds slowly. The US added silver to its critical minerals list in 2025.

42 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

PRELIMS

Places in the News: January 2026 on the Map

Locate each place, then learn one fact about it. Map questions in Prelims often test relative position.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. Red dots mark the places; dashed lines mark the Tropics, the Equator and the Arctic Circle.

Western Hemisphere

- **Caracas:** capital of Venezuela, the target of the US operation on 3 January.
- **Nuuk:** capital of Greenland, a self-governing territory of Denmark at the centre of the tariff dispute.

Europe and West Asia

- **Davos:** Swiss town hosting the World Economic Forum (19-23 January).
- **Sofia:** capital of Bulgaria, which joined the euro area on 1 January 2026.
- **Mukalla:** port city and capital of Hadhramaut, Yemen's largest governorate.

Asia-Pacific and Antarctica

- **Mayon:** active stratovolcano on Luzon, Philippines, on the Pacific Ring of Fire.
- **Concordia Station:** Franco-Italian Antarctic base that houses the new Ice Memory sanctuary.

43 | POLITY PRELIMS

Polity and Governance: Quick Notes

Judgments, reports and administrative changes from January 2026.

Courts

- **Justice Yashwant Varma:** the Supreme Court upheld the Lok Sabha Speaker's power to set up an inquiry committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, even though a similar motion was not admitted in the Rajya Sabha. Removal of judges: Articles 124(4) (Supreme Court) and 218 (High Courts).
- **'Romeo-Juliet' exception:** the Supreme Court asked the Centre to consider a close-in-age exception under the POCSO Act, 2012 for consensual relationships between adolescents. The age of consent remains 18.
- **BNS Section 69:** the Karnataka High Court held that the provision on sexual intercourse by deceitful means cannot be used to criminalise a consensual relationship after it breaks down.
- **Constitutional tort:** the State is liable to pay compensation when its officials violate fundamental rights (*Rudul Sah*, 1983; *Nilabati Behera*, 1993).
- **Stem cells and autism:** the Supreme Court ruled that stem cell therapy for autism may be offered only within approved clinical trials, not as a clinical service.

Reports and indices

- **CAG, State Finances 2023-24** (second edition): States' outstanding liabilities were about Rs 67.87 lakh crore, roughly 23% of GSDP, at end-March 2024.
- **Responsible Nations Index:** launched in January by the World Intellectual Foundation with JNU, IIM Mumbai and the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre; ranks countries on governance, social well-being, environment and global responsibility rather than GDP or power.

Administration and elections

- **e-Passports:** close to one crore issued since the 2024 rollout; they carry an RFID chip conforming to ICAO Document 9303; full transition targeted by 2035.
- **IPS central deputation:** from the 2011 batch, prior central deputation at SP or DIG level is needed for empanelment to Inspector General posts at the Centre.
- **IICDEM 2026:** the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management, hosted by the Election Commission's training institute (IIIDEM) at Bharat Mandapam.
- **National Sports Governance (National Sports Bodies) Rules, 2026:** framed under the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, covering elections, athlete representation and disqualification in national sports federations.
- **Juvenile justice:** a proposal to lower from 16 to 14 the age at which children accused of heinous offences may be tried as adults under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 revived debate on reform versus deterrence.
- **Tulu:** Karnataka is considering making Tulu (spoken mainly in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi) an additional official language under Article 345; there is also a demand to add it to the Eighth Schedule.

44 | POLITY PRELIMS

Polity, Rights and Governance: More Prelims Notes

Adds to the Polity notes (Section 43).

Stray dogs and the law

- In January, reports said more than a thousand stray dogs had been poisoned or killed in villages across several Telangana districts, often after panchayat election candidates promised to 'solve' the problem. FIRs and complaints followed.
- **Law:** the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023 require sterilisation, vaccination and return of dogs to their area, not killing. Killing or maiming an animal is an offence under Section 325 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Article 51A(g) asks citizens to show compassion to living creatures.
- **Supreme Court:** its 2025 orders on stray dogs moved from removal to shelters (August) to sterilise-vaccinate-release with feeding zones, and later directed removal of dogs from institutional premises such as schools, hospitals and transport hubs.
- **Public health:** India accounts for a large share of global rabies deaths; the National Action Plan for Dog-Mediated Rabies Elimination aims to end such deaths by 2030.

Trafficking survivors and liberty

- The Bombay High Court ordered the release of an adult woman rescued under the **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956**, holding that 'protective' custody cannot become forced detention of a consenting adult.
- The Act targets traffickers, brothel-keepers and pimps; it does not make sex work by itself an offence. Its custody provisions must be read with Article 21 (personal liberty).

Fiscal federalism

- **Delhi and the RBI:** Delhi signed an agreement with the RBI to bring its finances under the RBI's banking and debt management framework, letting it raise market loans (State Development Loans) at lower cost and use ways and means advances, instead of costlier borrowing such as from the National Small Savings Fund.
- **RBI State Finances report (December 2025):** States' combined debt remains near 29% of GDP, above the 20% suggested by the FRBM Review Committee (2017); interest-free 50-year loans under SASCI support State capital spending. Ageing States (Kerala, Tamil Nadu) face rising pension costs, while young States (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) need more education and skills spending.

45 | SOCIAL JUSTICE PRELIMS

Society, Education and Welfare Schemes: Quick Notes

Social sector items, including themes from the Economic Survey 2025-26.

Economic Survey 2025-26 social themes

- **Digital addiction:** the Survey flagged compulsive use of social media, gaming and streaming as a growing public health and productivity issue, especially among the young.
- **Secondary schools:** uneven availability of secondary schools in rural areas is a key reason for dropouts after Class 8. NEP 2020 aims to raise expected years of schooling.

Courts and education

- **RTE Act:** the Supreme Court directed the Centre and States to frame rules under Section 38 so that the 25% quota for disadvantaged children in private schools (Section 12(1)(c)) is properly implemented.
- **Student well-being:** the Supreme Court continued to monitor measures on student mental health in higher education through a National Task Force set up in 2025.

Schemes and portals

- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana** (2017) completed nine years: a DBT scheme giving Rs 5,000 for the first child, and Rs 6,000 for a second child if it is a girl.
- **PANKHUDI portal** (Ministry of Women and Child Development): a single window to coordinate CSR and voluntary support for nutrition, child care, protection and women's safety.
- **YUVA AI for All:** a free foundational AI course under the IndiaAI Mission.

Health

- **Spina bifida:** a neural tube birth defect that is largely preventable through folic acid before and in early pregnancy.
- **Nimesulide:** oral formulations above 100 mg were banned under Section 26A of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
- **Pharmacovigilance:** India rose from 123rd to 8th in contributions to the WHO's global drug-safety database.

46 | INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PRELIMS

International Relations and Internal Security: Quick Notes

Organisations, agreements and defence systems in the news in January 2026.

US withdraws from 66 international organisations (7 January)

- A presidential memorandum ended US participation in and funding for 31 UN-linked bodies and 35 others, including the **International Solar Alliance**, the IPCC and the IUCN; UN bodies listed include UN DESA and UNFPA.
- **ISA:** launched by India and France at COP21 in Paris (2015); headquartered in Gurugram. The US exit reduces finance but leaves India's leadership role intact.

EU-Mercosur agreement signed (17 January)

- Signed in Asuncion, Paraguay, after negotiations that began in 1999; it creates one of the world's largest free trade areas (over 700 million people). The EU will remove tariffs on most Mercosur exports. Ratification still faces resistance from some EU farm lobbies and states.
- Mercosur: founded by the Treaty of Asuncion (1991); members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia (joined 2024); Venezuela is suspended.

Groupings and treaties

- **Weimar Triangle:** a consultative format of France, Germany and Poland, set up in 1991 to help Poland integrate into Europe; India engaged with it during January's European outreach.
- **Pax Silica:** a US-led initiative to build trusted supply chains for semiconductors, critical minerals, computing and AI infrastructure.
- **New START:** the last US-Russia nuclear arms control treaty (limit of 1,550 deployed strategic warheads each) was due to expire on 5 February 2026, raising fears of a new arms race.
- **India-Bangladesh Ganga Water Treaty (1996):** a 30-year treaty expiring in December 2026; it shares lean-season flows at Farakka from 1 January to 31 May in 10-day blocks.
- **UN Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters:** Indian diplomat D.B. Venkatesh Varma was named its chair for 2026-27.
- **'Donroe Doctrine':** a label for President Trump's assertive revival of the Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere, seen in the Venezuela operation.

Defence systems and exercises

- **K-4 SLBM:** nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missile (range about 3,500 km) tested from INS Arighat; strengthens the sea leg of India's nuclear triad.
- **Pralay:** DRDO's quasi-ballistic surface-to-surface missile; two were fired in a salvo from the same launcher off Odisha.
- **LR-AShM:** DRDO's long-range anti-ship hypersonic glide missile (above Mach 5), shown at the Republic Day parade.
- **MPATGM:** third-generation man-portable anti-tank guided missile with fire-and-forget and top-attack modes and an imaging infrared seeker.
- **Suryastra:** India's first indigenously produced universal multi-calibre rocket launcher, for strikes at 150 km and 300 km, procured by the Army.
- **Ramjet artillery shells:** 155 mm shells using air-breathing ramjet propulsion after firing to extend range.
- **Village Defence Guards (J&K):** successors of the Village Defence Committees raised in the mid-1990s in Doda; armed local volunteers in remote areas.
- **'Justice Mission-2025':** large Chinese PLA drills around Taiwan simulating blockade and strikes.

Coming up

- **India AI Impact Summit 2026:** 19-20 February at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi; the first global AI summit hosted in the Global South.

47 | ECONOMY

PRELIMS

Economy and Agriculture: Quick Notes

Finance, regulation, schemes and farm sector items from January 2026.

Banking, tax and markets

- **GAAR over treaties:** in a tax dispute involving the Flipkart stake sale, the Supreme Court held that the General Anti-Avoidance Rule (Chapter X-A, Income Tax Act) can override tax treaty benefits, and that a Tax Residency Certificate alone does not bar scrutiny. GAAR applies where the tax benefit exceeds Rs 3 crore.
- **RB-IOS, 2026:** the Reserve Bank - Integrated Ombudsman Scheme 2026 replaces the 2021 scheme as a free, single grievance redress channel for customers of RBI-regulated entities.
- **Urban co-operative banks:** the RBI proposed reopening licences for new UCBs, halted since 2004.
- **SEBI (Stock Brokers) Regulations, 2026:** replace the 1992 framework with simpler, investor-focused rules for digital trading.

Pensions and insurance

- **NPS:** PFRDA allowed banks to sponsor pension fund managers; set up the SAARG committee (chaired by Narayan Ramachandran) to modernise NPS investment rules; and notified NPS Vatsalya guidelines for children's pension accounts.
- **Atal Pension Yojana** was extended to 2030-31.
- **Paripoorna Mediclaim Ayush Bima:** an optional top-up health cover for CGHS beneficiaries.

Trade, labour and indices

- **Export Promotion Mission:** two credit measures under its Niryat Protsahan component: an interest subvention on rupee export credit and a collateral support scheme for MSME exporters.
- **Export Preparedness Index 2024** (NITI Aayog): ranks States and UTs on four pillars (export infrastructure, business ecosystem, policy and governance, export performance).
- **Quick commerce:** platforms dropped '10-minute delivery' claims after the Labour Ministry raised rider safety concerns; the Code on Social Security, 2020 recognises gig and platform workers.
- **GSDP and tax devolution:** with the 16th Finance Commission's report awaited, some States argued that contribution to GDP should carry more weight in sharing central taxes.

Agriculture and fisheries

- **Rice:** India has overtaken China as the world's largest rice producer.
- **Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD):** letting paddy fields dry periodically instead of keeping them flooded cuts methane emissions and water use without lowering yields.
- **Bamanwas Kankar** became Rajasthan's first gram panchayat certified fully organic, led by women farmers.
- **Seafood exports** faced high US tariffs on shrimp; the US is India's largest seafood market.
- **Apples:** Himachal Pradesh sought higher duties or a seasonal ban on imports after duty cuts for New Zealand apples under the India-New Zealand trade deal.
- **Recirculatory aquaculture:** India's first commercial tropical RAS farm for rainbow trout opened in Hyderabad.
- **Fertiliser subsidy:** an integrated online system now handles subsidy claims from fertiliser companies.

48 | ECONOMY PRELIMS

Economy, Energy and Finance: More Prelims Notes

Adds to the Economy notes (Section 47).

Energy and industry

- **Winter peak power:** all-India peak demand reached about 245 GW on 9 January 2026, above the summer 2025 peak (about 242 GW), because of cold weather and a mild summer. It shows that peak demand is becoming less predictable, which strengthens the case for storage.
- **NITI Aayog green transition roadmaps:** decarbonisation plans for cement, aluminium and MSMEs. India is the world's second-largest producer of both cement and primary aluminium; options include blended cement, refuse-derived fuel, renewable power for smelters and carbon capture.
- **NITI Aayog on MSME scheme convergence:** proposes merging overlapping MSME schemes and sharing data across ministries. MSMEs contribute about 30% of GVA and over 45% of exports.

Money and markets

- **BRICS CBDC link:** the RBI proposed linking BRICS members' central bank digital currencies for cross-border payments. India's e-rupee pilots began in 2022 (wholesale and retail).
- **NSE co-location and dark fibre cases:** SEBI settled long-running cases over unfair faster access for some brokers, clearing a hurdle for the NSE's planned IPO. Co-location places brokers' servers inside the exchange's data centre; 'dark fibre' is unused optical fibre leased for private high-speed links.
- **India Post ATMs:** the Department of Posts revamped its ATM network to improve rural banking. White-label ATMs are run by non-banks; brown-label ATMs are owned by third parties but bank-branded.
- **First Advance Estimates (7 January):** real GDP growth 7.4% and nominal growth about 8% in 2025-26.

Agriculture

- **'Goldilocks' farm conditions:** an above-normal 2025 monsoon, mild temperatures and full reservoirs (about 91% of capacity before rabi sowing) gave record wheat sowing and falling food prices.
- **35 years of the 1991 reforms (July 2026):** commentators argued that liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation transformed growth but did not create enough non-farm jobs, an argument likely to recur through 2026.

49 | ENVIRONMENT PRELIMS

Environment and Ecology: Rules, Reports and Projects

Short notes on environment items from January 2026. Learn the names, the parent law or agency, and one or two numbers for each.

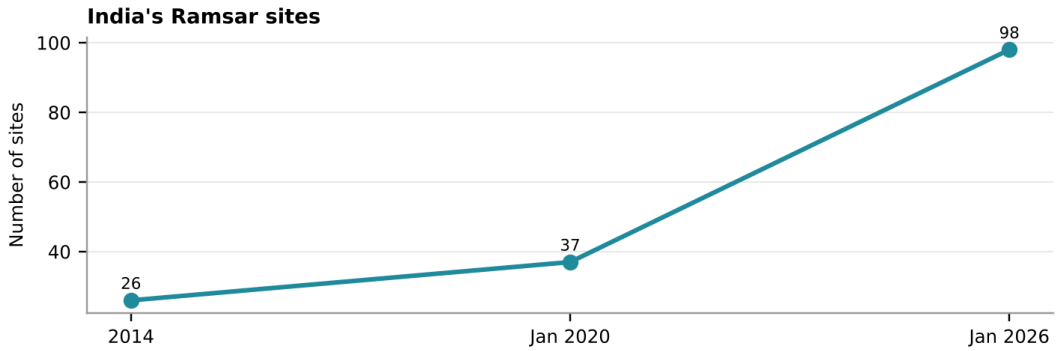


Chart. Patna Bird Sanctuary and Chhari-Dhand took the count to 98. Source: Ministry of Environment announcements.

Two new Ramsar sites: India's tally reaches 98

- Ahead of World Wetlands Day (2 February), **Patna Bird Sanctuary** (Etah, Uttar Pradesh) and **Chhari-Dhand** (Kutch, Gujarat) were added on 30-31 January, taking India to 98 Ramsar sites, the largest network in Asia (26 sites in 2014).
- Chhari-Dhand is a seasonal, shallow saline wetland on the edge of the Banni grasslands, used by cranes, flamingos and threatened waterbirds; Patna Bird Sanctuary is a small lake-based sanctuary and an Important Bird Area.
- Ramsar Convention: adopted 1971 at Ramsar, Iran; India became a party in 1982. The UK and Mexico have the most sites worldwide.

Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026

- Replace the 2016 rules. Waste must be segregated at source into **four streams**: wet, dry, sanitary and special-care waste.
- **Bulk waste generators** are defined by built-up area (20,000 sq m or more), water use (40,000 litres a day or more) or waste output (100 kg a day or more); they must process wet waste on site or through authorised agencies (extended bulk generator responsibility).
- Built on the polluter-pays principle, with digital tracking of waste flows.

Environment (Protection) Fund Rules, 2026

- Notified under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. The fund pools penalties for violations under the EP Act, the Air Act (1981) and the Water Act (1974), after these laws were partly decriminalised by the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023.
- Money can be spent only on a defined list of restorative activities, such as remediation of contaminated sites and pollution control.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity Target (Amendment) Rules, 2025

- Issued under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023. Four new sectors are covered: **petroleum refineries, petrochemicals, textiles and secondary aluminium**, adding about 208 units.
- They join aluminium, cement, chlor-alkali and pulp and paper. Units that beat their emission-intensity targets earn tradable carbon credit certificates; those that miss must buy credits.

Other notifications and plans

- **Draft National Electricity Policy, 2026:** released for consultation to replace the 2005 policy, aligned with the Viksit Bharat 2047 goal and a renewable-heavy grid.
- **CEA roadmap for pumped storage:** a target of 100 GW of hydro pumped-storage capacity by 2035-36 to balance solar and wind. Non-fossil sources crossed half of India's installed capacity in 2025.
- **Forest land and afforestation:** amended guidelines under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 ease rules for government and private bodies to take up plantation and assisted natural regeneration on leased forest land.
- **Uniform consent guidelines:** a common national framework for Consent to Establish and Consent to Operate under the Air and Water Acts, allowing State Pollution Control Boards to issue a single integrated approval.
- **Coking coal** was notified as a Critical and Strategic Mineral under the MMDR Act, 1957 (First Schedule). It is essential for blast-furnace steelmaking, and India imports most of what it uses.

Reports and studies

- **Copernicus (C3S):** 2025 was the third-warmest year on record, after 2024 and 2023. Falling aerosol pollution (for example, from cleaner shipping fuel under IMO rules) is removing a past cooling effect.
- **Global water bankruptcy (UN University report):** argues that many regions have used water beyond renewable limits; about 4 billion people face severe water scarcity for at least one month a year.
- **NOAA Arctic Report Card 2025:** October 2024 to September 2025 was the Arctic's warmest year since records began in 1900; it highlights 'Atlantification', the lowest winter sea-ice maximum on record, and 'rusting' Alaskan rivers from thawing permafrost.
- **Sinking deltas:** a study found large parts of the Ganges-Brahmaputra, Mahanadi, Brahmani, Godavari and Cauvery deltas subsiding, in places faster than sea-level rise, driven mainly by groundwater extraction.

Kaziranga Elevated Corridor

- The Prime Minister laid the foundation of the 4-laning of the Kaliabor-Numaligarh section of NH-715 in Assam, worth about Rs 6,950 crore, including a roughly 35 km elevated stretch so that animals can cross beneath it.
- Kaziranga: UNESCO World Heritage Site and Tiger Reserve on the Brahmaputra floodplain, home to about two-thirds of the world's one-horned rhinos.

50 | ENVIRONMENT PRELIMS

Environment and Geography: More Prelims Notes

Adds to the Environment, Geography and Species notes (Sections 49, 41 and 51).

Climate and atmosphere

- **Water vapour versus aerosols:** a study found water vapour adds more to lower-atmosphere heating than aerosols. Water vapour is a strong greenhouse gas and a feedback: warmer air holds about 7% more moisture per degree Celsius, which amplifies warming.
- **Aerosols:** tiny particles (sulphates, dust, black carbon). Most reflect sunlight and cool the planet, though black carbon absorbs heat. Cleaner air is now removing part of this 'masking', which helps explain recent record warmth.
- **Visibility:** measured as the Meteorological Optical Range, the distance over which a light beam falls to 5% of its intensity. Dense fog in north India in January brought attention to how airports use instruments (transmissometers) to measure it.
- **Berkeley Earth 2025 report:** 2025 was the warmest year on record for a La Nina year, showing human-driven warming outweighing natural cooling phases.

Ice cores and polar science

- **Ice Memory Sanctuary:** inaugurated on 14 January 2026 at Concordia Station on the Antarctic plateau. It stores mountain-glacier ice cores (first from Mont Blanc, France, and Grand Combin, Switzerland) in a snow cave at about -50 C, preserving climate records before the glaciers melt. Concordia is run by Italy and France.
- **India's Antarctic stations:** Maitri and Bharati (Dakshin Gangotri, the first, is now a supply base). India's Arctic station is Himadri.

Minerals, species and agriculture

- **G7 Critical Minerals Ministerial:** India took part in the G7 meeting on secure, diversified supply chains for minerals such as lithium, cobalt and rare earths. India also joined the US-led Minerals Security Partnership in 2023 and launched its own National Critical Mineral Mission in 2025.
- **Greater flamingo:** the largest flamingo species; seen in the Rann of Kutch, Chilika, Pulicat and the Gulf of Mannar; pink colour comes from carotenoid pigments in its food; IUCN Least Concern.
- **Atlas of Climate Adaptation in Indian Agriculture (ACASA-India):** a digital atlas mapping climate risks and suitable adaptation options for crops and livestock by district, to guide planning.

51 | ENVIRONMENT PRELIMS

Species, Places and Protected Areas in the News

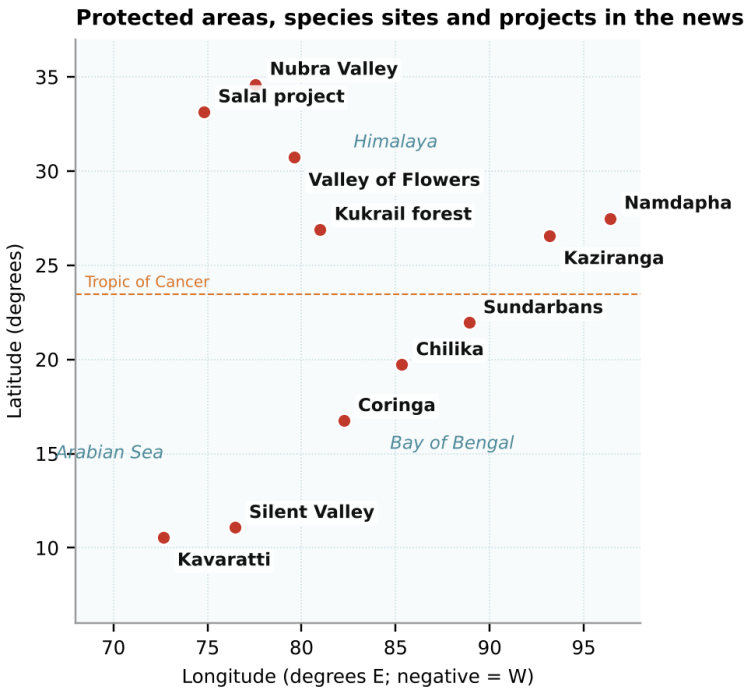
Use the IUCN status and the Wildlife (Protection) Act schedule for each species; for places, learn location and neighbours on a map.

Species in the news (1)

- **Galaxy frog** (*Melanobatrachus indicus*): only member of its genus, endemic to high-altitude evergreen and shola forests of the southern Western Ghats; IUCN Vulnerable.
- **White-bellied heron:** second-largest heron in the world, found in Northeast India (notably Namdapha, Arunachal) and Bhutan; IUCN Critically Endangered; Schedule I.
- **Gangetic river dolphin:** India's national aquatic animal; nearly blind, hunts by echolocation; IUCN Endangered; Schedule I. A dolphin rescue ambulance and an aquatic life monitoring centre were launched at the Wildlife Institute of India under Namami Gange.
- **Indian skimmer:** river bird with a longer lower bill that 'skims' the water; nests on river sandbars; IUCN Endangered. A Namami Gange-BNHS conservation project was launched.
- **Hoolock gibbon:** India's only ape, in the Northeast; Western Hoolock is Endangered, Eastern Hoolock Vulnerable.

Species in the news (2)

- **Lion-tailed macaque:** Old World monkey endemic to the Western Ghats (largest population in Silent Valley); IUCN Endangered.
- **Royle's pika:** small, tailless Himalayan relative of rabbits living at 2,400-5,000 m; does not hibernate; watched as an indicator of warming; IUCN Least Concern.
- **Fishing cat:** wetland cat and State animal of West Bengal; found in the Sundarbans, Chilika and Coringa; IUCN Vulnerable; Schedule I.
- **Bactrian (double-humped) camel:** in India found only in Ladakh's Nubra Valley; inducted by the Army for high-altitude logistics. The wild species is Critically Endangered.
- **Madras hedgehog:** 'bare-bellied' hedgehog of dry scrub in peninsular India; insect-eater that aestivates in summer.
- **Amazonian stingless bees:** became the first insects to receive legal rights, through ordinances in Peru's Satipo and Nauta municipalities.
- **Darwin's bark spider** (Madagascar): spins the largest known orb webs, across rivers, with exceptionally tough silk.
- **Indiaphonte bijoyi:** a new genus and species of microscopic copepod crustacean found in Kavaratti lagoon, Lakshadweep.
- **Coconut root wilt:** a phytoplasma disease spread by sap-sucking insects, damaging plantations in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.



Location diagram. Points plotted by latitude and longitude; boundaries not shown. Locate each site and pair it with a species or project from the notes.

Places in the news

- **Bulgaria** adopted the euro on 1 January 2026, becoming the 21st euro-area member (capital Sofia; borders Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and the Black Sea).
- **Hadhramaut (Yemen):** Yemen's largest governorate, capital Mukalla on the Gulf of Aden; home to Shibam, the 'Manhattan of the Desert' (UNESCO site).
- **Mayon volcano:** near-perfectly conical, active stratovolcano in Albay, Luzon (Philippines) on the Pacific Ring of Fire.
- **Liechtenstein:** doubly landlocked Alpine state between Switzerland and Austria; an EFTA member and so part of the India-EFTA TEPA.
- **Chagos Archipelago and Diego Garcia:** Indian Ocean islands south of the Maldives; the ICJ's 2019 advisory opinion backed Mauritius's claim, and a 2025 UK-Mauritius treaty transfers sovereignty while keeping the Diego Garcia base on lease.
- **Chatham Islands:** New Zealand territory about 800 km east of the South Island, where a large phytoplankton bloom formed over the Chatham Rise.
- **Kobani (Ayn al-Arab):** Kurdish-majority town in northern Syria on the Turkish border.
- **Salal project:** 690 MW NHPC run-of-river project on the Chenab in Jammu and Kashmir; desilting was ordered to restore capacity.
- **Kukrail forest (Lucknow):** chosen for India's first urban night safari; hosts a gharial rehabilitation centre set up in 1978.

Protected areas in the news

- **Valley of Flowers National Park** (Chamoli, Uttarakhand): alpine meadows in the Bhyundar valley; part of Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve; UNESCO World Heritage Site with Nanda Devi NP.
- **Kaziranga National Park** (Assam): see the elevated corridor note in the Environment section.
- **Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary** (near Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh): mangrove forests of the Godavari estuary, shielded by the Hope Island sand spit; habitat of the fishing cat.

52 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PRELIMS

Science and Technology: Quick Notes

Space, biotech, digital and physics items from January 2026.

Space

- **Artemis II:** NASA's first crewed Artemis mission, using the SLS rocket and Orion capsule to fly around the Moon without landing; the first crewed trip to the Moon's vicinity since 1972.
- **Dust Experiment (DEX):** India's first indigenous instrument for detecting interplanetary dust, built by PRL Ahmedabad and flown on the PSLV-C58 POEM platform.
- **NASA's IXPE** studied X-ray polarisation from a white dwarf system for the first time.

Biotech and health research

- **BSL-4 laboratory, Gandhinagar:** India's second civilian maximum-containment lab (after NIV Pune) and the first fully State-funded, under the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre.
- **National Technology Readiness Assessment Framework:** released by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to judge maturity of technologies seeking R&D funding.

Digital and AI

- **BSNL VoWiFi:** nationwide Wi-Fi calling using the subscriber's own number, built on IMS architecture.
- **Small Language Models:** compact AI models (millions to tens of billions of parameters) that run on-device at lower cost than large language models.
- **BHASHINI Samudaye:** a MeitY community initiative to co-develop Indian-language AI under the BHASHINI mission.
- **Vehicle-to-vehicle communication:** MoRTH plans V2V technology that lets vehicles exchange speed, position and braking data to prevent crashes.

Physics, energy and materials

- **Mpemba effect:** Indian scientists used supercomputer simulations to explain why hot water can sometimes freeze faster than cold water.
- **Bio-bitumen:** a road binder made from farm residue and lignin; India has begun commercial use, reducing crude imports and stubble burning.
- **Light water reactors:** use ordinary water as moderator and coolant with enriched uranium, unlike India's PHWRs which use heavy water and natural uranium; private participation under the SHANTI Act may expand LWRs.
- **India-Euratom:** the India-EU summit backed wider cooperation under the 2020 agreement on peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- **CERN ALICE** results showed how fragile deuterons form after high-energy collisions at the LHC.

53 | SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PRELIMS

Science and Technology: More Prelims Notes

Adds to the first S&T notes page (Section 52). Physics and astronomy items are popular for statement-based questions.

Physics and astronomy

- **Graviton:** the hypothetical particle thought to carry gravity, as the photon carries electromagnetism. Gravitational waves have been detected (LIGO, 2015), but a single graviton never has, because its energy is far too small to measure.
- **Quantum electrodynamics (QED):** the quantum theory of how charged particles interact by exchanging photons (Nobel Prize 1965: Feynman, Schwinger, Tomonaga). Japanese researchers proposed a first-principles explanation of how classical electromagnetic fields emerge from QED.
- **Solid-liquid hybrid state:** researchers at Ulm and Nottingham universities observed metal nanoparticles in which some atoms stay fixed while others move like a liquid. This matters for catalysts such as platinum on carbon used in fuel cells.
- **Greenwald limit:** a long-standing density limit for plasma in tokamak fusion reactors, above which plasma becomes unstable. China's EAST tokamak reported stable operation beyond it, suggesting the limit can be engineered around.
- **Star birth and magnetic fields:** Indian Institute of Astrophysics researchers mapped magnetic fields from cloud scale down to the dense core in the molecular cloud L328 (about 700 light years away), clarifying how fields guide star formation.
- **White dwarf:** the dense remnant core of a Sun-like star after it sheds its outer layers. NASA's IXPE studied X-ray polarisation from a white dwarf system for the first time.
- **CERN ALICE:** results showed that fragile deuterons (a proton plus a neutron) form after high-energy collisions mainly through short-lived intermediate particles.

Biotech and materials

- **Marine and space biotechnology:** marine organisms can supply food, medicines and materials (for example seaweed products such as agar and alginates, which India still imports). Space biotech studies life in microgravity. These fields are linked to the Deep Ocean Mission and the BioE3 policy (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment, 2024).
- **Biomaterials:** materials made from biological sources or processes (bioplastics, bio-based textiles, mycelium materials) to replace petroleum-based products.
- **Mycorrhizal networks:** partnerships between fungi and plant roots that trade sugars for soil nutrients such as phosphorus. Arbuscular mycorrhiza is the most common type in crops. US scientist Toby Kiers won the 2026 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement for research on these networks.

Energy and Earth observation

- **Hydrokinetic turbines:** generate power from the speed of flowing river or canal water without dams or reservoirs; Tripura reportedly identified 10 river sites for about 185 MW.
- **Remote sensing:** healthy vegetation absorbs red light and strongly reflects near-infrared (the basis of NDVI); water absorbs near-infrared. Active sensors such as radar (for example NISAR) work through clouds and at night; passive sensors record reflected sunlight.
- **Air-independent propulsion (AIP):** DRDO's phosphoric acid fuel cell AIP, displayed in January, lets conventional submarines stay submerged longer without surfacing to charge batteries.

Other Prelims Quick Hits

India-Germany: Chancellor Merz's visit (12-13 January)

- First official visit to India by Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and his first trip to Asia in office; meetings in Gujarat (Sabarmati Ashram, International Kite Festival) and New Delhi, with business engagements in Bengaluru.
- Reports counted 19 agreements, including a defence industrial cooperation roadmap, a joint declaration on critical minerals and a semiconductor ecosystem partnership. A German firm, Uniper, was reported to plan buying up to 500,000 tonnes of green ammonia a year from India.
- 2026 marks 75 years of India-Germany diplomatic relations; 2025 marked 25 years of the strategic partnership.

Doomsday Clock 2026 (27 January)

- The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set the clock at **85 seconds to midnight**, the closest ever and four seconds closer than 89 seconds in 2025.
- Reasons cited: nuclear weapons risks and expiring treaties, climate change, biological threats, and AI and disinformation.
- The Clock was created in 1947. It was set farthest from midnight, at 17 minutes, in 1991.

Nipah virus in West Bengal (January)

- Two nurses at a private hospital in Barasat, North 24 Parganas, were confirmed with Nipah virus; the National Institute of Virology, Pune confirmed on 13 January, and India notified WHO on 26 January. WHO assessed the risk of wider spread as low.
- Nipah is a zoonotic virus (genus Henipavirus) with fruit bats (Pteropus) as the natural reservoir. It spreads through contaminated food such as raw date palm sap, infected animals or close contact. No licensed vaccine or specific treatment exists.
- Earlier West Bengal outbreaks: Siliguri (2001) and Nadia (2007); Kerala has had several outbreaks since 2018.

Henley Passport Index 2026 (released mid-January)

- India rose five places to **80th** (from 85th in 2025), with visa-free, visa-on-arrival or eTA access to 55 destinations; it shares the rank with Algeria and Niger.
- Singapore is first for the third year running (192 destinations), followed by Japan and South Korea (188). Afghanistan is last.
- The index uses IATA data and covers 199 passports against 227 destinations.

UN International Years 2026

- The UN General Assembly has declared 2026 the International Year of **Rangelands and Pastoralists**, of **Volunteers for Sustainable Development**, and of the **Woman Farmer**. FAO leads the rangelands and woman farmer years.
- The first UN Decade of Sustainable Transport (2026-2035) also begins this year.

Also in the news

- **WEF Davos 2026** (19-23 January) was held under the theme 'A Spirit of Dialogue' (see the Greenland and Global Outlook articles).
- **First Advance Estimates** of GDP for FY26 (7 January) put real growth at 7.4%.
- **National Voters' Day** is observed on 25 January, the foundation day of the Election Commission of India (1950).

Practice Questions: Prelims and Mains

1. Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, which was the subject of a split Supreme Court verdict in January 2026, was inserted by:

(a) the 2013 Lokpal Act (b) the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018 (c) the CVC Act, 2003 (d) the DSPE Act, 1946

Answer: (b). It requires prior approval to enquire into official decisions of public servants.

2. The definitive phase of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) began on:

(a) 1 October 2023 (b) 1 January 2025 (c) 1 January 2026 (d) 1 January 2034

Answer: (c). The transitional reporting phase ran from 1 October 2023 to 31 December 2025.

3. Under the notification of January 2026, Population Enumeration under Census 2027 is scheduled for:

(a) April 2026 (b) September 2026 (c) February 2027 (d) 2031

Answer: (c). Houselisting runs April-September 2026.

4. In January 2026 the Doomsday Clock was set at how many seconds to midnight?

(a) 90 (b) 89 (c) 85 (d) 100

Answer: (c). It was 89 seconds in 2025.

5. The anomaly in the PSLV-C62 mission in January 2026 occurred in which stage?

(a) First stage (b) Second stage (c) Third stage (d) Fourth stage

Answer: (c). Near the end of the solid third stage (PS3).

6. India's BRICS chairship in 2026 is its:

(a) second (b) third (c) fourth (d) fifth

Answer: (c). India previously chaired BRICS in 2012, 2016 and 2021.

7. According to the WEF Global Risks Report 2026, which risk was most likely to trigger a global crisis in 2026?

(a) Extreme weather (b) Geoeconomic confrontation (c) Misinformation and disinformation (d) Societal polarisation

Answer: (b). 18% of respondents chose it; it also ranks first over the two-year horizon.

8. Consider the following: 1. Rangelands and Pastoralists 2. Woman Farmer 3. Millets 4. Volunteers for Sustainable Development. Which have been declared UN International Years for 2026?

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

Answer: (b). The International Year of Millets was 2023.

9. The highest peak of the Aravalli range is:

(a) Anamudi (b) Dhupgarh (c) Guru Shikhar (d) Doddabetta

Answer: (c). Guru Shikhar near Mount Abu, Rajasthan (about 1,722 m).

10. The national song 'Vande Mataram' was later included in which novel of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay?

(a) Durgeshnandini (b) Kapalkundala (c) Anandamath (d) Rajmohan's Wife

Answer: (c). Anandamath was published in 1882; the song was written in 1875.

11. Under an agreement signed during the UAE President's visit in January 2026, HPCL will buy LNG from:

(a) QatarEnergy (b) ADNOC Gas (c) Saudi Aramco (d) Kuwait Petroleum

Answer: (b). 0.5 million tonnes a year for 10 years from 2028.

12. In the Henley Passport Index 2026, India's rank is:

(a) 75th (b) 80th (c) 85th (d) 90th

Answer: (b). Up from 85th in 2025, with access to 55 destinations.

13. With the addition of Patna Bird Sanctuary and Chhari-Dhand in January 2026, India's number of Ramsar sites became:

(a) 91 (b) 94 (c) 98 (d) 100

Answer: (c). Chhari-Dhand is in Kutch (Gujarat) and Patna Bird Sanctuary in Etah (Uttar Pradesh).

14. Under the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, the Centre-State cost-sharing ratio for general category States is:

(a) 100:0 (b) 75:25 (c) 60:40 (d) 50:50

Answer: (c). It is 90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan States and 100% central for UTs without legislature.

15. Which Article of the Constitution requires the Governor to address the State Legislature at the start of the first session each year?

(a) Article 163 (b) Article 175 (c) Article 176 (d) Article 200

Answer: (c). Article 175 is the Governor's general right to address and send messages.

16. The Supreme Court's January 2026 ruling on menstrual health in schools located this right primarily in:

(a) Article 19 (b) Article 21 (c) Article 32 (d) Article 47

Answer: (b). Article 21, read with Articles 14 and 21A.

17. The 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (January 2026) was co-chaired by India and:

(a) Saudi Arabia (b) Egypt (c) the UAE (d) Bahrain

Answer: (c). The first meeting was held in Bahrain in 2016.

18. Which of the following is the only ape found in India?

(a) Lion-tailed macaque (b) Hoolock gibbon (c) Nilgiri langur (d) Slow loris

Answer: (b). The lion-tailed macaque is a monkey, not an ape.

19. Which of the following sectors were newly brought under GHG emission intensity targets by the 2025 amendment rules? 1. Petroleum refineries 2. Textiles 3. Cement 4. Secondary aluminium

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

Answer: (a). Cement was already covered.

20. Bulgaria joined the euro area on 1 January 2026. Which of these countries does NOT border Bulgaria?

(a) Romania (b) Greece (c) Hungary (d) Turkey

Answer: (c). Bulgaria borders Romania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey.

21. Consider the following about the K-4 missile: 1. It is a submarine-launched ballistic missile. 2. It was tested from INS Arighat. Which is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither

Answer: (c). It has a range of about 3,500 km.

22. The EU-Mercosur agreement was signed in January 2026 in:

(a) Brasilia (b) Buenos Aires (c) Asuncion (d) Montevideo

Answer: (c). Mercosur itself was founded by the Treaty of Asuncion in 1991.

23. Which international organisation, co-founded by India and France, did the US announce it would leave in January 2026?

(a) Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (b) International Solar Alliance (c) Global Biofuels Alliance (d) International Big Cat Alliance

Answer: (b). The ISA was launched at COP21 in Paris in 2015.

24. Thwaites Glacier, often called the 'Doomsday Glacier', is located in:

(a) Greenland (b) East Antarctica (c) West Antarctica (d) Svalbard

Answer: (c). Warm ocean water melts it from below.

25. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (January 2026) estimated India's FY26 growth at:

(a) 6.3% (b) 6.5% (c) 7.2% (d) 7.4%

Answer: (c). It projects 6.5% for FY27.

26. The Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) approved in 2024 is designed to carry up to how much payload to low Earth orbit?

(a) 10 tonnes (b) 20 tonnes (c) 30 tonnes (d) 50 tonnes

Answer: (c). It will have a reusable first stage.

27. Which of the following is NOT one of the four pillars of the Military Quantum Mission Policy Framework (January 2026)?

(a) Quantum communication (b) Quantum sensing and metrology (c) Quantum biology (d) Quantum materials and devices

Answer: (c). The fourth pillar is quantum computing.

28. Under the National Quantum Mission, the thematic hub for quantum communication is hosted at:

(a) IISc Bengaluru (b) IIT Madras (c) IIT Bombay (d) IIT Delhi

Answer: (b). It is run with C-DOT.

29. Consider the following about light water reactors: 1. They use ordinary water as moderator. 2. They can run on natural uranium. Which is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both (d) Neither

Answer: (a). LWRs need enriched uranium; PHWRs use natural uranium.

30. The SHANTI Act, 2025 repealed which of the following? 1. Atomic Energy Act, 1962 2. Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 3. Environment Protection Act, 1986

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

Answer: (b). It also gives the AERB statutory status.

31. Under which Article of the Outer Space Treaty does the state of registry retain jurisdiction over a space object?

(a) Article II (b) Article IV (c) Article VI (d) Article VIII

Answer: (d). Article II bars national appropriation of outer space.

32. India has signed but not ratified which of the following?

(a) Outer Space Treaty (b) Liability Convention (c) Registration Convention (d) Moon Agreement

Answer: (d). India is a party to the other three.

33. The Ice Memory Sanctuary inaugurated in January 2026 is located at:

(a) Svalbard (b) Concordia Station, Antarctica (c) Greenland ice sheet (d) Mont Blanc

Answer: (b). Cores are stored in a snow cave at about -50 C.

34. According to the CSE assessment, India saw extreme weather events in 2025 on approximately:

(a) 60% of days (b) 75% of days (c) 85% of days (d) 99% of days

Answer: (d). 331 of the first 334 days.

35. The Supreme Court in the Rajendra N. Shah case (2021) held that Part IXB of the Constitution applies to:

(a) All cooperatives (b) Only multi-State cooperatives (c) Only urban cooperative banks (d) No cooperatives

Answer: (b). Cooperatives are a State subject (Entry 32, List II).

36. Disputes between the Union and a State fall under the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction under:

(a) Article 32 (b) Article 131 (c) Article 136 (d) Article 226

Answer: (b). This is relevant to the ED writ petition case.

37. In the RBI's Trend and Progress report 2024-25, the rise in the amount involved in bank frauds was mainly due to:

(a) A surge in UPI frauds (b) Re-reporting of old cases after a Supreme Court ruling (c) Frauds in cooperative banks (d) Foreign exchange frauds

Answer: (b). 122 cases worth Rs 18,336 crore were re-reported.

38. The RBI's inflation target under the flexible inflation targeting framework is:

(a) 2% plus or minus 1% (b) 4% plus or minus 2% (c) 5% plus or minus 1% (d) 6% plus or minus 2%

Answer: (b). It is set under Section 45ZA of the RBI Act.

39. Under the RFCTLARR Act, 2013, consent of how many affected families is needed for land acquired for private companies?

(a) 50% (b) 60% (c) 70% (d) 80%

Answer: (d). It is 70% for PPP projects.

40. According to NCRB's ADSI 2023, which group accounted for the larger share of farm-sector suicides?

(a) Cultivators (b) Agricultural labourers (c) Tenant farmers (d) Equal shares

Answer: (b). 6,096 labourers against 4,690 cultivators.

41. Which of the following lies on the Caribbean coast of South America?

(a) Ecuador (b) Venezuela (c) Bolivia (d) Paraguay

Answer: (b). Ecuador is on the Pacific; Bolivia and Paraguay are landlocked.

42. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with:

(a) the Red Sea (b) the Gulf of Aden (c) the Gulf of Oman (d) the Caspian Sea

Answer: (c). It lies between Iran and the Musandam peninsula of Oman.

43. Consider the following ethical ideas: 1. Veil of ignorance 2. Treat people as ends, never merely as means 3. The golden mean. Which thinker is correctly matched?

(a) 1-Kant (b) 2-Kant (c) 3-Rawls (d) 1-Aristotle

Answer: (b). 1 is Rawls, 2 is Kant, 3 is Aristotle.

Mains Practice

- **Q1.** The India-EU FTA is described as the 'mother of all deals'. Examine its significance for India's trade strategy and the challenges that remain. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q2.** Assess India's response to the US operation in Venezuela in the light of its commitment to a rules-based order and strategic autonomy. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q3.** The use of tariffs against allies over Greenland and against partners of Iran shows trade becoming a tool of coercion. Discuss the implications for India's foreign and trade policy. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q4.** Should India join the Board of Peace? Examine in the light of India's commitment to UN-centred multilateralism and its interests in West Asia. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q5.** India's BRICS chairship in 2026 comes at a time of great-power rivalry. What should India's priorities be, and what constraints will it face? (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q6.** The India-UAE relationship has moved from trade to strategy. Discuss with reference to recent agreements. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q7.** How does the EU's CBAM affect Indian exports, and how should India respond at home and in international forums? (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q8.** Section 17A seeks to protect honest officers but may shield the corrupt. Discuss in the light of judicial precedent. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q9.** Evaluate the significance of a caste enumeration in Census 2027 for policy and for the federal balance. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q10.** Defining an ecosystem by a single physical criterion can weaken its protection. Discuss with reference to the Aravalli definition case. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q11.** Ten years of Startup India have widened entrepreneurship but not yet deepened innovation. Critically examine. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q12.** Two consecutive failures in the PSLV third stage raise questions for India's space ambitions. Discuss. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q13.** Replacing MGNREGA with the VB-G RAM G Act raises the guarantee but shifts costs to States. Examine the implications for rural welfare and fiscal federalism. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q14.** 'The Governor's address under Article 176 is a constitutional duty, not a discretionary power.' Discuss in the light of recent controversies. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q15.** Recognition of menstrual health as part of Article 21 marks a shift from welfare to rights. Discuss with reference to the Supreme Court's January 2026 judgment. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q16.** How can a structured partnership with the Arab League serve India's interests in West Asia and North Africa? (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q17.** India's space roadmap has become more ambitious than its launch capacity. Examine with reference to Gaganyaan, the NGLV and private launch firms. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q18.** Is a 'techno-legal' approach better suited to India than a standalone AI law? Critically examine. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q19.** Discuss the opportunities and risks of opening India's nuclear power sector under the SHANTI Act, 2025. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q20.** How can quantum technologies change national security? Discuss with reference to India's recent policy initiatives. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q21.** Territorial patent law sits uneasily with permanent human presence in space. Discuss. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q22.** 'In disasters, the first responders are communities.' Discuss the role of community-based disaster risk management in the Himalayan States. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q23.** Cyberspace is the fifth domain of warfare. Assess India's preparedness. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q24.** Very low inflation can be a policy problem. Discuss in the Indian context. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q25.** Land acquisition remains the biggest bottleneck for infrastructure in India. Suggest reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q26.** Digital addiction and student distress are emerging public health challenges. Suggest a policy response. (15 marks, 250 words)
- **Q27.** Discuss the role of songs, newspapers and symbols in mass mobilisation during the Swadeshi movement. (10 marks, 150 words)
- **Q28.** 'Protecting honest decision-making and preventing corruption are not opposing goals.' Discuss with examples from public administration. (GS IV, 10 marks, 150 words)

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Official Sources to Bookmark

Scan or click to open the official sites used most for monthly current affairs.

Press Information Bureau
https://pib.gov.in
Scan or click to open the official source.

Ministry of External Affairs
https://www.mea.gov.in
Scan or click to open the official source.

PRS Legislative Research
https://prsindia.org
Scan or click to open the official source.

57 | SOURCES REVISION

Sources and Notes

- **India-EU FTA:** European Commission summary and press material; European Council summit page (27 Jan 2026); law-firm and think-tank briefings.
- **Venezuela:** Ministry of External Affairs statement of 4 Jan 2026; AP and PTI reports; The Wire and Deccan Herald coverage.
- **Greenland and Board of Peace:** House of Commons Library briefing; AP, ABC, CNN, CBS and Al Jazeera reports (17-22 Jan); White House release of 22 Jan; All India Radio.
- **Iran:** ABC, CNBC, Al Jazeera and All India Radio reports (12-13 Jan 2026).
- **India-UAE:** MEA and PM India joint statement and list of outcomes (19 Jan 2026); UAE Presidential Court release; ADNOC Gas statement.
- **BRICS:** MEA/IANS reports of the 13 Jan launch; ISAS (NUS) brief of 19 Jan 2026.
- **CBAM:** RIS Policy Brief 128 (Jan 2026); GTRI analysis on exports to the EU.
- **Economic Survey:** PRS Legislative Research summary; Business Today and Outlook Money reports of 29 Jan 2026.
- **IMF and WEF:** IMF WEO Update (19 Jan 2026) as reported by All India Radio and Reuters/PTI; WEF press release on the Global Risks Report 2026 (14 Jan).
- **Startup India:** Startup India portal (National Startup Day 2026 page); DPIIT figures as reported.
- **Aravalli:** All India Radio (21 Jan 2026); Bar and Bench; The Leaflet; Outlook Business.
- **Section 17A:** All India Radio news report (14 Jan 2026); Bar and Bench (13 Jan 2026).
- **Census 2027:** Ministry of Home Affairs notification as reported by All India Radio and ETV Bharat (7-8 Jan 2026); notification of questions (22 Jan 2026).
- **UGC Regulations:** reports of the Supreme Court order of 29 Jan 2026 from The News Minute, Deccan Chronicle and Free Press Journal.
- **Republic Day and Padma Awards:** PIB releases of 16 and 21 Jan 2026; Ministry of Culture; MHA Padma list (25 Jan).
- **PSLV-C62:** ISRO statements as reported by All India Radio (12 Jan 2026) and IANS.

- **New articles:** MEA and All India Radio on the India-Arab meeting; gazette and PIB material on VB-G RAM G as reported; ETV Bharat and analysis pieces on Governors' addresses; Hitavada, The Wire and LiveLaw-based reports on the menstrual health judgment.
- **Prelims sections:** PIB and ministry notifications, Ramsar announcements (30-31 Jan), World Bank and UN releases, and news reports of January 2026, checked against more than one report for the main figures.
- **Quick hits:** PM India joint statement (India-Germany); Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists; WHO Disease Outbreak News on Nipah; Henley and Partners; UNRIC and FAO.
- **Gaganyaan and ISRO:** ISRO Chairman's remarks of 30 January 2026 as reported by IANS and ETV Bharat; Cabinet release on the NGLV (18 September 2024); Department of Space year-end review 2025.
- **AI governance:** Office of the PSA white paper (January 2026) as summarised by MediaNama and Vision IAS.
- **Nuclear:** PIB backgrounder on the SHANTI Bill (December 2025).
- **Quantum:** DRDO news clippings (23 January 2026); Insights IAS; Department of Science and Technology page on the National Quantum Mission.
- **Extreme weather:** CSE and Down To Earth, State of Extreme Weather 2025.
- **Ice Memory:** World Meteorological Organization release (14 January 2026).
- **ED writ case:** ETV Bharat report of 20 January 2026.
- **Bank frauds:** RBI Report on Trend and Progress of Banking 2024-25 as summarised by Rau's IAS Compass.
- **Inflation:** MoSPI CPI releases as reported by ETV Bharat (12 January 2026); RBI December 2025 policy as reported by SCC Online and Outlook Money.
- **Farm suicides:** NCRB ADSI 2023 as analysed by Down To Earth.
- **Vande Mataram (history section):** Ministry of Culture and PIB releases on Republic Day 2026.
- **Maps:** location diagrams plotted from latitude and longitude; they show no boundaries.

Please verify before use

- This issue stops at 31 January 2026. The Venezuela and Greenland situations, the Iran crisis, the UGC and Aravalli cases, PSLV-C62 root-cause findings and the India-EU legal text kept evolving afterwards.
- Board of Peace membership figures differ across reports (invitations and signatories changed week to week). Iran casualty figures come from rights groups and vary widely.
- Trade-liberalisation percentages for the India-EU deal are worded differently across sources. Check the Commission's published chapter summary.
- Startup employment figures differ by source; this issue does not use them.
- VB-G RAM G: as of January the commencement date and rules were still pending; check the notified start date and wage rates before use.
- Short Prelims notes give the essentials only. For species, protected areas and defence systems, confirm IUCN status, ranges and specifications from official sources before memorising.
- Some news reports mentioned more Nipah cases than WHO's two confirmed cases. The article follows WHO.
- The 'development as adaptation' spending figure (5.6% of GDP) comes from a secondary summary. Check it against the Survey itself.
- The new CPI series with 2024 base year was released on 12 February 2026 with January data, so it belongs to the February issue.
- **Corrections to other sources:** some magazines report a 75% rise in farm-sector suicides in 2023; NCRB data show farmer suicides fell about 10% and labourer suicides were flat. Some list Madhav Gadgil's Padma Bhushan as 1981; his 1981 award was the Padma Shri.
- **Checked less fully** (a temporary research limit cut short the checks): the Supreme Court's interim directions on student suicides, the Telangana stray dog figures, the Bombay High Court PITA ruling, the PRAGATI delay analysis, the hydrokinetic turbine sites in Tripura, the ACASA-India atlas, and the role of cyber operations in the Venezuela strike. These are marked 'reported' or kept general in the text.
- **Kept general on purpose:** ISRO's exact 2025 launch count, which differs between sources, and the National Cooperative Database totals, which change often.
- **Still developing:** Gaganyaan G1 was targeted for March 2026; check whether it flew. Check also the AI Safety Institute and the SHANTI Act rules.
- The ethics case study and essay themes are original practice material, not reports of real events.

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