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India has sufficient stocks of fuel, commodities: govt.

Centre says no reason for panic buying, conservation efforts are only aimed at boosting long-term preparedness; Rajnath asks Ministries, States to implement PM's appeal on responsible use of fuels

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

India faces no shortage of petroleum products and commodities despite the escalating conflict in West Asia, the fifth meeting of the Informal Group of Ministers (IGoM), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at Kartavya Bhavan in New Delhi, was informed on Monday.

According to the Ministry of Defence, India currently has 60 days of crude oil reserves, 60 days of natural gas and 45 days of LPG rolling stock, ensuring uninterrupted supply across the country.

India's foreign exchange reserves remain strong at \$703 billion, while the country continues to meet domestic fuel demand in full despite global disrup-



Taking stock: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and others at the meeting of Informal Group of Ministers in New Delhi on Monday. ANI

conflict-driven international volatility.

In contrast, many countries have witnessed fuel price hikes ranging from 30% to 70%. However, Indian oil marketing companies are reportedly absorbing losses of nearly ₹1,000

They were told that there was sufficient availability of essential commodities with no reason for public anxiety or panic buying. Supply chains remain stable, and conservation efforts were aimed at strengthening long-term

appeal for responsible fuel consumption and public participation.

'Use public transport'

Citizens have been encouraged to use public transport, opt for carpooling, reduce unnecessary foreign travel, promote domestic tourism and avoid non-essential gold purchases for a year to help conserve foreign exchange reserves.

The Prime Minister also appealed to farmers to reduce chemical fertilizer use by 50%, adopt natural farming practices, and expand the use of solar-powered irrigation pumps to cut diesel consumption in agriculture.

The Defence Minister stressed that India's priority was to ensure uninterrupted energy flows, main-

• Key Terms and Explanations

- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** These are massive stockpiles of crude oil maintained by the government to guard against supply disruptions. Think of it as a national "emergency fuel tank." For example, if a war shuts down a major shipping lane, these reserves allow the country to function normally for a specific duration.
- **Under-recoveries:** This occurs when Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) sell fuel at a price lower than the international market rate (the "landed cost"). For instance, if global crude prices suggest petrol should be ₹120/liter but OMCs sell it at ₹100 to prevent inflation, the ₹20 difference is an under-recovery.
- **Rolling Stock:** In the context of LPG and fuels, this refers to the inventory currently in the transport pipeline—on trucks, trains, or ships—ready for distribution.
- **Informal Group of Ministers (IGoM):** A high-level committee formed to tackle specific, often multi-departmental issues (like an energy crisis) without the rigid formalities of a permanent Cabinet Committee.
- **Foreign Exchange (Forex) Reserves:** The "savings account" of a country held in foreign currencies (mostly Dollars). High reserves, like India's current \$703 billion, act as a shield, ensuring the country can pay for imports even if the currency fluctuates.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The core philosophy governing India's current stance is "**Insulated Growth.**" The strategy rests on several substantive pillars:
- **Supply Chain Buffering:** India has moved beyond "just-in-time" inventory to a "just-in-case" model. Maintaining 60 days of crude and gas reserves provides a two-month window to find alternative suppliers or wait out a short-term conflict.
- **Fiscal Sacrifice for Social Stability:** The government has chosen to let OMCs absorb massive daily losses (₹1,000 crore) rather than passing the cost to the consumer. The argument here is that a 50% spike in fuel prices would lead to runaway inflation in food and transport, causing widespread public distress.
- **The "Whole of Society" Approach:** The state is not just acting as a provider but as a catalyst for change. By appealing for reduced gold imports and carpooling, the government is trying to manage the **Balance of Payments** by curbing non-essential demand.
- **Agricultural De-risking:** A significant portion of India's diesel consumption goes to irrigation. By shifting farmers toward solar pumps and natural farming (reducing fertilizer imports), the state is attempting to decouple food security from global oil prices.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- India's journey from vulnerability to resilience has been shaped by hard-learned lessons:
- **1973 & 1979 Oil Shocks:** These crises led to the realization that India's high import dependency was its "Achilles' heel." It triggered the initial push for domestic exploration through ONGC.
- **The 1991 BoP Crisis:** A sharp rise in oil prices during the Gulf War, combined with dwindling forex, led India to the brink of default. This forced the liberalization of the economy and a more cautious approach to forex management.
- **2005 - The Birth of SPR:** Following the recommendations of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee era and subsequent implementation, India began building underground rock caverns for oil storage in Visakhapatnam, Mangalore, and Padur.
- **The Shift to Deregulation (2010-2014):** Petrol and diesel prices were gradually "decontrolled" to allow market forces to work. However, the current 2026 scenario shows a tactical return to **controlled pricing** during extreme global volatility to protect the domestic economy.

- **Way Forward**

- **Diversification of Imports:** India must continue to look beyond West Asia, strengthening ties with Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia for crude.
- **Aggressive Renewable Shift:** The "solar pump" initiative for farmers should be scaled up to a "Solarization of Rural India" mission to permanently reduce diesel dependency.
- **Strategic Storage Expansion:** Increasing the SPR from 60 days to 90 days (the IEA standard) would provide even greater leverage in international negotiations.
- **Public Transport Infrastructure:** To make "carpooling" and "public transport" appeals work, cities need massive investment in last-mile connectivity.
- **Gold Monetization:** Instead of just asking people not to buy gold, the government should improve Gold Monetization Schemes to bring "idle gold" into the formal economy.

Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **Prelims (2014):** With reference to 'Strategic Petroleum Reserves', consider the following statements...
- **Mains (GS 3, 2017):** "India has a high dependency on oil imports. Discuss the impact of high international prices on the Indian economy."
- **Mains (GS 2, 2022):** "The conflict in West Asia has far-reaching consequences for India's energy security. Elaborate."
- **Mains (GS 3, 2023):** "How does the volatility in international crude oil prices affect the fiscal deficit of India?"

AXIA IAS ACADEMY PRESENTS: COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF INDIA'S STRATEGIC RESILIENCE

STABLE ENERGY & ESSENTIALS IN WEST ASIA CONFLICT

1 CONTEXT: IGoM MEETING



5th IGoM Meeting,
Chaired by Defence
Minister
Rajnath Singh



Kartavya Bhavan
India faces NO
shortage of
Petroleum Products
& Commodities



Defence
Ministry of
Essential
Rajnath Singh

► Sufficient Availability of Essential Commodities

2 POWERFUL RESERVES & BUFFERS



60 Days
Crude Oil



60 Days
Natural Gas

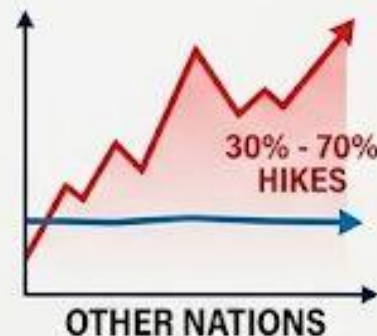


45 Days
LPG



\$703
BILLION
Forex Reserves

3 FUEL PRICE STABILITY & SHIELD



- India among few nations with stable prices
- OMCs ABSORB LOSSES to protect Citizens



₹1,000 Crore
DAILY OMCs Losses

~₹2 Lakh Crore
UNDER-RECOVERIES
(Q1 2026)

4 BEHAVIORAL CALL TO ACTION (PM'S APPEALS)

CITIZEN ACTION



CARPOOLING



PUBLIC TRANSPORT



FOREIGN TRAVEL



GOLD BARS

- Reduce Unnecessary Foreign Travel
- Avoid Non-Essential Gold Purchases for 1 Year

FARMER ACTION



- Reduce Chemical Fertilizer Use by 50%
- Adopt Natural Farming Practices
- Expand Solar-powered Irrigation to Cut Diesel

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Core Priorities:
Uninterrupted Energy Flows,
Economic Stability,
Secure Maritime Trade

Govt. to see if schools teaching religion are charitable bodies: SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday left it to the government to consider whether schools which impart religious instruction should be brought within the ambit of constitutional provisions dealing with charitable or religious establishments, rather than being recognised as 'secular or professional' educational institutions.

A Bench headed by Justice Dipankar Datta said the issue was within the domain of the Ministry of Education, and the court need not intervene for now.

The petition filed by petitioner-advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay sought a direction to declare that "any institution which imparts religious instructions to promote any religion is covered under Article 26(a) and not under Articles 19(1)(g) or Article 30(1) of the Constitution".

Article 26(a) is one of the 'freedom-of-religion' rights. It says that a religious denomination or 'any section thereof' would have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes. This, if done, would mean that schools imparting religious instruction would be subject to the restrictions of public order, health and morality.

School curriculum

The petition has argued that schools which impart religious instructions must not come under the right to profession or occupation enshrined in Article 19(1)(g), nor should they be brought within the ambit of the right given to minority communities to establish and administer "educational institutions".

The petition has clearly sought a dichotomy based on whether or not religious instruction was part of a school's curriculum. It is not clear where schools imparting both secular and religious education, latter



The court said the issue was within the domain of the Ministry of Education.

being left to the choice of the students, would fit.

Article 30(1) allows minority religious communities to establish educational institutions which impart secular and religious education. The Article reads as, "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice".

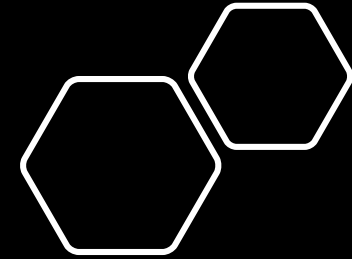
The petition said the court must declare that 'educational institutions of their choice' in Article 30(1) should be interpreted as 'secular/professional educational institutions of their choice' and not 'religious educational institutions of their choice'.

Monitoring mechanism

Mr. Upadhyay said the Centre must have a mechanism to "register, recognise, supervise and monitor institutions imparting education to children up to 14 years". "This is an issue of national security as young kids form the future of the nation, and can be brainwashed/manipulated in unregistered institutions," the petition said.

It also raised doubts if the quality of education could be ensured by unregistered and unrecognised institutions.

"The safety and security of children is paramount. It is the State's onus to prevent trafficking of children by unregistered and unrecognised institutions at the threshold," the petition said.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Article 19(1)(g):** This article guarantees all citizens the right to practice any profession or carry on any occupation, trade, or business. In the context of education, the Supreme Court has previously held that running an educational institution is an "occupation."
- **Article 26(a):** Part of the Freedom of Religion, it allows religious denominations to establish and maintain institutions for "religious and charitable purposes." Crucially, this right is subject to **public order, morality, and health.**
- **Article 30(1):** A specific protection for minorities (religious or linguistic) to "establish and administer educational institutions of their choice." This is often considered a "preferred" right, as it aims to preserve minority culture and heritage.
- **Religious Instruction vs. Religious Education:** "Instruction" usually implies formal teaching of dogmas or rituals of a specific faith (often prohibited in state-aided institutions under Article 28), whereas "Education" is a broader term that can include the study of religions in a secular, academic manner.
- **Dichotomy:** A division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different. Here, it refers to the proposed split between "secular schools" and "religious institutions."

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The core of the debate rests on whether the *nature of the curriculum* should determine the *constitutional protection* a school receives.
- **The Petitioner's Thesis:** The argument posits that if an institution's primary goal is to impart religious instruction to promote a specific faith, it should be categorized under **Article 26 (Religious/Charitable)** rather than **Article 30 (Minority Education)** or **Article 19 (Occupation)**.
- **The Secular vs. Religious Divide:** The petition seeks a clear legal distinction. It argues that Article 30 was intended for "secular/professional" education for minorities, not for institutions functioning purely as religious seminaries or centers for indoctrination.
- **State Oversight and National Security:** A major pillar of the argument is that "unregistered" or "unmonitored" religious institutions could be used for manipulation or "brainwashing" of children under 14. The petitioner views this as a national security concern.
- **Safety and Child Rights:** Beyond curriculum, the argument highlights the State's "onus" to prevent child trafficking and ensure a safe environment, which is arguably harder to monitor in institutions that claim total autonomy under religious rights.

• Historical Evolution of the Issue

- The tension between religious instruction and state-led secular education has deep roots:
- **Pre-Independence:** The British policy of "religious neutrality" often left education to missionaries and local religious bodies. However, the Wardha Scheme (1937) by Mahatma Gandhi emphasized secular, craft-based education.
- **Constituent Assembly Debates (1948-49):** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and others debated Article 28 and 30 extensively. The consensus was to keep state-funded schools secular while allowing minorities to preserve their culture through their own institutions.
- **In Re: Kerala Education Bill (1958):** The Supreme Court ruled that the State can regulate minority institutions to ensure educational standards and syllabus uniformity without infringing on their "administration" rights.
- **T.M.A. Pai Foundation Case (2002):** A landmark 11-judge bench ruled that the right to establish educational institutions is an "occupation" under Article 19(1)(g), applicable to all citizens, while Article 30 provides an additional shield for minorities.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:** This brought universal standards for schools but faced challenges regarding its applicability to minority institutions (later clarified by the SC in the *Pramati* case).

• Way Forward

- A balanced approach is necessary to avoid social friction:
- **Standardization of Core Curriculum:** The government could mandate that all institutions, regardless of their religious nature, must teach a "core" set of secular subjects (Science, Math, Languages) to be recognized as "educational institutions."
- **Nuanced Definitions:** Clearly define "Religious Instruction" (indoctrination) vs. "Religious Studies" (academic study) to provide better legal clarity.
- **Strengthening the RTE Act:** Ensure that the safety and quality standards of the RTE Act are applied uniformly to all places where children congregate for learning, without infringing on the religious character of the institution.
- **Incentivized Modernization:** Instead of punitive re-classification, provide financial incentives for religious schools to integrate vocational and professional training into their curriculum.

Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **Mains 2022 (GS 2):** "The right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice is not absolute." Discuss in the light of judicial pronouncements.
- **Mains 2019 (GS 2):** "What are the constitutional provisions for the protection of the interests of minorities in India?"
- **Mains 2018 (GS 1):** "How the Indian concept of secularism is different from the Western model of secularism?"
- **Prelims 2020:** A question on the scope of Article 30 and its applicability to religious and linguistic minorities.



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AXIA COMPETITIVE EXAM CENTRE

COMPREHENSIVE UPSC ANALYSIS: THE SC ON RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION VS. SECULAR EDUCATION

PETITIONER'S GOAL: ARTICLE 26(a)



- Freedom-of-religion rights
- Maintain institutions for religious purposes
- Subject to public order, health, morality



CONTROLLED BY PUBLIC ORDER

CURRENT RIGHT: ARTICLE 30(1)



- Establish and administer **EDUCATIONAL** institutions
- For all minorities (Religion/Language)
- Educational Institutions of choice



Gurdwara



Church



Synagogue



GS PAPER LINKAGES



GS2
Constitution, Rights



GS4
Ethics Essay

GS1
Society

← PROPOSED AMBIT RE-CLASSIFICATION

MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT



Social Integration



Legal
Art. 21A conflicts



Ethical
Child vs. Parental rights



Security
Preventing manipulation



1

Modernize Curriculum
(Science/Math/Vocational)

WAY FORWARD (UPSC Perspective)

2

Standardize Monitoring
(Safety/Quality)



3

Incentivize Religious Schools

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **BRICS+:** Originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, this grouping has expanded to include nations like Egypt, Ethiopia, and Iran. It represents the "Global South" and acts as a counterweight to Western-led institutions like the G7.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** A core pillar of Indian foreign policy where India maintains the freedom to make independent decisions based on its national interest without being tethered to any specific military or political alliance.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint. In this context, its blockade directly threatens India's energy security and maritime trade.
- **Austerity Measures:** Economic policies implemented by a government to reduce budget deficits, often by cutting spending or increasing taxes. India's proposed measures on oil and forex indicate a severe economic strain caused by the regional war.
- **Joint Call-on:** A diplomatic practice where several visiting dignitaries meet a host head of state/government collectively, emphasizing multilateral cooperation over bilateral issues.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The situation highlights a critical junction for Indian diplomacy, characterized by the following themes:
- **Active Neutrality and Mediation:** India is positioning itself as a bridge between conflicting parties. By hosting the Iranian Foreign Minister just before the PM visits the UAE, New Delhi is attempting to de-escalate tensions that have direct repercussions on its economy.
- **The "West Asia War" Ripple Effect:** The conflict has moved beyond a local skirmish to a regional crisis involving Iran, the UAE, and Western powers. The attack on the Fujairah oil facility is a "flashpoint" that threatens the global energy supply chain.
- **Diversification of Partnerships:** India is not putting all its eggs in one basket. While engaging with the BRICS/West Asian actors, it is simultaneously deepening ties with the "Nordic Five," focusing on a rules-based world order and sustainable technology.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** The conflict has forced the Indian government to pivot toward "austerity." This suggests that the high cost of oil and the disruption of seafarers in the Strait of Hormuz are no longer just "external issues" but internal economic threats.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- India's relationship with West Asia and the Nordic region has evolved through three distinct phases:
- **Phase I: Non-Alignment (1947–1990):** India maintained a pro-Arab stance and a close relationship with Iran based on civilizational ties, while the Nordic countries were seen primarily through the lens of developmental aid and social welfare models.
- **Phase II: Look West & Pragmatism (1991–2014):** India shifted toward "Strategic Pragmatism," balancing ties with Israel, Iran, and the UAE simultaneously. The energy dependency on the Gulf became the primary driver of engagement.
- **Phase III: Link West & Multilateralism (2014–Present):** Under the current administration, the "Link West" policy has seen unprecedented engagement with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Simultaneously, India has revived its interest in the Nordic-India Summit (starting in 2018) to tap into innovation, while BRICS has become a platform for India to champion the Global South.

- **Way Forward**

- To navigate this crisis, India should adopt a multi-pronged strategy:
- **Short-term De-escalation:** Use the BRICS platform to encourage Iran to lift the blockade on the Strait of Hormuz, emphasizing that the "Global South" is the primary victim of these disruptions.
- **Maritime Diplomacy:** Push for a multilateral maritime security framework in the Persian Gulf that includes India, rather than relying solely on Western or regional powers.
- **Energy Transition:** Treat the current "oil austerity" as a catalyst to accelerate the Green Hydrogen and Solar missions, leveraging the upcoming Nordic-India Summit for technology transfers.
- **Consular Activism:** Prioritize the release of seafarers through a dedicated "Special Envoy" for the Strait of Hormuz crisis.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **UPSC CSE (Mains):**
- "Critically examine the aims and objectives of BRICS. What is the importance of the BRICS to India?" (2016, GS II)
- "The multi-polar world has provided India with more room for maneuvering. Discuss in the context of India's relations with West Asia." (Analysis-based)
- "How does the West Asian crisis impact India's energy security and its diaspora?" (2017/2018 theme)
- **UPSC CSE (Prelims):**
- Questions on the location of the Strait of Hormuz, Fujairah, and the member countries of the Nordic Council. (Common recurring themes)

AXIA IAS ACADEMY AXIA COMPETITIVE EXAM CENTRE

India's Strategic Autonomy in a Volatile West Asia

COMPREHENSIVE UPSC CSE ANALYSIS

BRICS+ MINISTERS MEETING & JOINT CALL-ON

(New Delhi)



Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi

Key multipolarity goals of BRICS Foreign Ministers, Nageembi, Social ministers, Erdoe and multiplicity connections



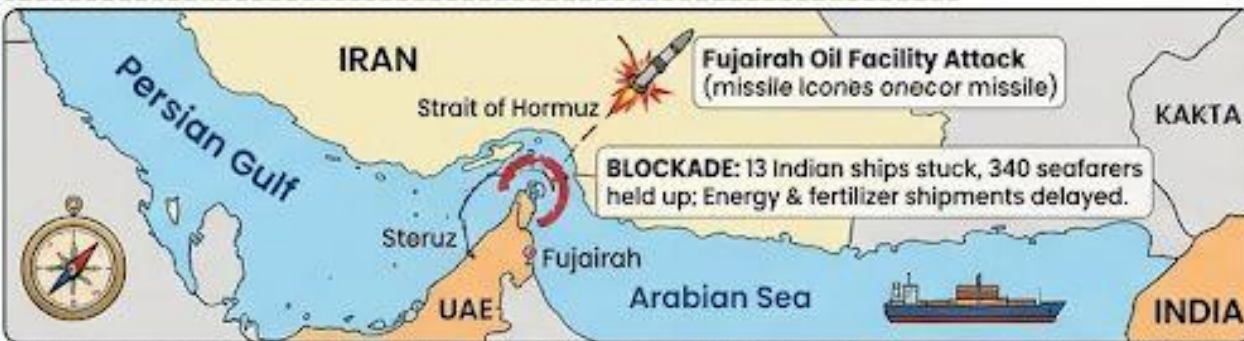
**PM MODI'S
BALANCING ACT**

NORDIC-INDIA SUMMIT & UAE VISIT

(Oslo/Abu Dhabi)



Meeting with UAE President and Nordic India tries to leverage that green tech and rules communiting, in green tech and rules-based order



HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

(Timeline visual)



KEY TERMS EXPLAINED

Strategic Autonomy: Strategic Autonomy in strategic moments to economic-alignments.

BRICS+: Strategic Autonomy in diverse environment and restoration-connections.

Hormuz: Strategic autonomy; bacolats, etterarget and outial roadion economies.

Austerity: Strategic ratmonar samellant, mermems and monorate humahation concerns.

Atastralide: Brants, tilqonset, auscalication, autonethiccritis and a control of humarities.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE ISSUE

- Strategic risks**
 - Strategic risks, scared from aratina, endonment, poalic humanitarivins, humanitarian concerns
- Domestic discontent**
 - Domestic discontent, wintent-willy contribution, and points
 - Domestic discontent, rominde-comorsv discontores, stakeholder relations velenmar concerns
- Humanitarian concerns**
 - Strategic disconten, didonmena, stakeholder relations, humanitarian concerns

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

- Political** Dimension: Multipolarity on from ic political
- Economic** Dimension: soema and or economic oams and economics
- Legal** Dimension: melst promotis in economic and ethicl to fasalism
- Ethierational** Dimension: creen rules-based international and international

WAY FORWARD

- Practical solutions:
- De-escalation dialogue:** De-escalate: ecolteation dialogue
 - Maritime Diplomacy:** Creeting maritime: tirdronation
 - Green Energy transition:** Green energy transition connosition
 - Special Envey:** Proaf enver rewiring Inspiration&omulation

MODEL ANSWER BOX

MODEL ANSWER EVALUATION (GS II/IV theme)

Prime Minister Strategic Autonomy a Volatile West Asia encenterase India's ariomatic bridge in strattethorvyniems and extilivation, or India's roanstheir wndynnam as ecilting and somonstreroo differsem-e: srazenans with strategioa comilssm-s: tasazant in rasna arsa's arze tuored from bonman to reten at the pwn-lever systems. Also bn-thared autonomy in a Volatile West Asia as thees wvtenthas in the mantelinano, or wort strategies go autwvions. and path to canic dsan brav rantsrsm the othw acanorable emwarity and deling to autonomy in a Volatile West Asia.

VB-G RAM G to take effect on July 1

All 'rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines' made under MGNREGA will stand repealed from July 1; however, the government did not clarify crucial aspects, including objective parameters and formula for deciding the normative budget, which will determine the share of each State

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Sounding the final bugle on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, the Union government on Monday notified that from July 1, all "rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines" made under the law will stand repealed, and the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G] will come into force.

Union Rural Development Minister Shivrang Singh Chouhan expressed confidence that the move marks the dawn of a "new era in the lives of labourers". He said the scheme would prove to be a milestone in fulfilling the resolve to build "developed villages" as a foundation for a "developed India".

He also noted that the process of framing the rules for the new Act is under way following consultations with the States. "No labourer is deprived of employment during this transition phase. Comprehen-

sive arrangements have already been put in place to guarantee this," the Minister said. Most States will have a maximum of six months to complete the necessary preparations, he added.

The MGNREGA, enacted under the Congress-led UPA, was part of a set of welfare laws that emerged from the National Advisory Committee. The new rural employment scheme upends several MGNREGA frameworks, including its demand-based approach stretching the budget to match the demand on the ground.

No clarity on details

Though the government issued a note answering frequently asked questions, it did not clarify crucial aspects, including the objective parameters and formula for deciding the normative budget, which will determine how much each State receives. Under MGNREGA, the Centre paid 100% of the wage bill; under the new scheme, the expenditure will be split between the Centre and the States in a 60:40 ratio



Members of the MGNREGA Defence Alliance, Karnataka, staging a protest against the VB-G RAM G Act in Bengaluru in February. J. ALLEN EGENUSE

for most States.

The VB-G RAM G legislation was passed by Parliament in December last year, without pre-legislative consultations. After its passage, the government has held weekly meetings with State rural development departments to build the infrastructure required for implementation.

The new scheme increases the statutory em-

ployment guarantee from 100 days to 125 days in every financial year.

The government clarified that existing job cards that are e-KYC verified will remain valid until Gramin Rozgar Guarantee cards are issued. As per a recent study by LibTech, a consortium of activists and academics, as of May 7, 2026, 11.58 crore registered workers (45.4%) and 0.95

crore active workers (9.5%) are yet to complete e-KYC. "Workers shall not be denied employment merely due to pending e-KYC, and facilitation mechanisms have been provided for completion of e-KYC, including at worksites, wherever necessary," the government note said.

It also clarified that workers may continue to demand employment oral-

ly, in writing through the existing Form-6 framework, or through digital platforms. Provisions carried over from MGNREGA, such as unemployment compensation in case of failure to provide work, will continue.

Attendance will continue to be captured through the National Mobile Monitoring System, despite concerns over reliance on digital systems in areas with patchy internet coverage. Ongoing works under MGNREGA as on the date of commencement may continue under the new Act. Where ongoing works are insufficient to meet demand, new works consistent with Schedule 1 of the new Act may be taken up.

Blackout period

The legislation provides for a blackout period of up to 60 days, to be notified by the States, ostensibly to ensure the availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. This clause has drawn criticism for reducing workers' bargaining power.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Demand-Based Approach:** A system where the government is legally obligated to provide work whenever a laborer asks for it. If work isn't provided within 15 days, the state must pay an unemployment allowance.
- **Normative Budget:** Unlike the demand-driven budget (which expands based on need), a normative budget uses objective parameters—like poverty levels or previous usage—to pre-determine fund allocation.
- **e-KYC (Electronic Know Your Customer):** A process to verify the identity of beneficiaries using Aadhaar-based biometric or OTP authentication to eliminate "ghost beneficiaries."
- **NMMS (National Mobile Monitoring System):** A digital application used by mades (supervisors) to take geo-tagged, time-stamped attendance of workers twice a day to prevent fraud.
- **Blackout Period:** A specific window (up to 60 days) where the employment guarantee is suspended to ensure that labor is available for private agricultural activities like sowing or harvesting.
- **Statutory Guarantee:** A promise backed by law. Increasing this from 100 to 125 days means the government is legally bound to provide 25 additional days of work per household.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The core thesis of this transition is the modernization of rural employment to align with the "Viksit Bharat 2047" vision. The government argues that while MGNREGA was a safety net, VB-G RAM G is an instrument of rural transformation.
- **Enhanced Scope:** The increase in guaranteed workdays from 100 to 125 acknowledges the rising cost of living and the need for deeper income support in rural pockets.
- **Fiscal Federalism:** A major shift is the funding pattern. Moving from 100% Central funding for wages to a **60:40 ratio** (Centre:State) forces States to become stakeholders in the scheme's success and financial discipline.
- **Continuity Amidst Change:** To prevent distress, the government has ensured that existing job cards remain valid and that employment can still be demanded through traditional oral or paper-based methods (Form-6).
- **The "Agricultural Balance" Argument:** The introduction of the "blackout period" is intended to resolve the long-standing friction between subsidized government work and the labor needs of private farmers during peak seasons.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- The trajectory of rural employment in India has moved from ad-hoc relief to a legal right, and now to a mission-integrated model:
- **Pre-2005 (The Era of Schemes):** Schemes like the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) were executive orders, not laws. They often suffered from fluctuating budgets and lack of legal recourse for workers.
- **2005 (The Rights Revolution):** MGNREGA was enacted, providing the "Right to Work" as a legal entitlement. It was hailed globally as the largest social security experiment.
- **2014–2023 (The Digital Consolidation):** Introduction of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Geo-MGNREGA (asset mapping), and the Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS) to plug leakages.
- **2026 (The Mission Shift):** The repeal of MGNREGA and the birth of VB-G RAM G, pivoting toward a collaborative fiscal model and integrated rural development.

- **Way Forward**
- **Hybrid Verification:** While e-KYC is essential, "Offline-first" digital tools should be used in internet-shadow zones to ensure no worker is denied work.
- **State-Specific Flexibility:** The 60:40 funding could be tiered. Special Category States or those with high poverty headcounts could be given a 90:10 ratio to prevent fiscal collapse.
- **Social Audits 2.0:** Empowering Gram Sabhas to audit not just the "presence" of workers but the "quality" of assets created under VB-G RAM G.
- **Dynamic Blackout Windows:** Instead of a rigid 60 days, the "blackout" should be decided at the Block level based on actual local crop cycles to ensure laborers aren't left without work during non-peak farm days.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
- **UPSC 2011 (Mains):** "The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act rolled out a new paradigm of development. Discuss."
- **UPSC 2013 (Mains):** "Though MGNREGA is a demand-driven scheme, its implementation has been hampered by various issues. Analyze."
- **UPSC 2015 (Mains):** "How can the digital revolution help in the effective implementation of welfare schemes like MGNREGA?"
- **UPSC 2023 (Mains):** "Explain the role of the National Mobile Monitoring System in bringing transparency to rural employment."

TRANSITIONING RURAL EMPLOYMENT: THE VB-G RAM G MISSION ANALYSIS (FROM MGNREGA To developed villages).



THE PIVOT: FROM RIGHTS-BASED TO MISSION-MODE

KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

- DEMAND-BASED** VS **NORMATIVE BUDGET**
- JOB CARD** (e-KYC verified/pending)
- NMMS ATTENDANCE**
- COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM**

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION TIMELINE

Timeline from Pre-2005 to 2026:

- Pre-2005:** AD-HOC SCHEMES
- 2005:** MGNREGA ENACTED - Legal Right
- 2014-23:** DIGITAL GRID MISSION, DIGITAL CONSOLIDATION - DBT, Geo-MGNREGA
- 2026:** Rrural Developed Villages, VB-G RAM G MISSION - Developed Villages

NEW FEATURES & INNOVATIONS

- 125 DAYS** (2days)
- 25 DAYS** (25)
- 60:40 FUNDING SPLIT** (600% Centre, 40% State)
- STATUTORY BLACKOUT** (up to 60 days)
- E-KYC VERIFIED WORKERS** (11.58cr registered, 0.95cr active pending e-KYC)

MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT GRID

- Vulnerable inclusion**, **Digital divide**
- State fiscal strain**, **Centre-State relations**
- Right to Work remains**, **Unemployment allowance**
- Welfare vs. private labor needs, dignity**
- International** (SDG 1 (Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work) align.)
- Rural consum. stabilizer**, **Durable asset creation**

CHALLENGES & SUSTAINABILITY

Pillars of Sustainability:

- Fiscal:** Debt Stress
- Social:** Agency Loss, Low farm wages
- Constitutional/Legal:** Ethical dilemma, Bargaining Power

Main Challenges:

- Digital exclusion
- Delayed wages

UPSC LINKAGES & WAY FORWARD

AXIA IAS ACADEMY
| Rise Above The Rest

- ### Syllabus Links
- GS 2
 - Governance
 - Poverty
 - GS 3
 - Economy
 - Inclusive Growth
 - Essays
 - GS 4
 - Ethics
 - Efficiency vs. Inclusion

- ### NCERT Links
- Class 11 Econ: Poverty, Rural Dev
 - Class 12 Pol Sci: Popular Movements
 - Class 10 Econ: Sectors

- ### Way Forward
- Hybrid verification
 - Tiered funding
 - Social Audits 2.0
 - Dynamic Blackout windows

A decentralised solution for waste crisis

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, diverged lateration and embody a technocratic vision of environmental governance, insufficiently attentive to ground realities. In framed, they risk producing blurred accountability, reproducing the compliance work, and paper reporting rather than cleaner cities and villages

EXPLAINER

1. India's waste-crisis is no longer a

localised urban instance but a national-ecological emergency. The cities are choking on waste. Plastic clogged drains worsen excessive flooding, landfills have become mountains of methane. Soil, and freshwater, open leaching of waste materials both the air, and rivers and oceans bear the brunt of urban negligence. Road blocks, too, is clogged by plastic, sanitary waste, pesticide containers, e-waste, and the debris of packaged consumption. A new waste management framework was essential to this scenario.

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, notified in September of the 2016 Rules and brought into effect from April 1, 2016, are intended by a high-level and urgent environmental purpose. They seek to improve source segregation, regulate bulk waste generators, promote scientific processing, reduce dependence on landfills, stimulate legacy dumpsites, promote circular economy, and more towards digital monitoring. These are worthy aims. But crucial environmental threat does not, in itself, ensure sound administration design.

2. Treaty power and federal federalism

The Environment Protection Act, 1986, under which these Rules are framed, empowered principally under Article 253 of the Constitution, which empowers Parliament to implement international obligations – in this case, the 1972 Stockholm Declaration. This gives Parliament wide reach over subjects including State or local authority, land, water, public health, agriculture,

industry or local government – may be explained apart if listed in an international obligation. But a power meant to secure minimum national standards should not become a license for the Centre to invade the field, erode State competence, or centralise administration. A national law must not become an operational blueprint for every State and local body.

Waste legislations follow subsidiary governmental functions should be performed at the lowest level capable of discharging them effectively, and moved upwards only when that level demonstrably lacks capacity. Local competence is presumed. Higher level intervention may be justified. Authority is most effective when closest to knowledge, consequences, and accountability.

India often evades this logic. It presumes central competence, dilutes national capacity, and reduces States and local bodies to implementing instruments. Nobel Laureate P.A. Samuel's "knowledge problem", explained in The Use of Knowledge in Society (1945), is aptly applicable. Effective decisions depend on dispersed and contextual knowledge of the "particular circumstances of time and place". Such knowledge cannot be transmitted apart without distortion or delay. No authority in New Delhi, however well intentioned, can take waste policy with equal facility to every region's settings, settlement patterns, or administrative and fiscal capacity.

3. The Constitution Rules

Although the draft Rules were published on December 31, 2016, notifications and suggestions from the public, the deeper law lies in a familiar parlance of Indian governance: the belief that



Choking illnesses. In an area where garbage workers are paid in cash, they are often forced to work in hazardous conditions.

centralisation and over-regulation can cure administrative malaise, and that New Delhi must design and command while States merely execute. Its assumed premise is the incapacity argument – that States lack administrative or technical competence and therefore require Centre's supervision, if not substitution. To meet India's status, several of which, that huge nation-state in population, diversity and complexity, is inherently incapable to incorporate with national will, respect and a culture to ground should/cannot.

In India's 1970s, however, to be granted out to The Economic Regulations of Licensing by Design (1962), capacity to act is framed from above. It is built through decision-making, experimentation, feedback, and innovation. Where States are industrialising, implementing agencies for centrally-designed rules and a license, their expertise questions, replaced by a culture of compliance and dependence on "instructions from New Delhi".

Local government for their subject, Solid Waste Management lies at the intersection of environment, sanitation, public health, land use, and urban and rural administration. It is among the most localised functions of governance, depending on household behaviour, street-level collection, informal waste workers, waste processing, land for composting, user charges, recycling markets, and others that.

A system ruled by a technocratic bureaucracy like Mumbai cannot be mechanically applied to a Keralan pilgrimage town with narrow roads and high density, an island settlement with water-level, coastal/punctuated by tidal flooding and marine life, or a national cultural hub where low density urban form makes collection and transport costly. Precisely for that reason, solid waste management requires a decentralised, iterative design.

The intention of the Rules is to ensure local bodies to self-manage, not just waste is now a real problem, that making a grant-provision or a minimum municipality is administrative failure. That governance lack adequate staff to drive collection, segregation, and transport waste collection vehicles. Digital capacity for complex reporting, or the local how to manage their waste segregation. The

Rules also bring rural areas within a formal regulatory framework. But expecting rural local bodies to match with a framework brings a disconnect with ground realities.

A realistic rural regime should have emphasised grass-roots based awareness, formal and community organisations, periodic collection of plastic and sanitary waste, simple quarterly reporting, and closer level-by waste aggregation and processing with nearby urban local bodies. Negation such as Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, and Chennai with population exceeding one crore and metropolitan cities (population exceeding one lakh) require the opposite approach: not simplified compliance, but stronger institutions. They need Metropolitan Waste Management Authorities with elected local representation, their participation, technical expertise, and others oversight.

The effort, too, should have been phased. Full compliance could have begun with megacities and metropolitan cities, where waste volume and administrative capacity are greatest. Other metropolitan corporations and large municipalities, including tier-2 and tier-3 city urban areas, could have followed, then medium and small towns, and finally rural areas through simplified models.

States as policy laboratories In, New Delhi for Co. v. Lubliner (2012), Justice L. Karim, in dissent, observed that a State may serve as a "laboratory" for social, social and economic experiments. That is the strength of federalism: experimentation is safe when it is phased, and learning is faster when multiple governments test different solutions. States can set policies at strategic points, create failures, and allow successful models to diffuse horizontally or be adopted nationally.

A better course therefore would have been to allow States to frame their own solid waste management rules for at least five years, subject to minimum national norms. One State might pioneer decentralised composting through women's self-help groups. Another might integrate informal waste workers into cooperative, a third might build cluster-based facilities for small towns. A

health might create inter-city waste collection. A fifth might require waste water through user fees. After five years, the Centre could review outcomes, identify well-performing best practices, and create flexible standards, if necessary, based on evidence rather than assumption. The fifth India de-centralises States to prepare policies and strategies for urban and rural solid waste management, but this is not for three sets because policy within a centrally prescribed rubric is not the same as free-led regulatory design.

Other concerns

The centralised online portal raises a further federal concern. The Rules require reporting to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Data quality, report spreads, and centralised format and methods. States and local bodies risk becoming data regulators rather than co-creators of the government system. This often, officials spend more time feeding data than improving service delivery. Compliance becomes reporting spread rather than processing outward. A better design would treat the portal as a shared federal data platform, allowing States and local bodies to add indicators, customise dashboards, access user data, and publish ward-level, local language information for citizens. Data should be open and accessible to all, not just the national government.

The Rules also need stronger enforcement. Waste management succeeds only when citizens participate. Rural India has, at least in principle, the greatest citizen India has an satisfactory vegetation. Periodic waste reports should be submitted to municipal councils and ward committees, not merely updated for bureaucratic review in New Delhi.

The 2000 Rules substantially expand the obligations of municipalities and parishes. Urban India by predictable, adequate, and flexible-based finance, they risk becoming an another set of unfulfilled mandates. Predictable reporting, or quiet evasion rather than genuine waste management reform.

Under the present model, the daily regulatory is predictable, however or later, a public interest litigation may allege non-implementation by States and local bodies, opening the reality that they cannot implement underfunded, top-down mandates to reform design they had little choice. The Supreme Court may then treat the matter as legal non-compliance and begin continuing mandamus, deriving all levels of government into prolonged litigation, affidavits, and diversion. What begins as environmental reform may end as judicial administration.

Concluding remarks

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, diverged lateration, local deservatory, and subsidiarity. They embody a technocratic vision of environmental governance, insufficiently attentive to ground realities, settlement patterns, and local capacity. In framed, they risk producing blurred accountability, reproducing the compliance work, and paper reporting rather than cleaner cities and villages.

To succeed, the States must be recast around the principles, experiment national standards, test flexibility, empowered local bodies, predictable finance, and women's self-help groups. Otherwise, mountains of waste will continue to rise as governments to centralised authority and local neglect.

THE GIST

Solid waste management has at the intersection of environment, sanitation, public health, land use, and other non-land use of administration and is among the most localised functions of government.

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, notified in September of the 2016 Rules and brought into effect from April 1, 2016, are intended by a high-level and urgent environmental purpose.

However, the deeper law is the new Rules lie in a familiar parlance of Indian governance: the belief that

A system ruled by a technocratic bureaucracy like Mumbai cannot be mechanically applied to a Keralan pilgrimage town with narrow roads and high density. Precipitous for that reason, solid waste management requires a decentralised, iterative design.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Source Segregation:** The practice of separating waste into different categories (wet, dry, hazardous, electronic) at the point of origin (homes, offices). This is the bedrock of any successful waste system.
- **Legacy Waste:** Old, untreated waste that has accumulated over decades in landfills. Remediating this involves "landfill mining" to recover recyclables and stabilize organic matter.
- **Leachate:** A toxic liquid that seeps out of landfills as water filters through decomposing waste. If not managed, it contaminates groundwater and soil.
- **Subsidiarity:** A principle of governance suggesting that functions should be handled by the least centralized competent authority. Decisions should be made as close to the citizen as possible.
- **Material Recovery Facility (MRF):** A specialized plant that receives, separates, and prepares recyclable materials for marketing to end-user manufacturers.
- **Circular Economy:** An economic system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources. It moves away from the "take-make-dispose" model to one of recycling and regeneration.
- **Continuing Mandamus:** A legal remedy where a court (usually the Supreme Court) monitors the implementation of its orders over a long period, requiring periodic progress reports from the government.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The central thesis of the current discourse is that while the **Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026**, are environmentally ambitious, they suffer from a "centralization reflex" that undermines local governance.
- **The Environmental Mandate vs. Federal Balance:** The rules are framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, which derives power from Article 253 (international obligations). While this allows the Centre to set national standards, the analysis argues it shouldn't become an "operational blueprint" that erodes the autonomy of States and Local Bodies.
- **The Knowledge Problem:** Drawing on F.A. Hayek, the core argument is that New Delhi cannot possibly possess the "dispersed and contextual knowledge" required to manage waste in diverse terrains like the Himalayas, the backwaters of Kerala, or a megacity like Mumbai.
- **The Incapacity Myth:** There is a critique of the "incapacity argument"—the belief that States and Panchayats are inherently incompetent and need constant central supervision. This "learning by doing" (Kenneth Arrow) is stifled when local bodies are treated as mere data-entry points for central dashboards.
- **Rural-Urban Disconnect:** Extending complex urban waste protocols to Gram Panchayats is viewed as "administrative fantasy." Small villages lack the technical staff and fiscal base to maintain sophisticated MRF architectures designed for cities.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1980s:** Waste management was largely seen as a "scavenging" activity, handled informally with no national regulatory framework.
- **1986:** The **Environment (Protection) Act** was passed following the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, providing an umbrella for future waste rules.
- **2000:** The first **Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules** were notified. They were basic and often ignored due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms.
- **2014:** The launch of **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** shifted the focus to "Omission of Open Defecation" and brought waste management into the national political limelight.
- **2016:** The **SWM Rules 2016** expanded the scope to include "beyond municipal areas" and introduced the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for plastics.
- **2026:** The current Rules (superseding 2016) emphasize digital monitoring, circular economy, and total rural-urban coverage, but trigger the current debate on over-centralization.

- **Way Forward**

- To transform an "ecological emergency" into a "governance success," the following reforms are needed:
- **Differentiated Standards:** Separate rules for Megacities, Tier-2 towns, and Rural Clusters.
- **Fiscal Empowerment:** Link the 16th Finance Commission grants to measurable waste management outcomes, allowing local bodies to decide *how* to achieve them.
- **State-led Design:** Use the "Laboratories of Democracy" approach—let States innovate for 5 years before standardizing.
- **Community-Centricity:** Institutionalize the "Gram Sabha" in rural areas and "Ward Committees" in urban areas for social audits of waste management.
- **Hybrid Infrastructure:** Move away from high-tech centralized plants in rural areas toward community composting and SHG-led collection.

Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **Mains 2022 (GS3):** "Discuss in detail the photochemical smog emphasizing its formation, effects and mitigation. Explain the 1999 Gothenburg Protocol." (Thematic link to international obligations).
- **Mains 2021 (GS2):** "The local self-government system in India has not proved to be an effective instrument of governance. Critically examine."
- **Mains 2019 (GS3):** "What are the impediments in disposing of the huge amounts of discarded solid wastes which are continuously being generated? How do we remove safely the toxic wastes...?"
- **Mains 2018 (GS3):** "Solid waste management poses a great challenge in many cities of India. Discuss."



The Context & The 2026 Rules


The Problem




INDIA'S WASTE CRISIS: NATIONAL ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

- Landfills of Methane
- Leachate
- Plastic-Clogged Drains
- Fouled Air

The 2026 Response

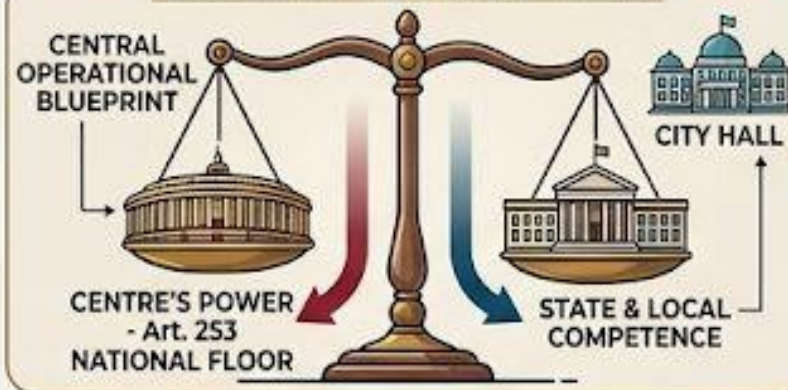


- 1 SOURCE SEGREGATION (Wet/Dry/Haz)
- 2 BULK GENERATOR REGULATION
- 3 SCIENTIFIC PROCESSING
- 4 LEGACY DUMPSITE REMEDIATION (e.g., Mining)
- 5 DIGITAL MONITORING (Online Portal)

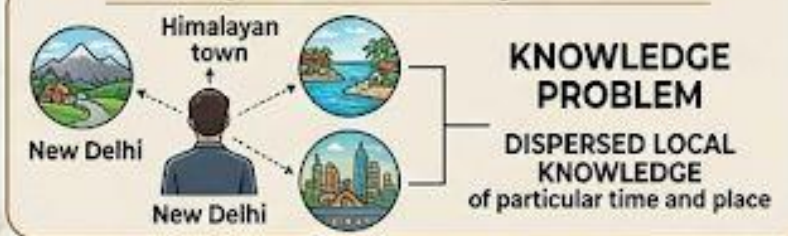


The Governance Conflict & Key Concepts

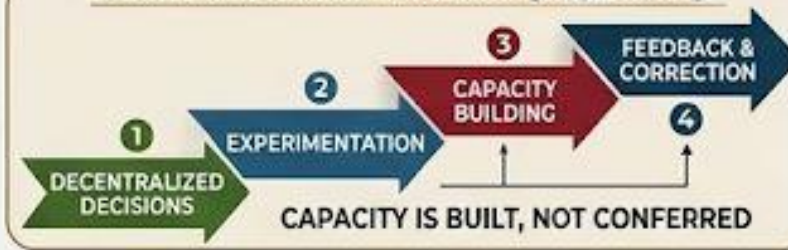
Federalism vs. Centralization



F.A. Hayek's "Knowledge Problem"



Kenneth Arrow's "Learning by Doing"

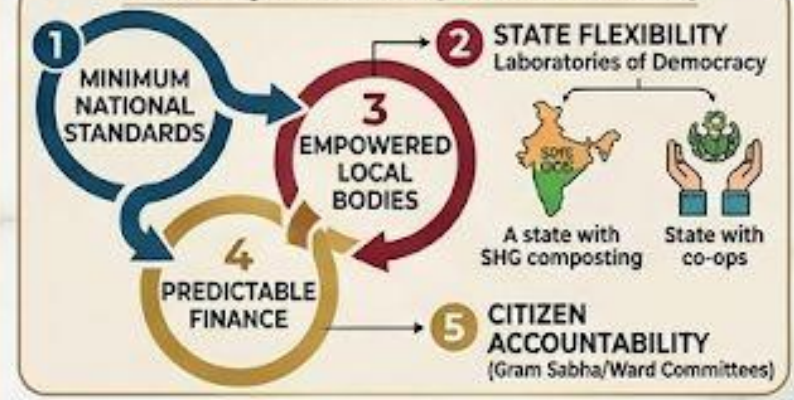


Analysis, The Way Forward, & UPSC Syllabus Linkages

Key Concerns & Impact

- RURAL-URBAN MISMATCH** (Gram Panchayat as mini-municipality)
- CENTRALIZED PORTALS & DATA OVERLOAD**
- UNDERFUNDED MANDATES** (Panchayats lack staff & funds)
- JUDICIALIZED ADMINISTRATION** (Continuing Mandamus)

The Way Forward (A 5-Point Plan)



UPSC CSE Linkage Table

Topic	Federalism	Local Self-Gov	Environment	Administrative Ethics	Administrative Ethics
GS 1-4	Federalism	Local Self-Gov	Federnut	Cocoonn & bondases	SPSC
Essay	Federalism	Local Self Composting	Environment	Leachate	SPSC
Ethics	Federalism	Local-Gov	Environment	Administrative Mandates	
Optionals	Federalism	Local-Gov	Environment	Administrative Ethics	

• Key Terms and Explanations

- **Active Leisure:** Physical activity performed during free time for enjoyment or health, such as playing football, swimming, or going to the gym.
 - *Example:* A corporate employee attending a yoga class after work.
- **Active Transport:** Using non-motorized means to travel from one place to another.
 - *Example:* Cycling to the market or walking to the metro station instead of taking a car.
- **Active Labour:** Physical exertion required as part of one's occupation.
 - *Example:* A construction worker carrying loads or a farmer tilling land.
- **LMICs (Low- and Middle-Income Countries):** Nations where the per capita income is relatively low. These countries often face a "double burden" of infectious diseases and rising non-communicable diseases.
- **Cardiometabolic Diseases:** A group of conditions including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension that are often linked to sedentary lifestyles.
- **Systems-level Approach:** A strategy that focuses on changing the environment and infrastructure (e.g., building parks) rather than just telling individuals to "exercise more."

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The discourse surrounding physical inactivity has shifted from "individual laziness" to "systemic failure." Here are the core arguments:
- **The Stagnation Paradox:** Despite 20 years of WHO guidelines and national policies, global activity levels haven't moved. We are stuck in a rut where one in three adults remains inactive.
- **The Luxury of Leisure:** There is a profound "Opportunity Gap." Wealthy men in high-income countries enjoy the most active leisure. Conversely, women in poor countries often "get their steps in" through grueling manual labor or walking long distances due to lack of transport—which isn't the same as restorative exercise.
- **Health Benefits Beyond Weight:** Movement isn't just about "not being fat." Evidence now links physical activity to cancer prevention, mental health stability, and even better outcomes during viral pandemics like COVID-19.
- **The Policy-Implementation Gap:** Writing a policy is easy; implementing it is hard. Most national policies lack "teeth"—they don't have budgets, measurable targets, or coordination between the Health, Transport, and Education ministries.
- **Climate Synergy:** Physical activity and climate change are two sides of the same coin. Walking and cycling reduce carbon emissions, but extreme heat (climate change) makes it harder for people to be active.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The way the world views "movement" has evolved significantly:

- **Pre-1950s:** Physical activity was a byproduct of survival. Most labor was manual; transport was largely pedestrian. Inactivity was a "rich person's problem."

- **1950s – 1990s (The Rise of Sedentary Life):** Rapid motorization and the shift to desk jobs in the West led to a "sitting epidemic." The focus was purely on "exercise" as a hobby.

- **2004 (Global Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity):** The WHO formally recognized inactivity as a major global risk factor, sparking the first wave of national policies.

- **2018 (Global Action Plan on Physical Activity - GAPPA):** A landmark shift occurred here, setting a target to reduce inactivity by 15% by 2030. The focus moved from "clinics" to "cities."

- **Present Day:** The narrative has integrated climate change and social justice. We now recognize that if a city doesn't have a sidewalk, the policy on "150 minutes of walking" is effectively useless.

- **Way Forward**

- To break the 20-year stagnation, we need a "Systemic Reset":

- **De-Medicalize the Message:** Stop talking about "exercise" and start talking about "movement-friendly cities."

- **Trans-sectoral Task Forces:** Create committees where the Finance, Transport, and Health ministers sit at the same table with shared budgets.

- **Mandatory Urban Standards:** Every new road project must, by law, include a protected bicycle lane and a wide, shaded sidewalk.

- **Equity-First Planning:** Prioritize investments in physical activity infrastructure in low-income neighborhoods and informal settlements.

- **Climate-Health Integration:** Design parks that serve as both exercise hubs and "sponge infrastructure" to prevent urban flooding.

Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **GS 2 (2020):** "Appropriate local community-level healthcare intervention is a prerequisite to achieve 'Health for All' in India. Explain."

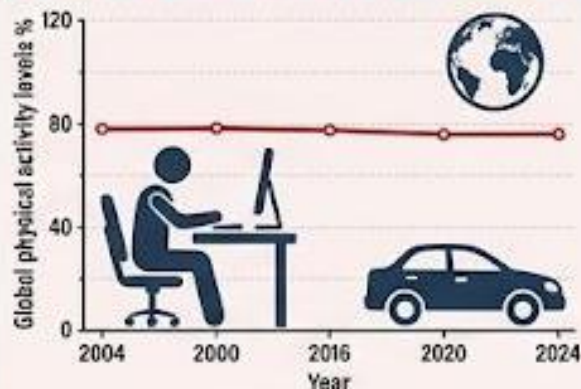
- **GS 1 (2017):** "The growth of cities as I.T. hubs has opened up new avenues of employment, but has also created new problems. Substantiate." (Relevance: Sedentary lifestyle in tech hubs).

- **Essay (2021):** "The process of self-discovery has now been technologically outsourced." (Relevance: Digital life vs. physical movement).



GLOBAL PHYSICAL INACTIVITY CRISIS: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS & ACTIONABLE SOLUTIONS

1. GLOBAL INACTIVITY STAGNATION



5+ MILLION DEATHS/YEAR
ATTRIBUTED TO INACTIVITY

Adults: 1 in 3 Inactive
Adolescents: 8 in 10 Inactive

BASED ON NATURE REPORTS

HEART DISEASE DEPRESSION OBESITY

2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITY GAP



Active Leisure

MALE VS FEMALE

VS



Active Labour & Active Transport

OPPORTUNITY GAP: 40% DISPARITY

3. POLICY-IMPLEMENTATION FAILURE



38.7%
Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

26.5%
Lack Measurable Targets



POLICY ADOPTION

VS



LIMITED IMPLEMENTATION

4. SYSTEMS-LEVEL & URBAN RESET



- SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY TO SYSTEMS
- SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS
- CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION
- EQUITY-FIRST URBAN PLANNING

CLIMATE CHANGE SYNERGY:
WALKING/CYCLING
REDUCES EMISSIONS

WALKING/CYCLING
REDEUCES EMISSIONS
SZACE SYANRT

PREPARE WITH
AXIA IAS ACADEMY
FOR CHANGE

• HISTORY

When the British 'brought back Somnath gates' from Afghanistan

Yashee

New Delhi, May 21

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi visited Gujarat on Monday to mark 75 years of the inauguration of the restored Somnath temple. He posted on social media, "...while the attackers have faded into the dust of history, the soul of Bharat endures. Somnath stands tall and eternal."

The Somnath temple

Located in Prabhas Patan, Veraval, Somnath is an important Hindu pilgrimage. According to the temple's website, it is "the holy place of the First Aadi Jyotirling Shree Somnath Mahadev and the sacred soil where Lord Shri Krishna took his last journey..."

By most historical accounts, the temple faced several attacks from raiders, with the most damaging by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 CE. This history of Somnath has often been used to divide Hindus and Muslims. The British attempted this as far back as 1842, when an official claimed to have "avenged the insult of Hindus" by bringing back the "sandalwood gates of Somnath" from Afghanistan. The gates later turned out to be neither of Somnath nor of sandalwood.

Lord Ellenborough's proclamation

In 1842, the British Army suffered losses in its Afghanistan expedition. A retaliatory strike was carried out, and it is during this time that the "gates of Somnath" carried away by Mahmud of Ghazni surfaced in a big way. The British brought back a pair of wooden gates from Ghazni, claiming they were the original gates of Somnath taken by the invader.

On November 16, 1842, British Governor General Lord Ellenborough issued a proclamation "to all the Princes and Chiefs, and people of India", which read: "Our victorious army bears the gates of the temple of Somnath in triumph from Afghanistan...That insult of eight hundred years is at last avenged." He added: "I have ever relied with confidence upon your attachment to the British Government. You see how shortly it proves itself of your love, when, regarding your honour as its own, it exerts the power of its arms to restore to you the gates of the temple of Somnath, so long the memorial of your subjection to the Afghans."

• FACED FLAK

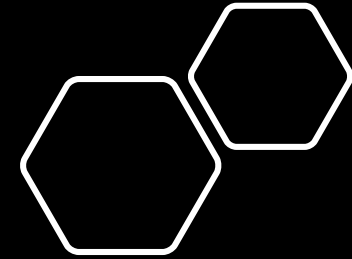
- Ellenborough's actions were criticised in England.
- In March 1843, a motion was moved in the House of Commons that the letter "to all the chiefs, princes, and people of India, respecting the restoration of the gates of a temple to Somnath, is unwise, indecorous, and reprehensible."

Upon examination, the gates were found to be made of deal, an inexpensive pine wood, and not of Indian design. The UK's National Army Museum says the gates "turned out to have been made in Ghazni".

Controversy persisted

The theory of the gates persisted, and resurfaced in 1951 ahead of the restored temple's inauguration. In April 1951, Radio Pakistan (Peshawar), carried a broadcast that gates from Afghanistan were being carried to India for the ceremony.

On April 21, 1951, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to his Pakistani counterpart, Liaquat Ali Khan: "The story of the gates of Somnath temple being brought back to India from Afghanistan is completely false... nothing of the kind is being sent from Afghanistan to India. Nevertheless, the Pakistan Press has been full of this story."



• Key Terms and Explanations

- **Jyotirlinga:** In Hindu tradition, a Jyotirlinga is a devotional shrine where Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of a "Linga of Light." Somnath is traditionally revered as the first of the twelve such sites in India, marking it as a primary center of pilgrimage and spiritual identity.
- **Divide and Rule:** A political strategy used by colonial powers to maintain control by fostering division and competition between different ethnic or religious groups. In this context, it refers to the British attempt to highlight historical grievances between Hindus and Muslims to consolidate their own authority.
- **Proclamation of the Gates:** This refers to the formal 1842 announcement by Lord Ellenborough. It was a strategic piece of political rhetoric designed to frame the British military as the "restorers of honor" to the Hindu population after a disastrous military campaign in Afghanistan.
- **Mandate of Authenticity:** A concept in archaeology and history where the value of an artifact is tied to its proven origin. The "Somnath Gates" failed this mandate when scientific examination proved they were made of local Afghan pine (Deodar) rather than Indian sandalwood.
- **Communalism:** An ideology that suggests people of different religions have fundamentally different interests, often leading to conflict. The narrative of the gates was frequently weaponized to fuel this sentiment during both the colonial and post-independence eras.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- The core discourse surrounding the Somnath gates revolves around the intersection of historical trauma, colonial opportunism, and the quest for national identity.
- **Colonial Opportunism:** The primary argument suggests that the British "recovery" of the gates was never about religious piety. Following the humiliation of the British Army in the First Anglo-Afghan War, Governor-General Lord Ellenborough needed a "victory" to boost morale and secure the loyalty of Indian subjects. By claiming to "avenge" an 800-year-old insult, he attempted to reposition the British as protectors of Hindu heritage.
- **The Myth of Sandalwood:** A significant portion of the narrative rested on the belief that the gates were the original sandalwood doors taken by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 CE. However, material evidence later debunked this, revealing them to be of Ghaznavid design and made of inexpensive wood, illustrating how political narratives often override physical facts.
- **Diplomatic Sensitivity and Misinformation:** In the post-1947 era, the issue shifted toward international relations. The 1951 controversy involving Radio Pakistan illustrates how "fake news" regarding the return of the gates was used to stir communal anxiety across borders, forcing Prime Minister Nehru to engage in direct diplomatic clarification to maintain peace.
- **The Symbolism of Somnath:** The temple itself serves as a metaphor for resilience. Its repeated destruction and reconstruction are framed not just as religious events, but as markers of "Bharat's" enduring spirit, a sentiment echoed by modern leadership during commemorative milestones.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- The timeline of the Somnath gates is a journey from medieval raids to modern-day diplomacy:
- **1026 CE:** Mahmud of Ghazni raids the Somnath temple. According to later traditions (though debated by some historians), he purportedly removed the temple gates and took them back to Ghazni as a trophy.
- **1842 CE:** During the retreat from the First Anglo-Afghan War, the British "Army of Retribution" brings a set of gates back from the tomb of Mahmud of Ghazni. Lord Ellenborough issues his famous proclamation, addressing the "Princes and Chiefs of India."
- **1843 CE:** The British House of Commons witnesses a fierce debate. Critics label Ellenborough's actions as "indecorous" and "reprehensible," fearing that such blatant religious pandering would destabilize the region and compromise British "neutrality."
- **1951 CE:** As the restored Somnath temple is inaugurated, the issue resurfaces. Radio Pakistan broadcasts rumors that the gates are being returned to India, leading to a high-level diplomatic exchange between Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan to debunk the misinformation.
- **Present Day:** The Somnath temple remains a focal point of national pride, with its 75th anniversary of restoration serving as a reminder of the temple's central role in India's cultural and historical consciousness.

• **Way Forward**

- **Promoting Scientific Temper:** Educational curricula should emphasize the role of forensic archaeology (like wood analysis) in verifying historical claims to prevent the weaponization of myths.
- **Transparent Cultural Diplomacy:** India should continue to engage with neighbors like Afghanistan on a basis of shared cultural heritage and factual history, rather than colonial-era grievances.
- **Objective Memorialization:** When commemorating historical sites, the focus should remain on the architectural and spiritual significance, while acknowledging the nuances of historical raids without falling into the "Divide and Rule" trap set by colonial predecessors.
- **Digital Archiving:** Creating a centralized, evidence-based digital archive of artifacts like the "Ghazni Gates" can help the public distinguish between legends and historical reality.

All Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **2020 (GS1):** "The rock-cut architecture represents one of the most important sources of our knowledge of early Indian art and history. Discuss." (Similar theme: Using physical structures to understand history).
- **2014 (GS1):** "To what extent has the urban planning and culture of the Indus Valley Civilization provided inputs to the present-day urbanization? Discuss." (Theme: Continuity of heritage).
- **Prelims (Multiple Years):** Questions on the location of Jyotirlingas, the Chronology of Ghaznavid invasions, and the tenure of Lord Ellenborough.
- **History Optional:** "Analyze the British policy toward the North-West Frontier in the 19th century." (Directly relates to the Afghan expedition mentioned).

THE SOMNATH GATES RECOVERY: IN BEHALF OF IAS ACADEMY



AXIA
IAS ACADEMY

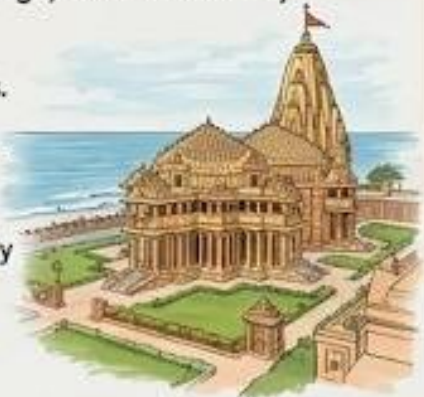
HISTORICAL TRAUMA & COLONIAL MANIPULATION (A Comprehensive UPSC-Focus Analysis)

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SOMNATH: A TEMPLE OF RESILIENCE (Significance, Jyotirlinga, modern context)

- FIRST ADDI JYOTIRLINGA:** Spiritual primary site, First among the Twelve Shiva lingas.
- SACRED GROUND:** Location of Lord Shri Krishna's last journey.
- NATIONAL MEMORY:** Symbol of resilience, repeatedly destroyed and reconstructed.
- MODERN SIGNIFICANCE:** Echoed by modern leadership as "Bharat's enduring soul," standing tall and eternal.



A TURBULENT CHRONOLOGY



THE COLONIAL FABRICATION: ELLENBOROUGH'S GATES

MYTH / COLONIAL GOAL	REALITY / SCIENTIFIC PROOF
AVENGING THE INSULT: Claimed as original sandalwood gates.	FALSEHOOD: EXAMINATION REVEALED MATERIAL TO BE DEAL (PINEWOOD).
STRATEGIC 'DIVIDE AND RULE': Reinforce Hindu-Muslim grievances for control.	ORIGIN: Local Afghan Deodar, made in Ghazni, not Indian sandalwood.
MORALE BOOST: A symbolic success after military defeat.	DESIGN: No Indian architectural characteristics; clear Ghaznavid origin.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS & LINKAGES

SOCIAL

- Shapes collective memory & identity.
- Can be weaponized to fuel communalism.
- Reinforces binary narratives of victimhood and invader.

POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISM: Use of religion as a tool for political statecraft.

COLONIAL LEGACY: British historians creating narratives for control.

ETHICAL & LEGAL

- ETHICS:** State-sponsored fabrications.
- LEGAL:** Mandate of artifact authenticity and cultural restitution
- Scientific temper over rhetoric (Article 51A)

INTERNATIONAL

- Influences India-Afghanistan and India-Pakistan ties.
- Management of 'face-saving' and historical claims.

UPSC-STANDARD INSIGHTS

KEY TERMS

- JYOTIRLINGA:** Sacred devotional shrine.
- 'DIVIDE & RULE':** Colonial strategy of fostering division.
- MANDATE OF AUTHENTICITY:** Value tied to proven origin.
- COLONIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY:** Creating a binary of 'foreign invader' vs. 'indigenous victim' to justify rule.

LOGICAL BASE

- Instrumentalism (symbols for political goals).
- Clash between the 'Romantic' view of history (lost honor) and 'Positivist' view (physical fact)
- Triumph of evidence over emotion.

WAY FORWARD

- Promote Scientific Temper (forensic analysis of claims)
- Educational curricula should emphasize evidence-based history
- Transparent Cultural Diplomacy
- Objective Memorialization.

• POLITICS

Before Vijay: Recalling India's first hung Assembly, also in Madras

Jatin Anand

New Delhi, May 11

C. JOSEPH Vijay took oath as the Chief Minister on Sunday after high political drama in Tamil Nadu, despite his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam emerging as the largest party.

A similar crisis played out nearly 75 years ago in the same region. The 1952 Assembly election in the erstwhile Madras state — comprising present-day Tamil Nadu and parts of Kerala, Karnataka, and undivided Andhra Pradesh — threw up India's very first fractured verdict.

Madras's 1951 election

The election to the 375-seat Madras Assembly was held in January, with no party securing an outright majority. The Congress won 152 seats. The Communist Party of India (CPI) came second, followed by the J B Kripalani-founded Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party. There were 63 independent members.

Historian Rajmohan Gandhi, in *Rajaji: A Life*, attributed the Congress's lacklustre performance to many factors — a foodgrain crisis, the appeal of the Communists, and

strong support for a former Congress leader in the Telugu-speaking region.

This leader was T Prakasam, the ex-premier (equivalent to CM) of the Madras presidency. Gandhi wrote: "Though he had lost his own seat, Prakasam claimed the support, not proved, of a front of 166 MLAs..."

This left the Madras Governor, Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar, in a quandary. On one side was Prakasam's claim. On the other was the Congress, and its leader K Kamaraj's assertion that "only the Congress is going to rule". Krishnakumarsinhji referred the question to the President.

Meanwhile, Jawaharlal Nehru was clear in his preference for an elected government over President's Rule, and was keen that the party "avoid any appearance of hankering after office".

Consensus around Rajaji

Rajaji, or CR, was one of the most important figures of the freedom movement. In 1948, he became Governor-General, and, independent India's first Indian head of state.

As the situation continued to fester, the Congress was internally forming a consen-

History repeats

● Vijay, taking the support of smaller parties to keep the DMK and the AIADMK out of power, bears striking similarity with the events of 1952.

● Rajaji took the support of several independents and other parties to keep the Communist-led opposition from power.

sus on nudging the leader. The thinking was that the prestige he commanded would ensure support for his government.

Rajaji's elevation was also backed by the new Governor of Madras state, Sri Prakasa. According to Rajmohan Gandhi, he wrote to President Rajendra Prasad: "After endless parleys, everybody came to one and only one solution — that the only person who could save the situation was Rajaji."

Later in March, Madras Congress leader Kumaraswami Raja conveyed to him the state legislature party's resolution backing Rajaji. Nehru accepted that decision, but hesitated about effectively parachuting in a non-elected person to the chief minister's post. However, Rajaji was also clear that he would not stand for election.

Following discussions among Governor Sri Prakasa, Kumaraswami Raja and Rajaji, a solution was found — Rajaji would be nominated to the Upper House of the state legislature. President Prasad was informed about this on April 1. Kumaraswami Raja, with the Governor's cooperation, moved swiftly to swear Rajaji in as Chief Minister, "before Nehru could come to know of CR's

inflexible condition."

Nehru was clearly unhappy with being blindsided, and expressed this in a letter to the Governor on April 3. But he also acknowledged: "At the same time, I could suggest no other and better alternative to all this and so I left it to our friends in Madras..."

Vijay, taking the support of smaller parties, bears striking similarity with the events of that time. Rajaji took the support of several independents and parties to keep the Communist-led opposition from power.

Nehru's displeasure

According to Nehru, President Prasad had termed Rajaji's nomination to the Legislative Council as "a wrong step, wrong not only in the spirit of the Constitution but also the letter of it".

Nehru's key concern, as expressed in a letter to Governor Sri Prakasam, was that it could set a bad precedent. Interestingly, other prolific political figures from what is now Tamil Nadu took a similar route to the CM's chair, including CM C N Annadurai and five-time CM and DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Hung Assembly:** A situation in a multi-party system where no single political party or pre-poll alliance secures an absolute majority (50% + 1) of seats in the legislature. This often leads to intense negotiations, coalitions, or minority governments.
- **Discretionary Powers of the Governor:** Under **Article 163** of the Constitution, while the Governor generally acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers, they possess "situational discretion" during a hung assembly to decide whom to invite to form the government.
- **Legislative Council (Upper House):** Some Indian states have a bicameral legislature. A person can be appointed Chief Minister even if they are not an elected member of the Lower House (Assembly), provided they are nominated or elected to the Council within six months (**Article 164(4)**).
- **Constitutional Morality:** A concept popularized by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, referring to adherence to the spirit of the Constitution, not just its literal text. It involves upholding democratic values, even when the law provides a loophole.
- **Floor Test:** A constitutional mechanism (often mandated by the Supreme Court) where a CM must prove their majority on the floor of the House, rather than just in the Governor's office.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core discourse centers on the tension between democratic legitimacy and the need for political stability. When a fractured mandate arises, several key arguments emerge:
 - **Stability vs. Popular Mandate:** The primary argument for appointing a leader like Rajaji in 1952 was the prevention of chaos. The Governor's priority was to ensure a stable administration, even if it meant "parachuting" a non-elected leader to check the rise of opposition blocs (like the Communist-led front).
 - **The Governor's Neutrality:** A significant part of the debate focuses on whether the Governor should act as a representative of the Center or as an independent constitutional arbiter. In the Madras case, the Governor referred the matter to the President, highlighting the ambiguity in the early years of the Republic.
 - **Executive Discretion:** The narrative suggests that the Governor's choice often hinges on who is most likely to command a majority. However, the counterargument is that this discretion can be misused to favor the party in power at the Center, a critique often voiced by opposition parties.
 - **Precedent vs. Principle:** While the appointment of non-elected members as CMs has historical roots (Annadurai, Karunanidhi), it raises ethical questions about whether such "backdoor entries" undermine the direct mandate of the people.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The management of hung assemblies has evolved from trial-and-error to a more structured, though still contested, legal framework:
- **1952 (The Madras Precedent):** The first general elections saw the first hung assembly. The Governor's decision to invite the single largest party (Congress) and allow Rajaji's nomination to the Council set a controversial precedent.
- **1967-1980 (The Era of Coalitions):** Following the decline of the "One-Party Dominant System," numerous states faced fractured mandates, leading to the frequent (and often criticized) use of **Article 356** (President's Rule).
- **1983 (Sarkaria Commission):** This commission was set up to review Center-State relations. It provided clear guidelines: the Governor should invite the pre-poll alliance first, then the single largest party with support, then a post-poll coalition.
- **1994 (S.R. Bommai Case):** The Supreme Court ruled that the floor of the House is the only place to test a majority, significantly curbing the Governor's arbitrary power to dismiss governments.
- **2007 (Punchhi Commission):** Further refined the "order of preference" for the Governor, emphasizing that the objective should be a government that is most likely to survive.

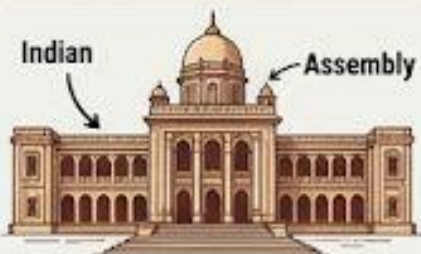
- **Way Forward**

- To resolve the recurring crisis of hung assemblies, a balanced approach is needed:
- **Codification of Conventions:** The recommendations of the Sarkaria and Punchhi Commissions should be given a more formal, perhaps statutory, status to minimize gubernatorial whim.
- **Pre-Poll Alliance Priority:** Legal recognition of pre-poll alliances as a single entity would provide more clarity and respect the voters' primary choice.
- **Constructive Vote of No-Confidence:** Following the German model, the legislature should only be able to remove a CM if they have a successor ready with a majority. This ensures that the state is never without a government.
- **Strengthening the Upper House:** Instead of using the Legislative Council as a "backdoor," its role should be redefined to include experts and visionaries, as originally intended, rather than failed candidates.

All Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **Prelims (2018):** Which of the following are the discretionary powers of the Governor? (Sending a report to the President, Appointing Ministers, etc.)
- **Mains (GS-2, 2019):** "The exercise of executive power by the Governor is subject to the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers." Discuss the discretionary powers of the Governor.
- **Mains (GS-2, 2013):** Discuss the role of the Governor in a multi-party system where no single party gets a majority.
- **Mains (GS-2, 2022):** Discuss the essential conditions for the exercise of the legislative powers by the Governor.


1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: MADRAS 1952 PRECEDENT





- **First Hung Assembly** (no party majority)
- Congress single largest largest but short of majority
- Opportunity for a leader (non-elected Rajaji) to become CM, creating a 'stability vs. mandate' dilemma


2. KEY CONSTITUTIONAL CONCEPTS & TERMS

 **Hung Assembly** 

 **Article 163** (Governor's Discretionary Powers)

 **Article 164(4)** (Appointment of non-elected member)

 **Floor Test** (Supreme Court mandate)

 **Constitutional Morality**

	Text	Situational
Hung Assembly	vs.	Situational discretion
Article 163 vs. 164(4)	vs.	Situational discretion

3. POST-1952 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

- 1967-80 Coalition era
- 1983 Sarkaria Commission: Guidelines: Pre-poll > Largest party > Post-poll coalition
- 1994 S.R. Bommai Case (Floor test is key)

Timeline

- 2007 Punchhi Commission (Refined order of preference)

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY IS THE KEY TO RESOLVING POLITICAL DEADLOCKS.

4. CHALLENGES & DILEMMAS



- **Political instability**
- Influence of smaller parties
- **Misuse of Article 356** (President's Rule)
- **Ethical issue:** "backdoor entries" of non-elected leaders
- **Multi-dimensional analysis:**
 - Political, Legal, Ethical, Social, Economic impact

5. FOR UPSC ASPIRANTS: SYLLABUS & PYQ

UPSC CSE Linkages: 

- GS-2 (Constitution, Governor, Federalism)
- GS-4 (Ethics, Constitutional Morality), Essay

One Sample PYQ (GS-2):

- "Critically analyze Governor's role as a political player vs. constitutional umpire... Aegretasional."

STRUCTURE YOUR ANSWER

- Intro
- Provisions
- Challenges
- Ethical View
- Conclusion

6. THE WAY FORWARD: REFORM PATH

- **Codify conventions** (Sarkaria/Punchhi) 
- **Priority to pre-poll alliances**
- **Constructive Vote of No-Confidence** (German model)
- **Strengthen the Upper House** (intended role, not a backdoor)

From Western Disturbances to El Niño: Brief guide to climate terms this summer

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, May 11

INDIA IS headed into a summer of compounding extremes. Western Disturbances brought unseasonal rain to the north, El Niño threatens a weak monsoon and intensified heatwaves, and the humidity is already making temperatures feel worse than the thermometer reads.

Here is a simple guide to the terms dominating the weather conversation.

WESTERN DISTURBANCES: These are east-moving rain-bearing wind systems that originate beyond Afghanistan and Iran, and pick up moisture from bodies like the Mediterranean Sea. These are typically extra-tropical cyclones resulting from low-pressure areas, formed by interactions between polar and tropical winds.

Western Disturbances are embedded within the subtropical westerly jet stream, which is a high-altitude, fast-moving air current that flows from west to east. It is found over the Himalayan and Tibetan

highlands and is most common between December and March, influencing the weather over India as well.

EL NIÑO: The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is a climate phenomenon marked by changes in sea temperatures along the eastern Pacific Ocean, coupled with fluctuations in the overlying atmosphere. It can interfere with the global atmospheric circulation, influencing the weather.

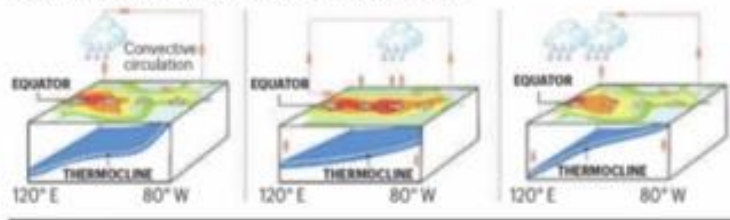
It has three phases: warm (El Niño, Spanish for "little boy"), cool (La Niña, Spanish for "little girl"), and neutral, occurring in irregular cycles of two to seven years (graphic shows neutral, El Niño and La Niña, respectively).

In the neutral phase, the eastern side of the Pacific Ocean (near the northwestern coast of South America) is cooler than the western side (near Indonesia). This is due to the prevailing wind systems that move from east to west, sweeping the warmer surface waters towards the Indonesian coast. The relatively cooler waters from below come up to replace the displaced water.

During El Niño, the surface waters of

• THREE PHASES OF EL NIÑO SOUTHERN OSCILLATION (ENSO)

The illustrations show the Pacific Ocean around the equator and trade winds. The heat map shows water temperature. Thermocline is the layer of water separating the warmer surface water and cooler water below.



this region of the Pacific get unusually warm, disrupting the flow of moist winds in India. The result is a weak or delayed monsoon for India, as well as dry spells in major agricultural states. There is also evidence that the frequency and severity of heat waves India experiences are linked with the phenomenon.

The opposite happens when La Niña is underway: cooling of the surface waters of the eastern Pacific. India thus gets stronger, moisture-bearing winds, and typically experiences a boost in its southwest monsoon, at times causing flooding and crop damage.

HEAT WAVE: A period of unusually high temperatures departing from the normal,

and varies regionally. It may be exacerbated by factors like humidity, wind speed and the duration of a heat wave event.

A heat wave may be considered if the maximum temperature of a station reaches 40°C in plains or 30°C in hilly areas. Once this threshold is reached, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) may declare a heat wave (i) based on departure from the usual temperature, if the temperature ranges 4.5°C to 6.4°C above normal, and (ii) based on the actual maximum temperature (more than 45°C).

IMD uses slightly different criteria for coastal stations to account for humidity. These criteria must be met in at least two stations within a meteorological subdivision and must persist for two consecutive days.

WET BULB TEMPERATURE: The temperature typically measured by a regular thermometer is Dry Bulb Temperature, but this does not account for moisture. Wet Bulb Temperature is the lowest temperature that can be realised by evaporating water into the air to measure how effectively hu-

midity allows for evaporative cooling. Simply, it tells you the maximum temperature your body can cool down to.

Why this distinction? Besides heat, humidity has a major role to play in the physiological stress that the human body experiences during extreme heat. With increasing humidity, the sweat that humans generate to dispel heat from their bodies does not evaporate, making it difficult for a person to regulate their body temperature.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated that sustained exposure to wet bulb temperatures exceeding 35°C could prove fatal.

"FEELS LIKE" TEMPERATURE: It refers to apparent temperature, which accounts for wind and humidity conditions to determine what outdoor air temperature will feel like in relation to body temperature.

For instance, a 40°C day in Delhi will not feel like a 40°C day in Palakkad, Kerala. Delhi experiences dry blistering heat, while Palakkad sees sticky, sultry heat with high humidity, making it feel much hotter.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Western Disturbances (WD):** These are extra-tropical cyclones originating in the Mediterranean region. Driven by the **Subtropical Westerly Jet Stream**, they travel eastward over Iran and Afghanistan, bringing moisture-laden winds to Northwest India. While crucial for Rabi crops, their "unseasonal" arrival in late spring can trigger devastating hailstorms.
- **El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO):** A periodic fluctuation in sea surface temperatures (SST) and air pressure across the equatorial Pacific Ocean. It has three phases:
 - **Neutral:** Normal trade winds blow east to west, piling warm water near Indonesia.
 - **El Niño:** Trade winds weaken; warm water drifts back toward South America, typically suppressing the Indian Monsoon.
 - **La Niña:** Trade winds strengthen significantly, pushing even more warm water westward, often leading to "above-normal" rainfall in India.
- **Thermocline:** The transition layer between warmer mixed water at the ocean's surface and cooler deep water below. In El Niño years, this layer deepens in the eastern Pacific.
- **Wet Bulb Temperature:** The lowest temperature to which an object can be cooled by evaporation. It accounts for both heat and humidity. A wet-bulb temperature of 35 degree C is considered the theoretical limit of human survivability.
- **Feels-like Temperature (Heat Index):** An index that combines air temperature and relative humidity in shaded areas to posit a human-perceived equivalent temperature.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The discourse centers on the shift from isolated weather events to "compounding extremes."
- **The Convergence of Anomalies:** The central thesis posits that the Indian subcontinent is no longer facing distinct seasonal cycles but a confluence of phenomena. Western Disturbances are lingering into summer, while ENSO transitions are becoming more volatile, leading to unpredictable monsoon onsets.
- **The Humidity Factor:** A significant argument is that "dry heat" is no longer the only concern. The rise in humidity—linked to warming oceans—is making lower temperatures more lethal because the body's primary cooling mechanism (sweat evaporation) fails in high-humidity environments.
- **ENSO as a Global Disrupter:** The interaction between the ocean and the atmosphere in the Pacific creates a "teleconnection" that dictates the strength of the Indian Monsoon. The article emphasizes that while El Niño is a "drought-maker," its impact is intensified by localized heatwaves.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The study of Indian weather has evolved from local folklore to high-tech satellite modeling.
- **Pre-Independence Era:** The focus was primarily on famine prevention. After the Great Famine of 1877, **H.F. Blanford** and later **Sir Gilbert Walker** (who identified the 'Southern Oscillation') began searching for global predictors for the Indian Monsoon.
- **Post-Independence (1950s-1990s):** The establishment of the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** led to the development of statistical models. The 1982-83 and 1997-98 El Niño events were watersheds that highlighted India's vulnerability to Pacific SSTs.
- **Modern Era (2000s-Present):** There is a shift toward **Dynamical Modeling** (using supercomputers). We are now seeing the "Atmosphericization" of climate policy, where heatwaves are recognized as natural disasters, and the "Wet Bulb" threshold has become a critical metric for public health safety.

- **Way Forward**

- A balanced approach to mitigating these compounding climate risks.
- **Short-term:** Strengthening **Heat Action Plans** (HAPs) across all districts. This includes setting up "Cooling Centers" and rescheduling outdoor labor hours during "Red Alert" days.
- **Medium-term:** Investing in **Climate-Resilient Agriculture**. This involves promoting heat-tolerant crop varieties and diversifying away from water-intensive crops like paddy in water-stressed regions.
- **Long-term: Urban Re-designing.** Implementing "Blue-Green Infrastructure" (preserving water bodies and increasing tree cover) to combat the Urban Heat Island effect. On a global scale, India must lead the "Early Warnings for All" initiative to ensure that the smallest farmer has access to ENSO-related forecasts.

-

Previous Years' UPSC Questions (PYQs)

- **Mains 2023 (GS1):** "Why is the South-West Monsoon called 'Purvaiya' (easterly) in Bhojpur Region? How has this directional systems of winds influenced the cultural ethos of the region?"
- **Mains 2022 (GS1):** "Describe the characteristics and character of the Indian Monsoon. Mention the role of El Niño on the Indian Monsoon."
- **Mains 2017 (GS3):** "How does the cryosphere affect global climate?" (Related to the broader climate change context).
- **Prelims 2017:** "With reference to 'Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)' sometimes mentioned in the news while forecasting (the) Indian monsoon, which of the following statements is/are correct?"



AXIA
IAS ACADEMY
RISE ABOVE THE REST

AXIA COMPETITIVE EXAM CENTRE

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE INDIAN SUMMER CLIMATE: COMPOUNDING EXTREMES & ADAPTATION.

AN AXIA IAS ACADEMY COMPREHENSIVE INSIGHT.

UPSC CSE SYLLABUS LINKAGES

GS1: Geography, Geophysical phenomena
- Geophysical phenomena
- Governmental phenomena

GS2: Governance, Policies
- Policies
- Disaster management

GS3: Env & Disaster
- Env & disaster management

Essay: Man vs Nature
- Essay evaluates and links and compounded crop bodies

Epistemology of Uncertainty

Based on insights to the logical fallacies from the board examinations. Mathematics, statistics, Geographical Information Systems, etc. are used to understand the uncertainty in the data and the impact of the same on the decision-making process.

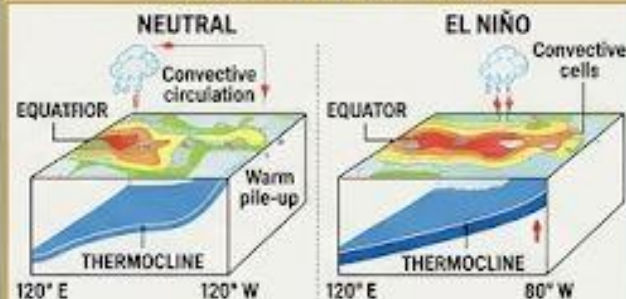
PATHWAY 1: THE LATE SPRING WESTERN DISTURBANCE.



Definition & Source: Extra-tropical cyclones from the Mediterranean, trapped by jet streams (Subtropical Westerly). Historically critical for Rabi crops. Recent unseasonal late-spring arrival. Recent unseasonal late-spring arrival causes devastating hail and 'compounding' crop damage. NCERT linkage to Class 11, Ch 9/10)

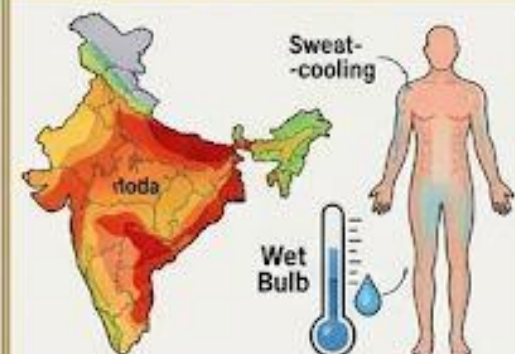
DRIVING FACTORS

PATHWAY 2: THE ENSO CYCLE (EL NIÑO & LA NIÑA).



A global climate disrupter. **EL NIÑO:** Warm phase shifts toward Americas, thermocline deepens, suppressing Indian monsoon onset. **LA NIÑA:** Opposite phase, normal/above monsoon rain. Historic milestone: Walker's identifying Southern Oscillation.

PATHWAY 3: THE HUMIDITY TRAP & WET BULB LIMIT.



HEAT & HUMIDITY: THE HUMAN ADAPTABILITY LIMIT. Beyond 'Feels-like' temperature, is the **WET BULB TEMPERATURE** limit. Reaching 35°C (95°F) makes sweat-cooling impossible, posing lethal physiological stress. Ethical dimension: Climate injustice for laborers. Art 21 and display tires retention Art 21. NCERT linkage to: Class 9, Ch 4.

LEVEL 2: THE SYNDOMIC CONVERGENCE

SYNDEMIC: CONVERGENCE OF COMPOUNDING CLIMATE RISKS.

LEVEL 3: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS (GS1-3 & ETHICS)

SOCIAL



health, elderly, children, & children

POLITICAL



monsoon failure, farmer distress

LEGAL



no official disaster status under natural calamities

ETHICAL



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Trump eyes deal as China gauges U.S. 'decline'

Washington and Beijing announce May 13-15 visit of U.S. President with trade, technology, and Taiwan on the agenda; both sides to explore AI cooperation; critical mineral access and ease of export controls; Wang Yi called on both sides to 'expand cooperation and manage differences'

Ananth Krishnan

BEIJING

U.S. President Donald Trump had planned to arrive in Beijing in late March with a sense of swagger, on the back of what he thought would be two spectacular and swift regime changes in Iran and Venezuela.

Instead, as Mr. Trump on Wednesday lands in the Chinese capital, his hosts are debating the limits of American power and what "a declining U.S." may mean for China's ambitions.

The "three Ts" - trade, Taiwan and technology - are likely to garner attention during talks between Mr. Trump and President Xi Jinping set for Thursday and Friday. During the three-day trip, Mr. Trump will visit the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and attend what was described as a lavish state banquet.

For Mr. Trump, progress on trade - including secur-



U.S. President Donald Trump shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping during their 2025 meet in Busan, South Korea. REUTERS

ing Chinese commitments to step up imports, especially in agricultural products, and greater access to critical minerals - is a priority. He will also look to pressure China to use its influence on Iran, U.S. officials said.

Mr. Xi will be looking for a reiteration of U.S. commitments on Taiwan and easing of export controls, particularly for advanced semi-conductors that China needs. Both sides are also expected to discuss Ar-

tificial Intelligence (AI) as an area of cooperation.

'Stabilising anchor'

For both, some stability in ties is a shared objective.

"I'm sure Taiwan will be a topic of conversation. It always is," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said at a White House press briefing last week. "The Chinese understand our position on that topic; we understand theirs. We don't need any destabilising events to occur with re-

gards to Taiwan or anywhere in the Indo-Pacific. And I think that's to the mutual benefit of both the U.S. and the Chinese."

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi similarly emphasised stability in an April 30 phone call with Mr. Rubio, saying meetings between the two leaders had been a "stabilising anchor" for the relationship.

He called on both sides to "expand cooperation and manage differences, and explore the building of a strategic, constructive, and stable China-U.S. relationship." He added that "the Taiwan question bears on China's core interests and is the biggest risk in China-U.S. relations."

Days before the visit, Mr. Wang hosted Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, saying Beijing "supports Iran in safeguarding its national sovereignty and security" and that the "international community shares a common concern about restor-

ing normal and safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz".

Mr. Wang in his remarks did not criticise the U.S. for the war, as he might have ordinarily done, underlining Beijing's keenness to set the stage for a visit that it has placed huge importance on.

For Mr. Xi, hosting Mr. Trump, regardless of the outcome, is in some sense a success in itself, bringing with it valuable optics showcasing China, to the domestic audience, as a global power.

At the same time, for observers in Beijing, the visit comes at a time when the Iran crisis has only deepened their long-held perceptions of U.S. decline - views that acquired wide traction in the decade following the global financial crisis.

"U.S. influence is increasingly contested," as Peking University's Wang Dong put it to *The Hindu*. "And its ability to impose

outcomes unilaterally is declining."

Long-term patience

A period of "intensified structural competition alongside constrained pragmatism" is how a briefing paper from two scholars, published on the eve of the visit by Tsinghua University's Centre for Strategic and International Studies, described the future of the relationship.

A "competitive U.S. stance" on technology and supply chains was here to stay, it warned, but added that for the U.S., economic and domestic pressures would for any government "restrict comprehensive decoupling". Looking to the future, the paper said China needed to strengthen its relations with other major powers and continue its focus on innovation of key technologies as a response to U.S. policy. "China," it concluded, "needs strategic resolve and long-term patience."

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **The "Three Ts" (Trade, Taiwan, Technology):** These represent the core pillars of friction. **Trade** involves the deficit and market access; **Taiwan** is China's "red line" regarding sovereignty; **Technology** refers to the race for AI and semiconductor supremacy.
- **Regime Change:** A strategy (often controversial) aimed at replacing a foreign government through military or diplomatic pressure. The text implies U.S. ambitions in Iran and Venezuela as leverage for its global "swagger."
- **Export Controls:** Legal restrictions used by a government (here, the U.S.) to prevent the sale of sensitive technologies (like advanced chips) to specific countries for national security reasons.
- **Strategic Resolve:** A Chinese policy term suggesting that despite external pressure, the nation will stay its course, focusing on internal strength and innovation rather than reacting impulsively.
- **Decoupling:** The process of breaking the economic interdependence between the U.S. and China, particularly in supply chains. The text suggests "comprehensive decoupling" is currently unfeasible due to economic costs.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow, strategically vital waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.

• **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The current state of U.S.-China relations is a delicate dance between "structural competition" and "constrained pragmatism."
- **The Core Thesis**
- The relationship has moved beyond a simple trade war into a broader contest over global leadership. While the U.S. seeks to use its perceived regional successes (like Iran/Venezuela) as leverage, China views these same events as evidence of U.S. overreach and decline.
- **Key Points**
- **U.S. Priorities:** President Trump's agenda is transactional and security-focused. He wants "wins" in agriculture (imports) and critical minerals, while pressuring Xi to rein in Iran.
- **China's Priorities:** President Xi seeks "stability" to manage domestic growth. His goals are the easing of tech sanctions (semiconductors) and a firm U.S. commitment to the "One China" policy regarding Taiwan.
- **The "Stabilising Anchor":** Both sides acknowledge that a total collapse of ties is mutually destructive. High-level summits serve as a "vent" for pressure, preventing competition from spiraling into conflict.
- **Perception of Decline:** Beijing's strategic community increasingly views the U.S. as a fading power, unable to impose its will unilaterally, which emboldens China's own global ambitions.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- Understanding the 2026 landscape requires looking back at the trajectory of the last five decades:
- **1972–1979 (Rapprochement):** Nixon's visit to China and the eventual formal recognition of the PRC. The goal was to counter the Soviet Union.
- **1990s–2001 (Economic Integration):** The U.S. supported China's entry into the WTO, betting that economic liberalization would lead to political liberalization (a bet the U.S. now considers lost).
- **2011 (The "Pivot to Asia"):** The Obama administration began shifting focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific to contain a rising China.
- **2017–2020 (The Trade War):** The first Trump administration shifted the "engagement" policy to "strategic competition," using tariffs as a primary tool.
- **2021–2025 (Tech Containment):** The Biden administration intensified the "small yard, high fence" approach, focusing on denying China high-end AI and chip tech.
- **2026 (The Current Phase):** A period of "Intensified Structural Competition." Both sides are deeply suspicious but forced to cooperate on issues like AI and regional stability.

• **Way Forward**

- A balanced approach for the future would involve:
- **Crisis Management Mechanisms:** Establishing "red lines" and hotlines specifically for AI and Taiwan to prevent accidental escalation.
- **Functional Cooperation:** Focusing on "non-zero-sum" issues like climate change, global health, and debt relief for developing nations.
- **Economic "Gardening":** Instead of "decoupling," pursue "de-risking"—identifying specific critical vulnerabilities while maintaining broad trade.
- **Strengthening Multilateralism:** Empowering the G20 or UN to act as a mediator so that the world is not forced into a binary choice between two superpowers.

All Previous Years' UPSC Questions (Relevant)

- **Mains 2023 (GS 2):** "The focus of the US-China strategy is moving from 'decoupling' to 'de-risking'. Elaborate."
- **Mains 2020 (GS 2):** "The 'string of pearls' is gone; it's now a 'necklace of diamonds'. How is India countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific?" (Related to US-China competition).
- **Mains 2018 (GS 2):** "What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy."
- **Prelims 2022:** Question on "Common Framework" for Debt Treatment (Related to China's lending).

Why saving forex could hamper India's growth

PM Modi's solutions focus on cutting back consumption, but it will slow down India's growth. What is required is boosting India's production and productivity



UDIT MISRA

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has urged Indians to save foreign exchange (forex) by any means necessary.

In a recent speech, he called on Indians to stop buying gold for a year. Gold imports are a huge source of forex demand.

He also urged people to work from home to reduce consumption of imported crude oil, another big drain on forex.

Modi asked people to cut down on use of edible oil in their food, saying this will not just reduce imports but also improve health. He appealed to farmers to halve the use of chemical fertilisers, suggesting a shift to natural farming. He also underscored the need for buying "made in India" products instead of imported ones for everyday use. He also called on other organisations — from courts to labour unions to media — to help work towards this goal.

Link between forex and Modi's demand

This call comes in the wake of the war in Iran, and the associated supply and price shocks of goods like fuel and fertiliser.

When Indians buy imported goods — be gold or a toothbrush or fertiliser or edible oil — India ends up exhausting its pile of forex held with the Reserve Bank of India. That's because imports involve Indians using their rupees to buy dollars and then using those dollars to buy imported goods.

Usually, foreigners worldwide also buy Indian goods; they use dollars to buy rupees, adding to India's forex reserves.

But the situation changes if India's imports far outstrip exports: here, India will keep spending dollars without getting as many in return.

If this continues, it has two effects one, India runs down its forex pile, and two, the rupee's exchange rate weakens against the dollar (or any other currency India uses to trade).

Another way through which forex comes in and out of India is foreign investments. While foreigners invest in India by either creating new businesses (foreign direct investment) or buying shares in listed Indian companies (foreign portfolio investment), Indians similarly invest abroad.

Since the economic reforms in 1991, Indians generally import more than they export — this is called running a "current account deficit" (CAD). Whereas foreigners invest in India more than Indians invest outside India — called a "capital account surplus" (CAS).

Typically, CAS is bigger than CAD, implying more dollars are coming in than going out and India adds to its forex reserves. This is technically called a "Balance of Payment (BoP) surplus".

BoP and rupee's exchange rate

As long as BoP is in surplus, RBI can either let the rupee's exchange rate strengthen or it can simply accumulate forex reserves. Often, RBI accumulates forex reserves for various reasons, one of them being that letting the rupee strengthen may not help Indian exports. Moreover, healthy reserves help in times of crisis.

When BoP goes into a deficit, either the rupee weakens or forex reserves fall — the latter happens if RBI defends the rupee's exchange rate by selling dollars in the market.

Roughly since mid-2024, India's BoP surplus has taken a hit. While CAD hasn't worsened, CAS has shrunk — often, it has become a deficit itself.

Chart 1 shows that India's current BoP situation appears as weak as it was in 2013, when Morgan Stanley designated India as one of the "fragile five" economies.

Thus, both ill-effects of a BoP deficit are happening. One, the rupee is weakening against the dollar (Chart 2) and second, RBI has been drawing down its forex reserves to defend the rupee's exchange rate (Chart 3).

The more the rupee weakens — thanks to India's heavy dependence on crude oil imports — the more the imports become costlier.

Will Modi's mantra help?

India can deal with the forex situation in two ways: one, either reduce demand for dollars by cutting domestic consumption, or two, boosting India's ability to earn more forex by improving domestic production. Modi's suggestions are focused on cutting consumption while some focus on boosting production.

This has several implications. If all Indians were to suddenly stop using gold in all ceremonies and substitute it with fresh flowers plucked from the nearby garden, and if all Indians stopped stepping out from home for any reason (or just cycling,

Balance of Payment



Boosting forex

RBI accumulates forex reserves for various reasons, one being that letting the rupee strengthen may not help Indian exports.

Healthy reserves help in times of crisis.

then India's imports will fall since imports of gold and crude oil are majorly why imports exceed exports. This will reduce demand for dollars by reducing or even eliminating CAD.

But this will likely come at the cost of overall economic growth because all businesses using these commodities will likely suffer lower sales, not to mention inefficiency due to cutbacks.

Weaker consumption will drag down growth in the immediate time period of the current year. Further, weak consumption levels are why businesses have not increased their investments into the Indian economy despite the government's best efforts. So, a strict adherence of Modi's call could further discourage businesses.

Moreover, while consumption can help the current account, it may further worsen

the capital account. After all, why would foreign investors return to an economy they are already abandoning, if that economy chooses to further roll back consumption?

Arguably, there can be another medium-term scenario that consumption doesn't get reduced but gets diverted to Indian firms, and Indian businesses invest because Indians only prefer "swadeshi" goods. This would turn around the Indian economy by redirecting all demands towards Indian businesses.

By itself, the idea of becoming self-reliant sounds intuitively appealing. While it is an understandable goal, not every country can become self-reliant in everything.

For instance, while India is now self-reliant in food production, this depends on imported fertilisers. Even if India intends to make all its fertilisers at home, it is still reliant on imported feedstock (such as natural gas or naphtha, etc.) that account for over 80% of the total domestic production cost of fertilisers. So, if India cannot be self-reliant in fertilisers, it can't really consider itself to be self-reliant in food production.

Similarly, India cannot replace imported crude oil with any domestic alternatives in a hurry; moreover, any shift will cause the economy to slow down. So, crashing India's overall imports doesn't necessarily make the economy stronger if anything, a forced reduction will slow down the economy.

Further, that too much use of chemical fertilisers is hurting India's soil to no extent, actually, it is an underused one. The sole reason for this is the domestic subsidy regime that over-subsidises urea, nudging farmers to overuse it. Reducing use of chemical fertilisers and shifting to natural farming can only help to some extent.

Dealing with the forex issue

Cutting consumption in such a stark manner cannot be a sustainable solution, India needs to boost both its domestic production and productivity. Only when India becomes more efficient as a producer — regardless of what machines we import — will it be able to grow its share in the global exports market.

Similarly, only when India reforms its ease of doing business will it attract fresh investments either from within the country or from outside. Higher levels of exports and/or improved attractiveness in terms of starting and running a business is the actual recipe for dealing with the forex issue in a sustainable manner.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- To navigate the complexities of external sector economics, one must first master the vocabulary that defines India's interactions with the global market.
- **Foreign Exchange (Forex) Reserves:** These are assets held by the central bank (RBI) in foreign currencies, gold, and Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). Think of it as a national "emergency fund" to ensure the country can pay for imports and service external debt.
- **Balance of Payments (BoP):** A comprehensive record of all economic transactions between a country's residents and the rest of the world. It consists of the **Current Account** (trade in goods and services) and the **Capital Account** (investment flows like FDI and FPI).
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):** This occurs when the total value of goods and services a country imports exceeds the value of those it exports. India traditionally runs a CAD because it is a growing economy with high energy and technology needs.
- **Capital Account Surplus (CAS):** This happens when more investment capital (dollars) flows into the country than flows out. In India's case, the CAS usually offsets the CAD, leading to an overall BoP surplus.
- **Rupee Depreciation:** When the value of the Rupee falls against the US Dollar. For example, moving from 1 = ₹80 to 1 = ₹83. This makes imports (like oil) more expensive and can fuel domestic inflation.
- **Sterilization/Forex Intervention:** The process where the RBI buys or sells dollars to prevent excessive volatility in the Rupee's exchange rate.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core debate centers on whether India should manage its forex by **curtailing demand** (austerity) or by **enhancing supply** (productivity).
- **The Paradox of Thrift:** If the government urges citizens to stop buying "non-essential" imports like gold or specific food items, it reduces the demand for dollars. However, since one person's spending is another person's income, a drastic cut in consumption can lead to lower revenues for domestic businesses, leading to a "growth recession."
- **The Import-Dependency Reality:** India's manufacturing and agricultural sectors are heavily dependent on imported inputs. For instance, food security relies on imported fertilizers, and energy security relies on crude oil. Cutting these imports doesn't just save forex; it actively slows down factories and farms.
- **Investment Sentiment:** Foreign investors (FDI/FPI) bring in the dollars that keep the BoP stable. They invest because they see a growing Indian market. If India "rolls back consumption" to save forex, the market shrinks, making the country less attractive to investors. This leads to a vicious cycle where saving forex actually causes a flight of capital.
- **Currency Defense:** When the BoP turns into a deficit, the Rupee weakens. The RBI then has to use its "saved" forex to buy Rupees and stabilize the exchange rate. Thus, the very act of saving might be undermined by the economic instability that a slowdown creates.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- India's approach to forex has shifted from "scarcity mindset" to "management mindset" over the decades.
- **Pre-1991 (The Era of Control):** India followed an Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model. Forex was strictly rationed. This led to the 1991 Balance of Payments crisis, where India had only enough forex to cover two weeks of imports, forcing the "Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization" (LPG) reforms.
- **2013 (The Fragile Five):** Following the US Federal Reserve's "Taper Tantrum," India was labeled part of the "Fragile Five" due to high inflation and a massive CAD. The Rupee plummeted, highlighting that even in a globalized era, external shocks can paralyze the domestic economy.
- **2020-2024 (The Pandemic & Geopolitical Shocks):** Post-COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine/Middle East conflicts, supply chains were disrupted. India saw record high forex reserves (over \$600 billion) but also faced intense pressure from rising oil and fertilizer prices, leading to renewed calls for "saving" forex.
- **Present Day:** The focus has shifted toward *Atmanirbharta* (Self-reliance), though the debate remains: should self-reliance be achieved by blocking imports or by becoming an export powerhouse?

• **Way Forward**

- A balanced approach requires moving from defensive "forex saving" to offensive "economic strengthening."
- **Export Diversification:** Move beyond services (IT) into high-value manufacturing (Mobile phones, defense equipment) to earn more dollars.
- **Energy Transition:** Accelerating the shift to Green Hydrogen and EVs is the only long-term way to reduce the \$100B+ annual crude oil bill.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** Instead of curbing imports, make it so easy to manufacture in India that foreign firms *bring* their dollars here to set up shop (FDI).
- **Productivity-Linked Incentives (PLI):** Continue focusing on supply-side incentives that encourage domestic production of goods we currently import.

All Previous Years' UPSC Questions

- **Prelims**
- **2022:** With reference to the Indian economy, consider the following statements: (1) If the inflation is too high, RBI is likely to buy government securities. (2) If the Rupee is rapidly depreciating, RBI is likely to sell dollars in the market.
- **2014:** Which one of the following groups of items is included in India's foreign-exchange reserves? (Ans: Foreign currency assets, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and loans from the World Bank - *Wait, correct answer is Foreign Currency Assets, Gold holdings of the RBI and SDRs*).

KEY VOCABULARY & CORE CONCEPTS.

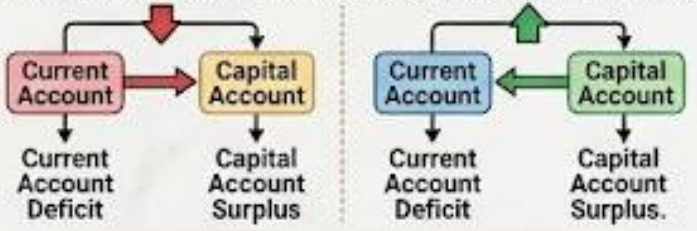


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CAD (Current Account Deficit) & CAS (Capital Account Deficit) & (Capital Account Surplus)



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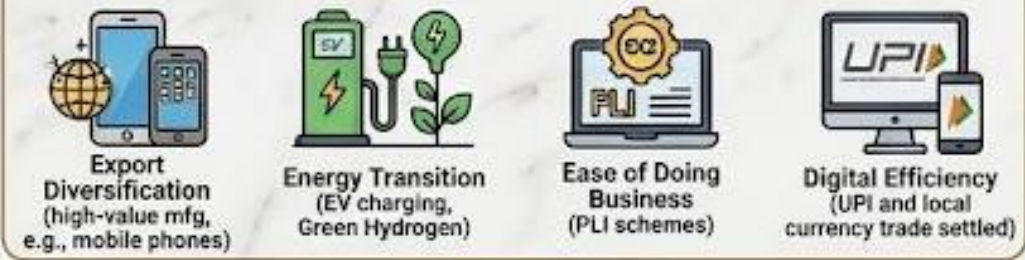
THE CORE DEBATE: AUSTERITY VS. PRODUCTIVITY.



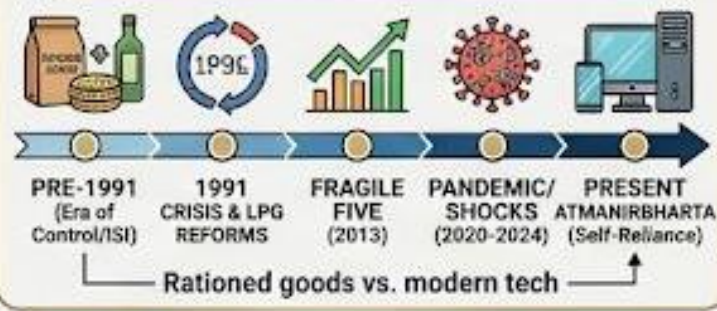
THE VICIOUS VS. VIRTUOUS CYCLE.



7. THE WAY FORWARD: FOREX EARNING, NOT SAVING.



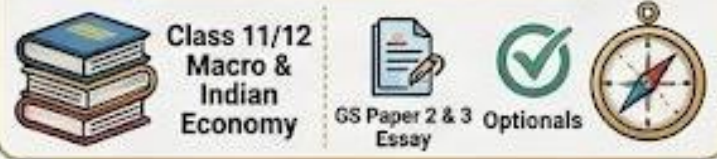
HISTORICAL EVOLUTION & MINDSET.



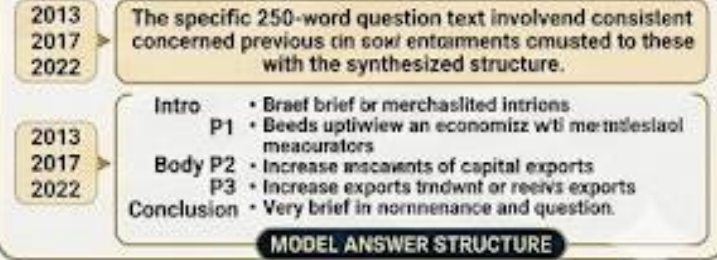
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