AXIA IAS ACADEMY

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

JULY 11

CONSISTENT COMPREHENSIVE AND CREDIBLE

UNIQUE AND BEST IN QUALITY

• HEALTH

Why weekly diabetes shot could reshape treatment

India has one of the world's largest diabetes populations. Novo Nordisk's new injection offers a cost effective and convenient option for diabetics

ANONNA DUTT

DANISH PHARMACEUTICAL giant Novo Nordisk Thursday launched its once-a-week insulin shot in India that promises to make blood sugar control more convenient in one of the world's largest diabetes populations. Called icodec, the drug will be sold under the brand name Awiqli ("a weekly") for just Rs 261 per week. This is the world's first long-acting insulin shot that reduces injections from 365 days a year to 52 days.

How does it work?

For long-lasting effects, two key modifications were made to human insulin to develop insulin icodec.

FIRST, a fatty acid chain was added to increase its affinity to a protein in the blood called albumin. When a week's dose of insulin is delivered under the skin, this bonding with albumin creates an inactive depot of the drug. This bond is reversible and the drug is slowly released into the bloodstream throughout the week.

SECOND, three amino acid substitutions were made to lower the molecule's affinity to insulin receptors. Even after the molecule gets out of the albumin bond, the reduced affinity for insulin receptors means the drug gets used slowly. The reduced affinity does not reduce the potency of the drug.

"The impact of this drug is similar to that of any other insulin. The advantage for the patients, however, is that it would reduce the number of shots they have to take. This is likely to improve compliance as well," said Dr SV Madhu, professor of endocrinology at GTB Hospital, New Delhi.

Is icodec different from insulin?

Icodec is an insulin analogue — a genetically engineered version of human insulin — that increases its life within the body.

Before the discovery of insulin in 1921, a childhood diabetes diagnosis was fatal. Physicians prescribed starvation treatment — low-calorie diets with periods of fasting. "Patients with T1D [type 1 diabetes] were often kept in hospital for weeks or months at a time, while their calorie intake and glucose excretion were meticulously recorded," according to the *BMJ*. Initially, the insulin given to these patients came from extracts of mashed-up pig and cow pancreas. It was only in the 1960s, when the structure of insulin was discovered, that it could be manufactured. It became more widely available after recombinant technology — which can be used to alter the genetic code of a protein — was developed in the 1970s. Now, most insulin is commercially manufactured and altered to increase the duration it stays in the body or improve the way it is absorbed. Insulin icodec is one such development.

While everyone with type 1 diabetes needs insulin injections because their body does not produce the hormone, when it comes to the more common type 2, many can manage with pills. Yet, 25 to 30% of the people end up requiring insulin eventually.

Who is the drug meant for?

The drug is meant for two categories of diabetics:

FIRST, **type 2 diabetics who have failed to achieve blood glucose control even with the highest doses of oral medicines**

"Those living with diabetes for eight to ten years, with pills being unable to control the blood glucose levels, need to take insulin injections to prevent further complications. Yet, most of them are unwilling to switch to the shots. Initiating insulin early can prevent damage to the organs, nerve endings, and the eye," said Dr S K Wangnoo, head of endocrinology at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi. Even doctors show reluctance to start their patients on insulin treatments.

Dr Madhu said once patients do not meet blood glucose targets despite the maximum dose and combination of oral medications, they should immediately be moved to insulin, initially at a lower dose with oral pills before transitioning completely to insulin.

Vikrant Shrotriya, managing director of Novo Nordisk India, said: "Currently, there are six million people on insulin in India, but this number should at least be double. Insulin is a drug that is never abused and is very effective for the treatment of diabetes, yet people stay away from it. We are hoping that the convenience of using this drug would mean more and more people who are recommended insulin start using it."

SECOND, **as background insulin for type 1 diabetics**

Those with type 1 diabetes need a long-acting dose known as the basal dose, along with shots around the meal times known as the bolus dose, based on how many calories they consume. "People with type 2 diabetes would be the best fit for this drug. This is because people with type 1 diabetes already need to take the three doses a day; a fourth dose doesn't add too much burden. Plus, they typically see more fluctuations in their blood glucose levels and need to adjust their insulin doses accordingly. When I put out a survey two years ago, some women reached out to me and said that they needed to adjust the dose during menstruation. This type of flexibility is not possible with a weekly dose," said Dr V Mohan, chairman of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, Chennai.

What about side effects?

The most common side effect of the medicine is hypoglycemia — a condition where the blood glucose levels fall too much — that can affect one in ten people. Dr Wangnoo, however, says this is the same level as seen with other daily insulin shots.

Dr Madhu says: "The reason people notice these episodes of hypoglycemia with insulin is that blood glucose levels are controlled for the first time with it. Even pills can cause episodes of hypoglycaemia, but when blood glucose levels are through the roof, the question of hypoglycaemia does not arise."

How much does it cost?

The drug will cost Rs 261 per week. It will be available in two doses of pre-filled pens — a 700 ml unit costing Rs 2,611 and a 2,100 ml unit costing Rs 7,883. A patient usually needs around 70 units per week, which may need to be scaled up depending on need. "The Rs 261 per week cost is cheaper than the current price of other insulin analogues, which can cost anywhere between Rs 345 and 453 a week. This drug will essentially cost around Rs 50 a day," said Shrotriya.

How many people in India need it?

Currently, 101 million people are living with diabetes and 136 million with pre-diabetes. "While initially most of them would be managed with pills, after five years, say, 5% to 10% would need insulin shots. And, after 10 years, maybe 20% to 30%. Even if we consider that only 20% need it, the number would still stand at around 20 million. There would definitely be more use for the drug in type 2 diabetics because of the convenience of taking one shot and cost similar to other products in the market," said Dr Mohan.

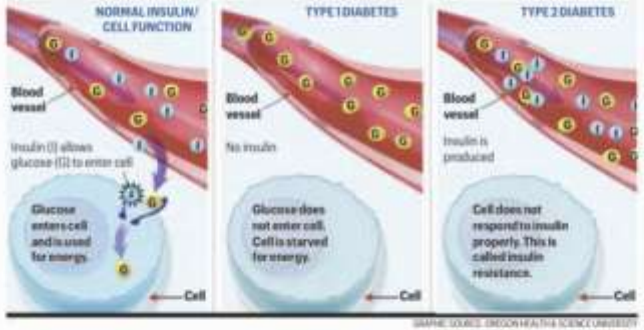
• HOW DIABETES TYPES 1 AND 2 AFFECT THE BODY

TYPE 1 DIABETES
A condition where the pancreas completely stops producing insulin, the hormone responsible for controlling the level of glucose in blood.

TYPE 2 DIABETES
Body's insulin production either goes down or the cells become resistant to the insulin. It accounts for more than 90% of all diabetes cases in the country.

101 million
INDIANS ARE LIVING WITH DIABETES

136 million
INDIANS HAVE PRE-DIABETES



GRAPHIC SOURCE: OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

Weight-loss drugs

Icodec, which lowers blood glucose levels, becomes more effective when combined with GLP-1 drugs.

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This is because abdominal obesity, which GLP-1 tackles, reduces insulin sensitivity. Meaning, more insulin is needed to process same amount of sugar.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Type 1 vs. Type 2 Diabetes:** These represent two distinct pathophysiological pathways. **Type 1 Diabetes** is an autoimmune condition where the body's immune system mistakenly attacks and destroys the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas, resulting in absolute insulin deficiency. Patients require lifelong external insulin. **Type 2 Diabetes** is primarily a metabolic disorder characterized by insulin resistance—where the body's cells do not respond effectively to insulin—often coupled with a progressive decline in insulin secretion.
- **Insulin Icodec (Once-Weekly Insulin):** A novel, genetically engineered human insulin analogue designed to provide a continuous, basal release of insulin over seven days. By modifying the molecular structure, it drastically minimizes the frequency of administration.
- **Albumin-Binding Depot Mechanism:** The pharmacokinetic innovation behind weekly insulin. The insulin molecule is modified by attaching a fatty acid chain, which allows it to bind reversibly to **albumin** (the most abundant protein in human blood plasma). Once injected under the skin, it forms an inactive reservoir (depot). The insulin is then slowly and steadily uncoupled from the albumin and released into the bloodstream throughout the week.
- **Recombinant DNA Technology:** The advanced biotechnological process used to produce human insulin analogues. It involves inserting the human gene responsible for insulin production into the DNA of host micro-organisms (like bacteria or yeast), turning them into bio-factories that synthesize exact or optimized versions of human hormones.
- **Basal vs. Bolus Insulin Regimens:** In healthy individuals, the pancreas secretes a steady, low level of background insulin throughout the day (**Basal**) and sudden spikes during meals (**Bolus**). Long-acting analogues simulate the background basal insulin, whereas short-acting insulins or oral medications manage the mealtime glucose spikes.
- **Hypoglycemia:** A clinical state where blood glucose levels drop below normal parameters (typically below 70 mg/dL). It is the most common side effect of intensive insulin therapy and can cause dizziness, confusion, or severe neurological distress if left unmanaged.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The deployment of long-acting therapeutic tools addresses deep-rooted clinical and systemic challenges in chronic disease management. The core discourse revolves around compliance, structural biology, and patient autonomy.
- **The Problem of Therapeutic Inertia and Compliance**
- A significant barrier in managing diabetes is the psychological and physical burden of daily injections. Patients frequently exhibit resistance to starting insulin therapy—a phenomenon known as clinical or therapeutic inertia. Moving from a rigorous routine of 365 needle pricks a year down to just 52 injections removes a massive psychological hurdle, directly translating to superior long-term adherence and a deceleration of secondary diabetic complications like retinopathy and nephropathy.
- **Biochemical Re-engineering for Longevity**
- The structural viability of weekly insulin hinges on a two-pronged genetic alteration:
- First, the addition of a specific fatty acid chain ensures strong, reversible binding to plasma albumin, creating a slow-release safety vault in the vascular system.
- Second, three precise amino acid substitutions are engineered into the molecule to deliberately lower its affinity for insulin receptors. This ensures that the drug is consumed by the body's tissues at a measured, conservative pace without reducing its therapeutic potency.
- **Target Demographics and Clinical Specificity**
- The application of this innovation is not universal across all diabetic profiles:
- **Primary Beneficiaries:** It is optimally suited for Type 2 diabetic individuals who have experienced secondary failure with oral hypoglycemic agents (OHAs)—typically after 8 to 10 years of disease progression—and require steady background basal control.
- **The Type 1 Challenge:** For Type 1 diabetics, its utility is limited to serving purely as a basal background layer. Because Type 1 patients experience sharp, highly volatile blood sugar fluctuations driven by diet, exercise, and physiological shifts (such as menstrual cycles), the rigid, unchanging release profile of a weekly shot lacks the nimble adjustments required to prevent sudden hypoglycemic episodes.
- **The Socio-Economic Calculus**
- Affordability determines the ultimate success of any medical intervention in the Global South. Weekly therapeutic options position themselves disruptively by costing roughly ₹261 per week (approximately ₹50 per day). When juxtaposed against existing daily insulin analogues—which often range between ₹345 and ₹453 per week—the long-acting formulation provides a dual advantage: it enhances lifestyle convenience while reducing out-of-pocket expenditure for patients.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The Pre-1921 Starvation Era:** Before the isolation of insulin, a diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes was essentially a death sentence. The only primitive treatment available was severe calorie restriction and near-starvation diets, which merely prolonged life by a few grueling months while patients suffered from severe emaciation.
- **1921–1960s: The Era of Animal Extraction:** The landmark discovery of insulin by Frederick Banting and Charles Best in 1921 revolutionized medicine. For decades, insulin was harvested from the pancreas of slaughtered pigs (porcine) and cows (bovine). While life-saving, these animal-derived insulins frequently triggered allergic and immunogenic reactions due to foreign proteins, and their purification was highly resource-intensive.
- **The 1970s Recombinant DNA Breakthrough:** The dawn of genetic engineering allowed scientists to map the precise amino acid sequence of human insulin. By inserting these human genes into *E. coli* bacteria, the pharmaceutical sector manufactured the world's first biosynthetic human insulin. This eliminated animal cruelty, dramatically lowered allergic reactions, and established a scalable global supply chain.
- **The Turn of the Century: Daily Insulin Analogues:** To better mimic the body's natural physiology, researchers developed insulin analogues in the late 1990s and 2000s. These modifications altered the absorption rates, leading to the creation of regular daily basal insulins (such as Glargine and Detemir) that provided a smooth, peakless release of glucose-lowering hormone over a 24-hour window.
- **The Modern Shift to Ultra-Long-Acting Formulations:** The current era represents the frontier of molecular optimization. By transitioning from a 24-hour operational window to a 168-hour (weekly) window, medical science has shifted focus from mere biological replacement to optimizing human lifestyle compatibility and adherence logistics.

- **Way Forward**
- **1. Strengthening Public Procurement and Universal Distribution**
- To truly benefit the masses, the government should integrate advanced long-acting treatments into public procurement frameworks like the **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)**. Bulk state purchasing can lower manufacturers' prices even further, allowing these life-changing therapies to be distributed affordably through Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) to reaching the lowest income groups.
- **2. Accelerating Local Bio-Similar R&D**
- The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), along with initiatives like the **National Biopharma Mission**, should offer targeted research incentives to indigenous pharmaceutical companies. Supporting local firms to develop biosimilar alternatives for ultra-long-acting insulins will foster domestic competition, safeguard supply chains, and systematically lower prices once original patents expire.
- **3. Enhancing Digital Health Tracking and Support Networks**
- Introducing advanced therapeutics should go hand-in-hand with digital health tools. Utilizing the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)** infrastructure allows public health authorities to deploy automated SMS alerts, digital compliance monitors, and community health worker (ASHA) applications. These tools help track weekly adherence, offer timely nutritional guidance, and actively monitor for side effects like hypoglycemia at the community level.

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THE COMPLETE UPSC ANALYSIS: WEEKLY DIABETES SHOT (INSULIN ICODEC) & ITS PARADIGM SHIFT

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION & TARGETS

- Pre-1921 Starvation
- Animal Extract — 1921-60s Animal Extract
- 1970s Recombinant DNA
- 2000s Daily Analogs — 2000s daily
- 2020s — 2020s Weekly Analogs (weekly)

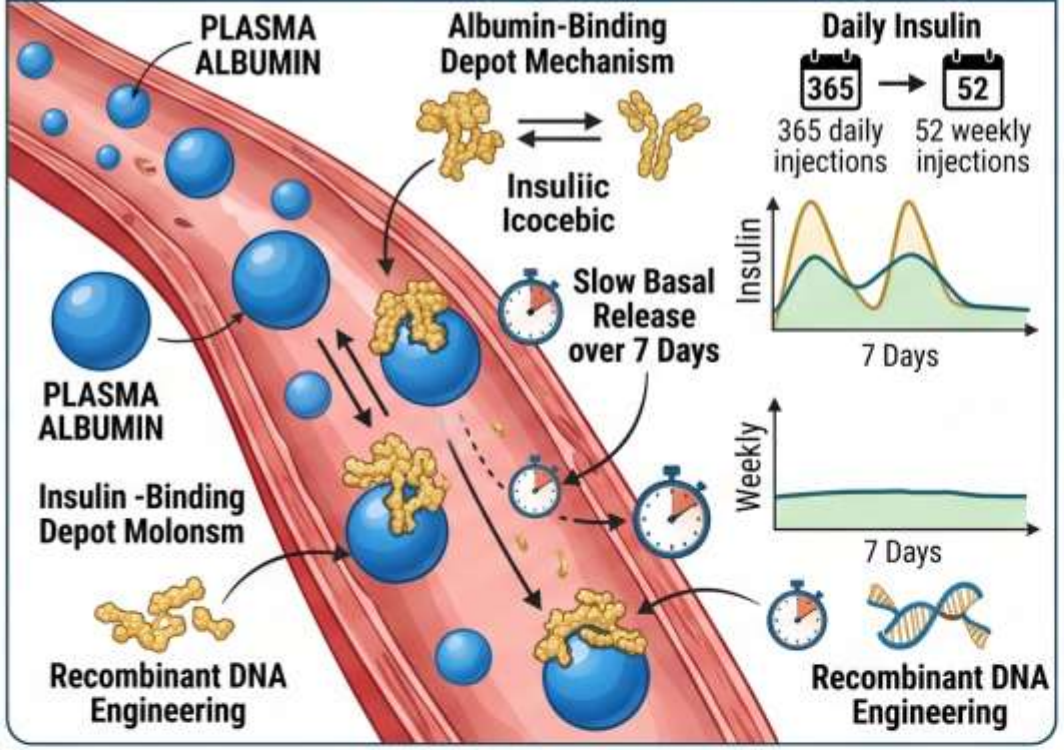
PRIMARY BENEFICIARY
(Type 2 Diabetes)

- Failed oral medications, failled of long oral medication etc.
- Long-term use and long-term use

LIMITATIONS
(Type 1 Diabetes)

- Less flexibility, more flexibility
- Higher volatility
- Higher volatility and management

MECHANISM OF ACTION: WEEKLY INSULIN ICODEC



MULTIDIMENSIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH ANALYSIS

Social
- NCD Burden
  - 101m Diabetic
- De-stigmatization
- Gender Variables

Economic
- Mitigating OOPE
  - Lower Daily Cost
- Macroeconomic Productivity

Political
- Constitutional Mandate (Art 47
- National Health Programs

Ethical
- Right to Health vs. IP
- Equity in Distribution

Legal
- Price Regulation
- (NPPA) NPPA "Biosimilars"
- Regulatory Approvals

International
- Global Health Diplomacy "Pharmacy of the World"
- Comparative Burdens

UPSC PREPARATION & WAY FORWARD

UPSC RELEVANCE

- **Syllabus Mapping.** (summarized GS 2, 3, 4 points, ofth-witc c ppoiner, conttinues, NCERT), cliases mentioned in the text.
- **NCERT Linkages:** Books/Classes mentioned in the text.
- **PYQ Themes:** Biotech applications, Health infrastructure,structure, etc.

WAY FORWARD (Strategic Solutions)

- **Public Procurement** (Janaushadhi network)
- **Local Biosimilar R&D** (DBT incentives)
- **Digital Health Tracking** (ABDM integration)
- **Re-skilling Healthcare** (ASHA, primary providers)

• SCIENCE

Landslides: The need for early warning systems

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, July 10

THE LANDSLIDES in recent days in the Western Ghats and other parts of India have reignited discussions on the need for an early warning system for such events.

Creating warning systems

Landslides can indeed be predicted, at least in highly prone areas such as Wayanad — where a 2024 landslide killed more than 300 people. Early warning system can be installed for timely evacuations from danger zones. Such systems already work effectively in many countries.

In India, too, such systems have worked in the past. Barely two weeks before the 2024 landslides in Wayanad, a series of landslides in the hills of Munnar (further south in Kerala) saw no loss of life. This was partly because the Idukki district administration evacuated people on the advice of a team of researchers from Amrita University, who were testing an early warning system. Led by Maneesha Vinodini Ramesh, it is one of many groups developing such systems in collaboration with government agencies.

Range of models

Recently, Professor Dericks Praise Shukla and his team at IIT Mandi have unveiled their own landslide early warning system, which is in the process of getting validated with ongoing events in the Himalayan region.

Shukla has been using a different methodology than those deployed by researchers at Amrita University. "They have installed a network of sensors at the high-risk sites, instruments like tilt meters, pressure gauges, accelerometers (to measure change in vibrations, ground movements, etc.) and the like. If these sensors report values beyond certain well-defined thresholds, then a warning is issued, and the administration can take action," he said.

"Scientifically, this is a very robust method, and gives plenty of lead time to plan and execute evacuations. This is how early warning systems are operating in other countries as well. The one limitation is that you get the information only about the slope where the instruments are installed, nothing about the neighbouring slope. Landslides are highly localised events," he said.

Shukla has been using a probabilistic forecasting method to track possibilities of landslides in the Himalayan region. His team has mapped vulnerable spots in the region using a satellite-based database of past events.

Since rainfall is one of the most common triggers, the team uses highly localised rainfall forecasts to model the probability of a landslide. Other relevant factors, like soil conditions, rock stability, extent of slope and population density, have to be fed into the model. "Very localised rainfall forecast is available only on that particular date or a day earlier. So, our method does not give a very long lead time. Once higher-resolution rainfall forecasts, which India Meteorological Department is working on, become available, landslide forecasts can be made much earlier," Shukla said.

"A comprehensive and effective early warning system for landslides can be prepared in about two years if resources and effort are properly dedicated to it. Within the areas prone to landslides, we must identify high-risk areas where landslides are frequent.... Once this gets done, we can install sensors at selected sites," he said.

RISK ZONES

- IIT Mandi professor Dericks Praise Shukla said the north-western Himalayan region and parts of Manipur and Mizoram are vulnerable to landslides.
- Sikkim is relatively less vulnerable due to a less dense road network, which implies greater stability, he said.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Landslide (Mass Wasting):** The downward and outward movement of slope-forming materials including rock, soil, artificial fill, or a combination of these under the direct influence of gravity.
- **Early Warning System (EWS):** An integrated system of hazard monitoring, forecasting, risk assessment, and communication that enables individuals, communities, and governments to take timely action to reduce disaster risks before a hazardous event occurs.
- **Tiltmeters and Accelerometers:** Specialized geotechnical instruments used to monitor structural and ground stability. A tiltmeter measures the ultra-precise changes (in degrees or radians) from the horizontal level of a slope. An accelerometer measures the rate of change of velocity of ground movement or vibrations.
- **Probabilistic Forecasting:** A technique used to predict the likelihood of an event occurring within a specific timeframe and spatial domain, rather than giving a definitive yes/no answer. It relies on historical data, mathematical modeling, and real-time variables.
- **Threshold Limits:** The specific, quantified boundaries (such as rainfall depth, moisture level, or ground displacement velocity) beyond which a slope is expected to transition from a stable state to an unstable, failing state.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The paradigm of landslide management in highly vulnerable ecological zones, such as the Western Ghats and the Himalayan regions, centers on moving away from post-disaster response toward proactive technological intervention. The following core arguments frame this discourse:
- **The Technological Imperative for Early Warning Systems**
- **Predictability of Mass Wasting:** Landslides are not entirely unpredictable anomalies. In highly prone terrains—such as Wayanad in the Western Ghats or vulnerable stretches of the Himalayas—the application of targeted engineering and meteorological frameworks makes it possible to predict failures and facilitate timely evacuations.
- **Empirical Success of Proactive Interventions:** Real-world applications have demonstrated that when local administrations act swiftly on predictive data, casualties can be entirely prevented. A prime example is the successful evacuation of vulnerable populations in the Idukki district of Kerala, where academic-government collaboration on a pilot warning system prevented loss of life during heavy rainfall events.
- **Comparative Framework: Sensor Networks vs. Probabilistic Modeling**
- **Physical Geotechnical Sensor Networks:** This method involves installing physical instruments like tiltmeters and pressure gauges directly onto high-risk slopes.
  - *Strengths:* It provides exceptionally robust, real-time physical data regarding ground movement, offering administrative bodies a definitive lead time to execute evacuations.
  - *Limitations:* It is highly hyper-localized. The instruments capture data exclusively for the specific slope where they are embedded, leaving adjacent or neighboring slopes unmonitored.
- **Satellite-Based Probabilistic Forecasting:** This methodology utilizes historical databases of past landslide events, satellite mapping, and localized rainfall predictions to model disaster probabilities.
  - *Strengths:* It covers vast, macro-level terrains (such as entire mountain ranges) without requiring thousands of physical ground sensors.
  - *Limitations:* Its accuracy depends heavily on the resolution of localized rainfall forecasts. If meteorological models can only provide high-resolution data 24 hours in advance, the operational lead time for evacuation remains constrained.
- **Environmental Dynamics and Anthropogenic Stressors**
- **The Infraspatial Vulnerability Paradox:** The susceptibility of a mountain ecosystem is closely tied to its infrastructural footprint. For instance, parts of the North-Western Himalayas, Manipur, and Mizoram show extreme vulnerability due to heavy slope modifications. Conversely, regions like Sikkim show greater relative slope stability, partly due to less dense road networks that preserve the natural binding capacity of the terrain.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Independence Era (Colonial Observations):** Landslide analysis was limited to basic geological observations by British surveyors, primarily focused on protecting colonial hill stations (e.g., Shimla, Darjeeling) and strategic military trade routes. The approach was purely reactive, dealing with clearances after a collapse.
- **Post-Independence to Late 20th Century (1950s–1980s):** The Geological Survey of India (GSI) assumed the role of the nodal agency for landslide studies. The focus shifted toward macro-zonation mapping—identifying which parts of the country were broadly prone to hazards. However, real-time warning capabilities remained non-existent, and structural engineering solutions (like retaining walls) dominated mitigation efforts.
- **The Paradigm Shift (2005–2009):** The enactment of the Disaster Management Act in 2005 and the subsequent formulation of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) restructured India's approach. In 2009, the NDMA released the *National Landslide Risk Management Strategy*, which explicitly highlighted the need to move from post-disaster relief to multi-hazard early warning systems.
- **Modern Decentralized Tech Integration (Present Day):** The current phase features collaborations between premium academic institutions (such as IIT Mandi and Amrita University), state disaster management authorities, and the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The focus is now on Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, artificial intelligence, and real-time probabilistic models to provide site-specific alerts.

- **Way Forward**
- **Integration of Micro-Meteorology with Geotechnical Arrays:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) must deploy high-resolution, hyper-local weather forecasting models that integrate seamlessly with local physical sensor grids. Combining real-time soil saturation metrics with precise hourly rainfall forecasts helps maximize warning accuracy and extends operational lead times.
- **Deployment of a National Landslide Sensor Grid:** The government should initiate a targeted, two-year national mission to map and instrument high-risk slopes across the Western Ghats and the Himalayas. This involves using physical sensor networks (tiltmeters, accelerometers) for densely populated slopes, while utilizing satellite-based probabilistic forecasting models for broader regional analysis.
- **Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CB-EWS):** Technology is only as effective as the community's response to it. Local populations should be trained to read basic decentralized indicator tools and participate in regular evacuation drills. This democratizes disaster response and helps minimize panic or confusion during real alerts.
- **Mandatory Carrying-Capacity and Eco-Sensitive Zoning:** State governments in hill regions should legally mandate scientific carrying-capacity assessments before approving major commercial or infrastructural projects. Development must follow strict eco-sensitive zoning laws, preserving areas with high slope instability from intensive road building and heavy construction.

AXIA IAS ACADEMY

RISE ABOVE THE REST

PREPPING FOR APSC/UPSC: COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF LANDSLIDE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

(Based on July 10, Amitabh Sinha, 'Landslides: The Need for Early Warning Systems')

THE CHALLENGE

- Recent catastrophic events in Western Ghats (Wayanad, Munnar)
- Loss of over 300 lives (Wayanad, 2024)
- Disruptions and fatalities in Himalayan region

SUCCESSFUL PROOFS OF CONCEPT

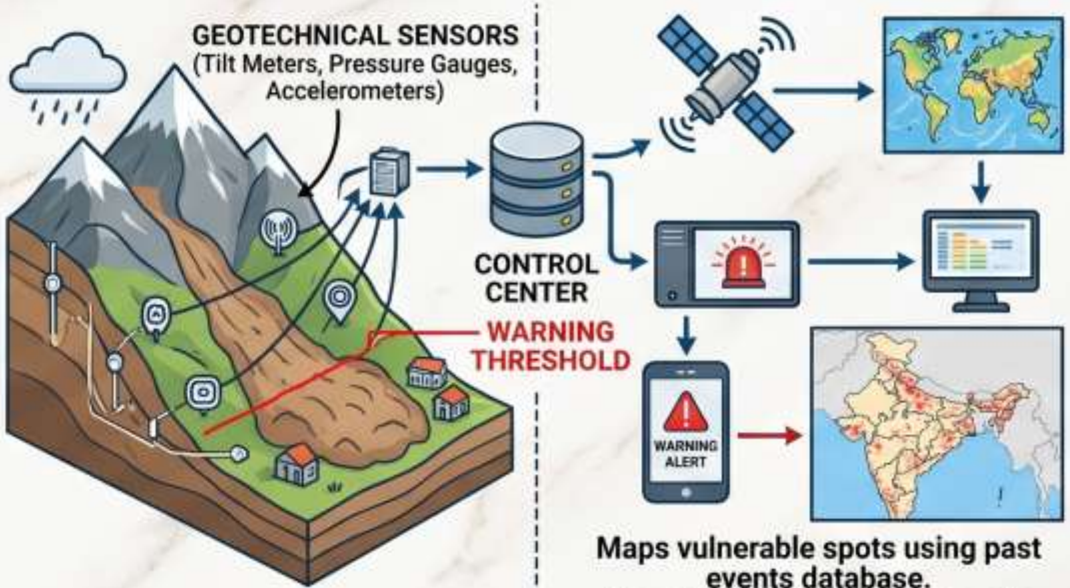
Idukki (Kerala): Life Saved

Idukki district admin evacuated Munnar hills. Saw **NO LOSS OF LIFE** due to Amrita University EWS pilot (led by Maneesha V. Ramesh) two weeks before 2024 Wayanad landslide.

IIT Mandi EWS: Ongoing Validation

Prof. Dericks P. Shukla (IIT Mandi) EWS in process of validation in Himalayan region. Uses different methodology.

EWS METHODOLOGIES: GEOTECHNICAL VS. PROBABILISTIC

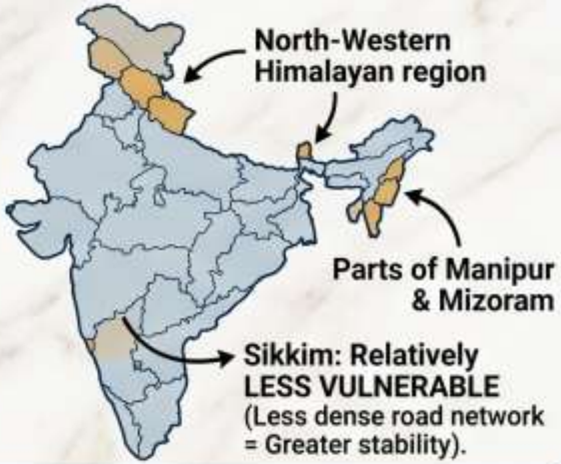


- High-risk slope specific.
- Robust physical data.
- Limitations: highly localized (this slope only).

Maps vulnerable spots using past events database. Uses localized rainfall forecasts (current limit 1 day, IMD high-res rainfall will improve this). Other factors: soil, rock, slope, pop. density. Broad-scale mapping.

IDENTIFIED VULNERABILITY ZONES

(IIT Mandi, Prof. Shukla)



THE PATH FORWARD

BUILDING COMPREHENSIVE EWS (~2 YEARS)

1. IDENTIFY HIGH-RISK AREAS & FREQUENCY
2. DEDICATE RESOURCES & EFFORT
3. INSTALL SENSORS AT SELECTED SITES
4. INTEGRATE PROBABILISTIC SELECTED SITES

4. INTEGRATE PROBABILISTIC FORECASTS (With improved rainfall forecasts)

• ECONOMY

June inflation may breach RBI 4% target: Transport is driving this

GRAPHS, DATA, PERSPECTIVES
BY UDIT MISRA

WEEKLY ECONOMIC AND POLICY INSIGHTS USING DATA

THE RETAIL inflation rate is set to breach the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target level of 4%, according to an analysis by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). The next set of inflation data, covering June, will be released Monday.

Retail inflation fell sharply from more than 6% in October 2024 to zero in October 2025. Since then the figure has started edging up — a trend exacerbated by supply constraints in the wake of the West Asia war. Even so, retail inflation stayed below the RBI's target rate of 4% for the past 16 months. In May, the retail inflation was 3.93%. According to CMIE's estimates, the overall retail inflation in June is likely to be 4.25%.

Reasons for higher inflation

There are two main triggers for the anticipated jump in headline inflation rate, according to CMIE.

One, is the sub-category of "transport" inflation. In the overall index used to calculate inflation, this sub-category has a weight of around 9%. According to CMIE's estimates, transport inflation, which had largely been close to zero for most of this year, is likely to have grown by 4.6% in June.

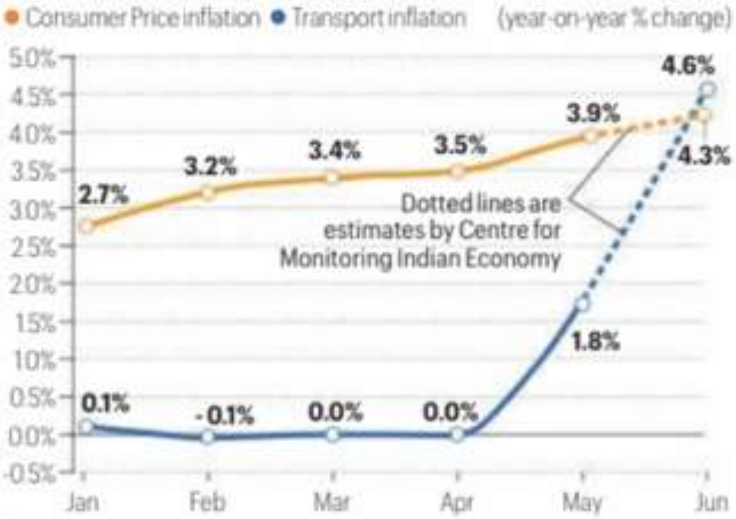
This sharp spike in transport-related inflation (*see chart*) in June shows the full impact of the petrol and diesel price hike that were first implemented in May.

There are other factors that have likely pushed up transport costs. "...travel fares would have continued to rise, reflecting the higher fuel costs... Maruti raised vehicle prices from June to offset rising input costs. Inflation firmed across all components of the transport division, with the fuel price hike remaining the principal driver," notes CMIE's analysis.

The second sub-category that has experienced higher inflation in June has to do with different types of fuels. The government increased domestic LPG prices in early June, marking the second hike since March. LPG prices in June averaged Rs 947 per 14.2 kg cylinder across major cities, up from Rs 923 in May. Prices have cumulatively increased by more than Rs 80 since March.

• A key inflation trigger: Transport

Among the main triggers for the anticipated jump in the headline inflation rate is a sharp spike in 'transport' inflation.



"Higher LPG prices are also expected to have lifted the cost of substitute fuels such as firewood and dung cakes. Consequently, inflation in the electricity, gas, and other fuels category is estimated to have risen to 1.9 per cent from 0.8 per cent in May," says the CMIE analysis.

Impact on growth

Higher inflation is bad news for economic growth. Fast-rising prices drag down the real economic growth rate because they reduce a consumer's power to purchase goods and services with the same level of income. Things get worse when the RBI's policy action is taken into consideration.

At 4.25%, retail inflation would still be within the RBI's comfort band of 2% to 6%. If it stays within this zone, the RBI is unlikely to sharply calibrate its monetary policy.

But if inflation goes above 6%, for instance, the RBI will need to raise interest rates in the economy. This makes all kinds of loans costlier and, thus, makes it expensive for anyone to undertake any economic activity. Reduced economic activity reduces demand for goods and services in the economy, thereby cooling down price rise.

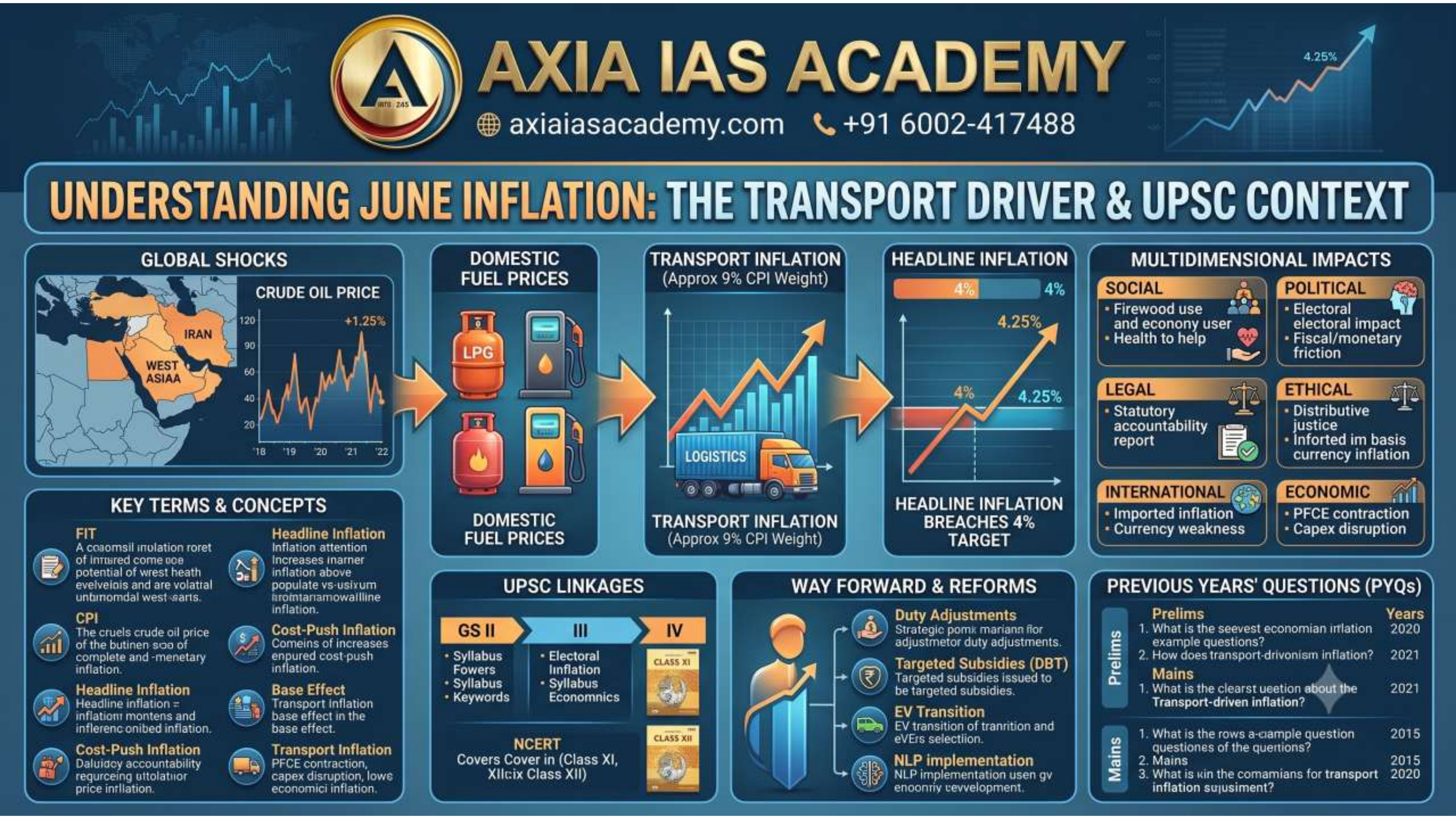
Given the renewed hostilities between US and Iran, the RBI will likely be cautious in the coming months if inflation keeps inching up. If the trend sustains, expect it to hike rates at some point during the year.

- **Key Terms and Expositions**
- **Retail Inflation / Consumer Price Index (CPI):** This metric measures the change over time in the general price level of a basket of consumer goods and services purchased by households. It reflects the cost of living directly experienced by the common citizen.
- **Headline Inflation:** This refers to the raw inflation figure reported through the CPI, encompassing all commodities in the basket. Unlike core inflation, headline inflation includes highly volatile categories like food and energy prices, which can fluctuate wildly due to seasonal shifts or geopolitical disruptions.
- **Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT):** A monetary policy framework where the central bank is legally mandated to maintain inflation within a specific target range to ensure price stability while supporting economic growth. In India, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) operates under a statutory mandate to keep retail inflation at 4% with a tolerance band of +/- 2% (i.e., between 2% and 6%).
- **Transport Inflation:** A critical sub-category of the CPI that measures price changes in moving people and commodities. It possesses a significant weight of approximately 9% in the overall index. Because transport costs act as an input for almost all physical goods, a spike here has a cascading, cost-push effect across the entire economy.
- **Cost-Push Inflation:** Inflation driven by systemic increases in the costs of wages and raw materials. When input costs rise, aggregate supply decreases, forcing manufacturers to pass these costs onto consumers.
- **Base Effect:** This refers to the distortion in a current inflation figure caused by an abnormally high or low inflation rate in the corresponding month of the previous year. A low base in the previous year artificially inflates the current year's growth rate, even if the absolute price rise is moderate.

- **Core Arguments and Structural Mechanics**
- The macroeconomic landscape is currently experiencing a delicate balancing act, driven by localized input costs and international geopolitical friction.
- **The Central Thesis**
- The primary driver behind the upward trajectory of retail inflation—pushing it past the RBI's ideal 4% target to an estimated 4.25%—is not an excess of domestic demand, but rather a supply-side shock. This shock is concentrated heavily in the transport sector and domestic fuel components, aggravated by volatile global geopolitical dynamics.
- **Key Supporting Arguments**
- **The Dominance of Transport Costs:** Transport inflation, which remained dormant and close to zero for a significant part of the year, has experienced a sharp spike to around 4.6%. This sudden surge is a direct consequence of adjustments to commercial petrol and diesel prices, forcing transport operators and logistics firms to raise fares and freight rates.
- **The Cascading Impact of Domestic Energy Prices:** Periodic upward revisions in domestic Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) prices—averaging around ₹947 per 14.2 kg cylinder across major urban centers—have triggered a broader energy price contagion. This rise has inadvertently inflated the cost of rural substitute fuels, such as firewood and dung cakes, causing the broader 'electricity, gas, and other fuels' index to jump from a minimal 0.8% to nearly 1.9%.
- **The Threat to Real GDP Growth:** Rapidly accelerating retail prices act as a regressive pressure on aggregate demand. When nominal incomes remain stagnant while prices for basic utilities and transport rise, the consumer's real purchasing power contracts. This directly reduces private final consumption expenditure, which serves as the primary engine of India's real economic growth.
- **Central Bank Dilemma and Counter-Perspectives**
- **The Comfort Band Cushion:** While an inflation rate of 4.25% breaches the precise 4% ideal target, it remains comfortably within the RBI's statutory safety net of 2% to 6%. Consequently, immediate, aggressive monetary tightening or sudden rate hikes are highly unlikely, offering temporary breathing room for fiscal expansion.
- **The Specter of Global Contagion:** The primary counter-argument to a relaxed monetary stance is the highly volatile international environment, particularly renewed hostilities between major global powers like the United States and Iran in West Asia. If these supply-side bottlenecks persist and headline inflation threatens the upper threshold of 6%, the RBI will be forced to raise interest rates. This policy intervention would cool down prices but would also make corporate and retail credit significantly costlier, dampening broader economic activity.

- **Historical Evolution of Inflation Management**
- To fully appreciate the modern inflation-targeting framework, it is vital to trace how India has managed price stability from the early days of independence to the current era of globalized supply chains.
- **The Pre-1990s Era (Structural Rigidities and Supply Controls):** Following independence, India's inflation management was heavily reliant on administrative measures, physical rationing, and strict price controls under a closed economy model. Monetary policy was largely subservient to the fiscal requirements of automatic monetization of ad-hoc treasury bills. The economy suffered severe supply-side shocks during the droughts of the mid-1960s and the global oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, proving that administrative pricing alone could not shield consumers from global volatility.
- **The Post-Liberalization Transition (1991–2014):** With the opening of the economy in 1991, price discovery shifted toward market forces. The RBI adopted a "Multiple Indicator Approach" from 1998 onwards, tracking variables like credit growth, employment, and output alongside inflation. During this era, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) served as the primary headline indicator. However, this framework often failed to capture the true cost-of-living pressures faced by end consumers, leading to high, persistent double-digit retail inflation between 2009 and 2013.
- **The Urjit Patel Committee Reforms and the FIT Era (2014–2016):** A watershed moment occurred in 2014 when the Urjit Patel Committee recommended adopting CPI as the nominal anchor for monetary policy. This culminated in a historic amendment to the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, in 2016, establishing the statutory Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). The legal target was set at 4% with a +/- 2% band, institutionalizing macroeconomic predictability and moving away from ad-hoc policy adjustments.
- **The Recent Macroeconomic Arc (2024–2026):** Recent years demonstrate the deep impact of external disruptions. Retail inflation witnessed dramatic swings—plummeting from over 6% in late 2024 down to near-zero levels by October 2025, primarily driven by strong base effects and temporary domestic supply gluts. However, by mid-2026, prolonged disruptions in the West Asia maritime corridors and volatile global energy markets reversed this downward trend, pushing inflation back toward 4.25% and highlighting the vulnerability of domestic prices to international geopolitical instability.

- **Way Forward**
- **Short-Term Tactical Interventions**
- **Calibrated Fiscal Duty Adjustments:** The Union and State governments should implement a coordinated reduction in central excise duties and state VAT on petrol and diesel. Acting as a fiscal cushion, this measure can directly absorb international crude spikes and prevent fuel costs from passing entirely into transport inflation.
- **Strategic Expansion of Clean Energy Subsidies:** To protect vulnerable groups from reverting to polluting fuels, targeted direct benefit transfers (DBT) under welfare programs like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) should be dynamically linked to fuel inflation, insulation low-income households when LPG prices climb.
- **Long-Term Structural Reforms**
- **Accelerating the Transition to Electric Mobility:** India must reduce its vulnerability to global oil shocks by accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and compressed natural gas (CNG) across commercial transport and public logistics networks. Expanding cleaner transit options helps insulate domestic freight rates from geopolitical conflicts.
- **Optimizing the National Logistics Framework:** Swift implementation of the National Logistics Policy (NLP) is essential to improve multi-modal transport infrastructure. Reducing India's total logistics cost from double digits down to single digits will help lower structural costs, allowing the economy to better absorb input price shocks.
- **Diversifying and Securing Energy Imports:** To mitigate risks from regional geopolitical tensions, India should continue diversifying its crude oil and natural gas sourcing away from volatile regions. This strategy can be strengthened by expanding strategic petroleum reserves to guarantee price stability during international supply disruptions.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• PFCE contraction
• Capex disruption
KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS
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Cost-Push Inflation
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Transport Inflation
PFCE contraction, capex disruption, lowe economici inflation.
UPSC LINKAGES
GS II
III
IV
• Syllabus Fowers
• Syllabus
• Keywords
• Electoral Innflation
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• LEGAL

Behind *Satluj* takedown, the parallel regimes for theatrical and OTT releases

Apurva Vishwanath
New Delhi, July 10

AFTER BEING stuck for nearly three years over certification issues, the movie *Satluj*, based on the life of rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, premiered on ZEE5 on July 3. Just two days later, however, it was taken off the platform. While the film remains available internationally on ZEE5 Global, it is unavailable in India "until further notice".

Government sources have cited "security concerns" over the film. An Inter-Departmental Committee, constituted by the government under the Information Technology Rules 2021, is set to take up the matter.

The takedown of a film that was never allowed a theatrical release has put the spotlight on the parallel regulatory regimes in India — the Cinematograph Act for theatrical releases and the Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021 for streaming platforms.

Why was Satluj banned?

The film chronicles Khalra, the Amritsar-based activist, who investigated the alleged illegal cremation of "thousands of unidentified bodies" by police during Punjab's militancy years. He was abducted and killed in 1995, a case in which several police officials were convicted.

The project, originally titled *Ghallughara*, changed its name to *Punjab '95* after the first round of scrutiny by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The CBFC sought 127 cuts before it would clear a theatrical release, which the makers refused.

The film, therefore, never reached the cinemas and eventually landed on the over-the-top (OTT) platform — without the cuts — under the name *Satluj*. Parallelly, the makers challenged the CBFC's objections before the Bombay High Court in 2023, but later withdrew the petition.

How does CBFC certification work?

Theatre releases are governed by the Cinematograph Act, 1952. Under Section 4 of the Act, any person wishing to exhibit a film publicly must apply to the CBFC, a statutory body under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Screening uncertified films in a cinema is a criminal offence.

The CBFC certifies films into categories: U (unrestricted); UA (unrestricted with parental guidance); A (adults only), and S (restricted to specialised audiences).

The Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023, further split the UA category into age-based sub-categories and made certificates perpetually valid, removing the earlier 10-year limit. The Act also empowers the board to refuse certifications or to grant them subject to excisions and modifications if a film is against the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India; the security of the state; friendly relations with foreign states; public order, decency or morality; or involves defamation or contempt of court. These are the "reasonable restrictions" on free speech under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

Filmmakers have long criticised the wide discretion given to the examining and revising committee within the CBFC. Until 2021, a filmmaker, by a CBFC order in the form of a refusal or grant of a certificate or demands of cuts, could appeal to a dedicated tribunal under the act. A tribunal rationalisation reform abolished FCAT, transferring its functions to the High Courts, which is a slow and expensive process for time-sensitive releases. Critics also say that judges may lack the specialised engagement with cinema that a specialised tribunal would bring.

This is perhaps why the makers of Satluj withdrew the plea before the Bombay High Court and turned to streaming services where the CBFC has no jurisdiction.

How are OTT platforms regulated?

OTT platforms typically operated with minimal oversight. But as their influence and reach grow, the government has made attempts to regulate these platforms.

In 2019, the Karnataka High Court dismissed a writ petition seeking the regulation of content on OTT platforms also under the Cinematograph Act. The HC reiterated the distinction between public exhibition of films, which is governed under the Cinematograph Act, to a private viewing of content on an OTT platform by individuals in the privacy of their personal spaces.

The government had also opposed the plea, arguing that the provisions of the IT Act take care of the apprehensions expressed by the petitioner.

OTT content is regulated under part III of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which prescribe a code of ethics requiring publishers to exercise caution over content that may fall under the grounds for "reasonable restrictions" mentioned above.

The rules set up a three-tier grievance structure — self-regulation by the publisher, self-regulatory bodies and government oversight through the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. This framework is also under challenge. The Bombay and Madras High Courts have stayed this provision.

In the 2023 Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, which was subsequently withdrawn, the government attempted to define OTT platforms as a broadcasting service to bring them under its ambit.

In the case of *Satluj's* takedown, the government has reportedly used its powers under Section 69A of the IT Act.

What is Section 69A?

Section 69A involves the power to issue orders to block content. These orders are issued under the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009. The government must record the reasons for blocking in writing, and then a designated review committee examines these directions and can set aside orders if they do not comply with Section 69A.

The Information & Broadcasting Ministry has formed an Inter-Departmental Committee under Rule 14 of the IT Rules to look into *Satluj's* content and make recommendations to the government. It can recommend warnings, an apology or disclaimer, reclassification or modification of content, or deletion and blocking under Section 69A.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC):** A statutory body operating under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It is tasked with regulating the public exhibition of films under the provisions of the Cinematograph Act, 1952.
- *Example:* Before a feature film can be screened in commercial theatres, it must secure a certificate (such as 'U', 'UA', or 'A') from the CBFC, which often demands specific cuts or alterations as a prerequisite for approval.
- **Over-The-Top (OTT) Platforms:** Digital streaming services that deliver audio, video, and other media content directly over the internet, bypassing traditional distribution networks like terrestrial television, cable, or physical cinema halls.
- *Example:* Platforms like ZEE5, Netflix, and Amazon Prime Video allow users to access content on personal devices via private internet connections.
- **Section 69A of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000:** A powerful statutory provision that empowers the Central Government to issue directions to block public access to specific digital information through any computer resource. This power is exercised on grounds such as national security, public order, and sovereignty.
- **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** A secondary legislative framework enacted under the IT Act. It mandates a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism and a strict code of ethics for digital publishers, news portals, and OTT streaming platforms.
- **Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT):** A specialized statutory body that formerly adjudicated appeals filed by filmmakers aggrieved by CBFC orders. It was dissolved in 2021, shifting the appellate burden directly onto the High Courts.
- **Article 19(2) of the Constitution:** The constitutional clause that empowers the State to impose "reasonable restrictions" on the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. These restrictions can be applied on specific grounds, including the sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, decency, and morality.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **The Structural Split in Regulatory Frameworks**
- The core conflict stems from a fundamental divergence in how India governs creative media. Theatrical content faces a rigorous, state-mandated pre-censorship regime under the Cinematograph Act, 1952. In contrast, digital streaming content falls under a co-regulatory, post-facto framework governed by the IT Rules, 2021. This structural divide incentivizes creators of politically sensitive or unconventional cinema to bypass theatres entirely and opt for direct digital releases to preserve their artistic vision.
- **The Extension of Executive Control Over Digital Media**
- While digital platforms were initially celebrated for operating with minimal administrative oversight, the state has steadily expanded its regulatory reach over the internet. Through the invocation of Section 69A of the IT Act and the operationalization of the IT Rules, 2021, the executive now exercises sweeping authority to order content takedowns based on broad "security concerns." This trend blurs the lines between public theatrical exhibition and private digital consumption.
- **The Judicial Boundary Between Public and Private Exhibition**
- Higher judicial bodies have historically maintained a sharp distinction between public cinema screening and private digital viewing. Rulings, such as those from the Karnataka High Court, emphasize that watching content on a personal device in a private space does not equate to a public exhibition. Consequently, attempts to apply the heavy-handed censorship provisions of the Cinematograph Act to OTT platforms have consistently faced legal resistance.
- **Institutional Delays Following FCAT Dissolution**
- The abolition of the FCAT in 2021 has severely compromised the redressal mechanism available to content creators. Without a specialized, time-sensitive tribunal to challenge arbitrary cuts or bans, filmmakers are forced to approach the High Courts. This transition has rendered the dispute resolution process slow, prohibitively expensive, and structurally ill-equipped to address the time-sensitive nature of modern media releases.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The Colonial Foundations (1918):** The origin of film censorship in India dates back to the Cinematograph Act, 1918. Introduced by the British colonial administration, its primary objective was to police political narratives, suppress nationalist sentiment, and control public media consumption.
- **Post-Independence Codification (1952):** The enactment of the Cinematograph Act, 1952, formalised film regulation by establishing the CBFC. This law firmly rooted pre-censorship within India's legal architecture, requiring state sanction for any public film exhibition.
- **The Rise of Digital Infrastructure (2010s):** The rapid spread of high-speed internet and smartphones led to the emergence of OTT platforms. Operating initially within a regulatory vacuum, these services existed entirely outside the jurisdiction of the CBFC, creating a clear policy distinction between physical cinema and digital streaming.
- **The Tightening Digital Noose (2021–Present):** The introduction of the IT Rules, 2021, marked a significant policy shift by bringing digital media under a formalized, three-tier regulatory umbrella. The subsequent abolition of the FCAT and legislative efforts like the now-withdrawn Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill highlight continuous state efforts to standardize control across both physical and digital media ecosystems.

- **Way Forward**
- **Transitioning to an Independent Co-Regulation Model**
- India should move away from rigid, state-controlled censorship models and adopt an independent co-regulation framework. The three-tier oversight mechanism under the IT Rules should be insulated from direct executive control. The final tier of oversight should be managed by an autonomous digital media council, led by retired judicial officers and industry experts, ensuring that content decisions are free from administrative bias.
- **Reinstating an Expert Appellate Body**
- To address the institutional gap left by the dissolution of the FCAT, the government should establish a dedicated, fast-track appellate tribunal for media and entertainment. This body would provide filmmakers with a quick, cost-effective alternative to protracted High Court litigation, ensuring that artistic disputes are resolved efficiently by experts familiar with cinematic nuances.
- **Implementing the Shyam Benegal Committee Recommendations**
- The core principles of the Shyam Benegal Committee report should be integrated into India's film governance architecture. The CBFC’s mandate should be restricted purely to content certification and age-appropriate classification (e.g., granular age ratings like UA13+, UA16+), removing its authority to impose arbitrary cuts, alterations, or outright bans on creative projects.

UPSC CSE ANALYSIS: THE REGULATORY FRACTURE IN INDIA'S CONTENT GOVERNANCE (THEATRICAL VS. OTT)

triggered by: THE SATLUJ TAKEDOWN CASE

THEATRICAL RELEASES
(THE PUBLIC TRACK)

- **ACT:** Cinematograph Act, 1952
- **BODY:** CBFC (Statutory Pre-Censorship)
- **NATURE:** Pre-Certification & Mandatory Cuts (U, UA, A)
- **GROUNDS:** Article 19(2) Reasonable Restrictions
- **ISSUES:** High Costs, Slow Process, FCAT Abolition Delays

"PUBLIC EXHIBITION IN SHARED SPACES"

OTT RELEASES
(THE PRIVATE TRACK)

- **ACT:** IT Act, 2000 (Section 69A) & IT Rules, 2021
- **MECHANISM:** Co-Regulatory, Post-Facto
- **CODE:** 3-Tier Grievance, Code of Ethics
- **GROUNDS:** National Security, Sovereignty, Public Order
- **ISSUES:** Sudden Takedowns, Closed-Door Decisions, Blurred Lines

"PRIVATE CONSUMPTION ON PERSONAL DEVICES"

Timeline

- **1918** (Colonial Genesis)
- **1952** (Statutory Codification)
- **2010s** (Digital Disruption)
- **2021+** (IT Rules, Parallel Regimes)

UPSC CSE SYLLABUS LINKAGES:

GS 2 | GS 3 | GS 4 | Essay

WAY FORWARD

1. **Independent Co-Regulation** (Autonomous Tier-3 council with judicial/industry lead)
2. **Reinstate Expert Appellate Body** (Fast-track tribunal for media)
3. **Shyam Benegal Comm. recommendations** (CBFC as Certification-only, granular ratings)
4. **Section 69A Transparency** (Public reasoned orders, pre-decisional hearings)

CASE STUDY: THE SATLUJ TAKEDOWN (triggered stuck for certification, OTT release, sudden takedown via S69A)

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IITs, IIMs, Central varsities push back against VBSA norms

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Institutes of National Importance (INIs), including IITs and IIMs, have pushed back against the Centre's Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, asking to be exempted from many provisions of the Bill that intends to overhaul India's higher education regulatory framework.

These institutes, along with Central Universities, have cited the need to protect institutional autonomy, flagging contradictions in the Bill and criticising aspects such as the provisions for centralisation.

The Bill is under review by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) headed by BJP MP D. Purandeswari. Submissions to the JPC show that the NDA-ruled States of Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Madhya Pradesh have objected to the provisions, as reported by *The Hindu* on Friday.

The Bill seeks to repeal statutory Acts governing the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE , and replace them with a single apex body. FILE PHOTO

Structural overhaul

The Bill proposes a structural overhaul of higher education in the country by repealing the statutory Acts governing the University Grants Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education, and the National Council for Teacher Education and replacing them with a single apex body called the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan, with regulatory, accreditation, and standards councils under it.

The government has defended the Bill by citing Clause 49, which promises to protect the autonomy of INIs and Institutes of Eminence.

The IITs, IIMs, along with institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Information Technology and IISERs, called for the Bill to explicitly include language exempting these institutes from the scope of the new regulatory structure.

While IIT-Kanpur, IIT-Hyderabad, IIM-Sambalpur, and IISER, Mohali, sought total exemption, IIT Madras said the IITs should be excluded from certain clauses on regulatory approvals for online programmes, opening new colleges, and the applicability of the Bill's penalty provisions.

Several other IITs, IIMs, and IISERs have expressed the need to ensure complete institutional autonomy for research, curriculum, and academic activities. The IIT-Dhanbad, IISER, Kolkata, and the University of Hyderabad have pointed out that there are other provisions in the Bill which imply that the new Bill will take precedence over the laws under which the IITs, IIMs, and IISERs were set up.

Graded penalty system

The IIT Bombay has questioned the logic of leaving law and medicine out of the Bill's scope.

Several institutes have criticised the proposed penalty structure. The Bill introduces a graded penalty system that could go up to ₹75 lakh in fines and/or closure of the institution.

While IIT Madras submitted that IITs should be left out of the clause, the University of Hyderabad suggested that penalties of a particular amount and above should be imposed only after the decision of an "independent adjudicator".

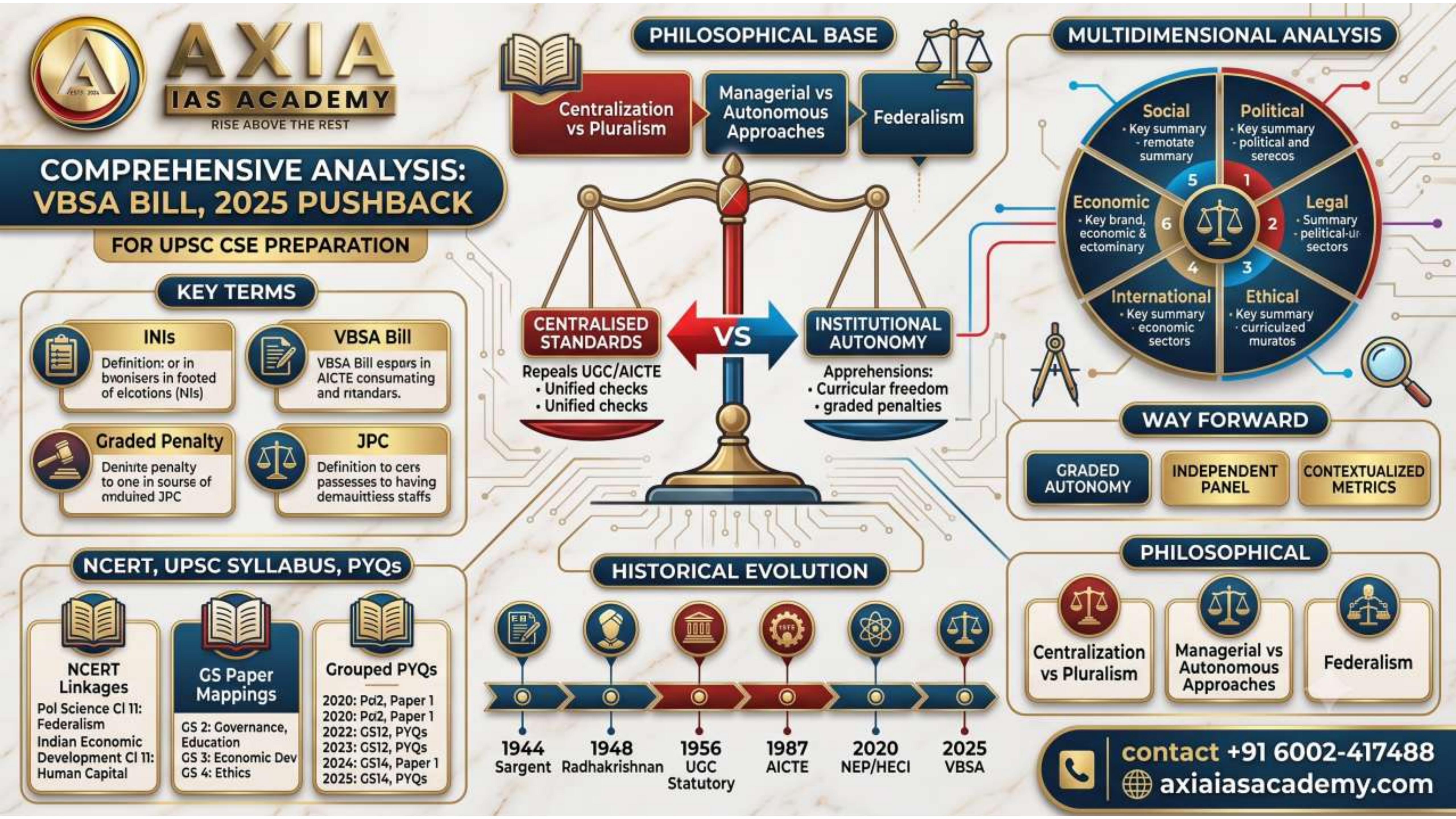
The Central Tribal University (CTU) of Andhra Pradesh, however, cautioned that the penalty clause could have "differential and unintended" consequences for small and rural institutions serving tribal or underserved areas. It said these institutes may fall short on indicators such as availability of faculty but "not due to institutional negligence, but because of structural and regional constraints".

IIT Madras said the idea of the envisioned single, unified, and institutional accreditation body may not be adequate to deal with the performance of different types of higher educational institutions in the country.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Institutes of National Importance (INIs)**
- Institutes of National Importance are premier public higher education institutions in India established by specific Acts of Parliament. They are empowered to confer degrees, enjoy significant academic and administrative functional autonomy, and are expected to develop highly skilled personnel in specialized sectors.
- **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025**
- This proposed legislative framework aims to completely overhaul India's higher education regulatory landscape. The Bill seeks to dissolve existing standalone statutory regulators and replace them with a single, centralized apex body responsible for regulation, accreditation, and setting academic standards across the nation.
- **Single Apex Regulatory Body**
- A unified governance architecture designed to bring disparate educational domains under one regulatory umbrella. Instead of sector-specific councils, this single entity manages multiple verticals (such as funding, standard-setting, and accreditation) to reduce bureaucratic red tape and eliminate overlapping jurisdictions.
- **Graded Penalty System**
- A structured compliance enforcement mechanism introduced to penalize institutions based on the severity and nature of their regulatory violations. Rather than employing a one-size-fits-all punitive action, it outlines a progressive scale of financial penalties (potentially up to ₹75 lakh) or structural mandates, including the forced closure of non-compliant institutions.
- **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)**
- An ad-hoc committee consisting of Members of Parliament from both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. A JPC is specifically constituted to examine a particular bill, financial discrepancy, or policy matter in a highly detailed, non-partisan manner, inviting stakeholders to submit feedback before legislative finalization.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **The Core Thesis of Structural Overhaul**
- The fundamental objective driving the new legislative design is the consolidation of the higher education regulatory ecosystem. By repealing the foundational statutory Acts governing the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), the policy seeks to eliminate fragmented governance. The state's core argument is that a single apex authority will streamline operational approvals, institutionalise uniform quality metrics, and accelerate the realization of the goals outlined in contemporary national education policies.
- **The Institutional Counter-Argument: Autonomy under Threat**
- Premier institutions argue that standardisation should not come at the cost of academic and administrative exceptionalism. Leading technical and management institutes contend that their global prestige is directly linked to their freedom to design fast-evolving curricula, pioneer niche research, and launch modern online programmes without multi-layered bureaucratic clearing houses. The core apprehension is that a highly centralized structure will inevitably lead to administrative bottlenecks, slowing down institutional agility in a hyper-competitive global knowledge economy.
- **Sectoral Vulnerabilities and the Penalty Framework**
- A major point of contention is the uniform implementation of the graded penalty system. Diverse educational entities face unequal ground realities:
- **The Resource Gap:** Established metropolitan institutes possess the capital and infrastructure to navigate stringent standard audits easily.
- **Regional Disparities:** Emerging institutions in rural, tribal, or underserved regions face systemic challenges. For instance, the Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh points out that severe shortages in faculty recruitment often stem from geographical and structural isolation rather than institutional negligence. Penalizing these institutions on par with well-funded urban entities could inadvertently paralyze rural higher education.
- **Ambiguities in Regulatory Scope and Accreditation**
- Academic bodies have raised concerns regarding the logical consistency of the new architecture. Prestigious entities like IIT Bombay have questioned why critical professional fields like law and medicine are excluded from this unified framework while technical and management streams are heavily integrated. Furthermore, critics argue that a single, monolithic institutional accreditation body lacks the specialized tools required to evaluate the vastly different performance paradigms of standard state universities versus elite research-driven institutes.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Independence Foundation and Early Frameworks (1944–1947)**
- The structural institutionalisation of formal higher education governance in India can be traced back to the Sargent Report of 1944, which proposed the formation of a University Grants Committee. This early intervention recognized the need for state coordination in advanced learning, setting a precedent for centralized oversight while attempting to preserve the distinct character of individual university senates.
- **Post-Independence Consolidation and Sectoral Separation (1948–1980s)**
- **1948–49:** The University Education Commission, chaired by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, recommended the restructuring of higher education to meet the developmental demands of a newly independent nation. This directly culminated in the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) via an Act of Parliament in 1956, tasked with the determination and maintenance of standards in universities.
- **1964–66:** The Kothari Education Commission emphasized standardisation, equity, and access, which deeply influenced the first National Policy on Education in 1968.
- **1987:** The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) was granted statutory status to ensure coordinated development and proper planning of the technical education system, solidifying a fragmented, domain-specific regulatory model.
- **The Shift Toward Monolithic Regulation (2000s–2020)**
- As the number of private and public institutions grew exponentially, the limitations of overlapping regulatory domains became apparent.
- **2009:** The National Knowledge Commission and the Yash Pal Committee recommended dismantling the existing complex web of regulators (UGC, AICTE, etc.) in favor of a single, overarching regulatory body called the National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) to protect academic freedom from bureaucratic overreach.
- **2020:** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly advocated for the setting up of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as a single umbrella body with four distinct verticals for regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standard-setting.
- **The Present Milestone (2025–Present)**
- The introduction of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025, represents the legislative manifestation of these long-standing consolidation proposals. By moving under the scrutiny of a Joint Parliamentary Committee, the issue has entered its most critical phase, characterized by federal pushback from diverse states and institutional resistance from premier centers of excellence trying to preserve their legacy autonomy.


AXIA
IAS ACADEMY
RISE ABOVE THE REST
COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS:
VBSA BILL, 2025 PUSHBACK
FOR UPSC CSE PREPARATION
KEY TERMS
INIs
Definition: or in bwonisers in footed of elcotions (NIs)
VBSA Bill
VBSA Bill espars in AICTE consumating and ritandars.
Graded Penalty
Denitte penalty to one in sourse of mduired JPC
JPC
Definition to cers passesses to having demauittiess staffs
NCERT, UPSC SYLLABUS, PYQs
NCERT Linkages
Pol Science Cl 11: Federalism
Indian Economic Development Cl 11: Human Capital
GS Paper Mappings
GS 2: Governance, Education
GS 3: Economic Dev
GS 4: Ethics
Grouped PYQs
2020: Pd2, Paper 1
2020: Pd2, Paper 1
2022: GS12, PYQs
2023: GS12, PYQs
2024: GS14, Paper 1
2025: GS14, PYQs
PHILOSOPHICAL BASE
Centralization vs Pluralism
Managerial vs Autonomous Approaches
Federalism
CENTRALISED STANDARDS
VS
INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY
Repeals UGC/AICTE
• Unified checks
• Unified checks
Apprehensions:
• Curricular freedom
• graded penalties
HISTORICAL EVOLUTION
1944 Sargent
1948 Radhakrishnan
1956 UGC Statutory
1987 AICTE
2020 NEP/HECI
2025 VBSA
MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS
Social
• Key summary
• remotate summary
Political
• Key summary
• political and serecos
Legal
• Summary
• pelitical-ur sectors
Ethical
• Key summary
• curriculzed muratos
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WAY FORWARD
GRADED AUTONOMY
INDEPENDENT PANEL
CONTEXTUALIZED METRICS
PHILOSOPHICAL
Centralization vs Pluralism
Managerial vs Autonomous Approaches
Federalism
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Govt. amends rules to regulate drugs containing alcohol

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Aimed at strengthening regulatory control and preventing misuse of medicinal products with a high alcohol content, the Union Health Ministry has removed the exemption from licensing requirements for formulations containing more than 12% of ethyl alcohol.

In a release issued on Friday, the Ministry mandated that all formulations containing more than 12% v/v ethyl alcohol, in quantities exceeding 30 ml, shall no longer be covered under the exemption provided to them under Schedule K.

Consequently, such products will be required to obtain the requisite licences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

The amendment also shifts these products to Schedule H1 of the Drugs Rules, 1945, which mandates sale against the prescription of a registered medical practitioner and stricter record-keeping.

The release noted that certain medicinal products, including tinctures of cardamom, ginger, and other aromatic preparations, had been exempted from licensing requirements under Schedule K of the Drugs Rules, 1945.

The Health Ministry has flagged misuse of formulations with high alcohol content. FILE PHOTO

Susceptible to misuse

"Some of these formulations contain high concentrations of ethyl alcohol, in certain cases up to 80-90% v/v, making them susceptible to misuse for intoxication. References were also received from certain State governments in this regard," the Ministry said.

The amendment is expected to strengthen regulatory oversight over those medicinal products containing alcohol, ensuring their availability only through the regulated pharmaceutical supply chain.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940:** This is the umbrella legislation in India that regulates the import, manufacture, distribution, and sale of drugs and cosmetics. Its primary objective is to ensure that the drugs available to the public are safe, effective, and conform to prescribed quality standards. For example, any facility manufacturing medicines must comply with the Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) prescribed under this Act.
- **Drugs Rules, 1945:** Derived from the parental 1940 Act, these rules provide the framework for the day-to-day enforcement of drug regulations. They contain various schedules (from A to Y) that categorize drugs based on their storage, sale, display, and prescription requirements.
- **Schedule K of the Drugs Rules:** This specific schedule grants exemptions to certain classes of drugs from the stringent licensing requirements related to manufacture or sale. Historically, simple home remedies or traditional preparations—such as over-the-counter ointments, inhalers, or aromatic tinctures—were placed here so that rural and remote populations could buy them without needing a formal pharmacy setup or a doctor's prescription.
- **Schedule H1 of the Drugs Rules:** Introduced to curb the indiscriminate use and regular over-the-counter abuse of certain potent medications (like third-generation antibiotics, anti-tuberculosis drugs, and habit-forming habits), Schedule H1 mandates strict controls. A drug under this schedule can only be sold against a valid prescription from a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP). Furthermore, the pharmacist must maintain a separate register recording the patient's name, the doctor's details, and the exact quantity sold, preserving these logs for at least three years.
- **Ethyl Alcohol (v/v) Concentration:** The term "v/v" stands for volume/volume, indicating the percentage of pure ethyl alcohol present in the total volume of a liquid solution. For instance, a medicinal formulation with 12% v/v ethyl alcohol means every 100 ml of the medicine contains 12 ml of absolute alcohol. When this concentration climbs to 80-90% v/v in certain aromatic preparations (like ginger or cardamom tinctures), the liquid functionally approaches the potency of industrial spirits or strong liquor.
- **Tinctures and Aromatic Preparations:** These are traditional pharmaceutical solutions where the active therapeutic components of herbs or spices (like cardamom, ginger, or orange peel) are extracted and dissolved in a high-concentration alcohol base. While chemically designed to preserve and dissolve volatile plant oils, their high alcohol content makes them highly susceptible to non-therapeutic consumption.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The policy discourse surrounding the regulation of alcohol-bearing medicinal products highlights a critical tension between ensuring public health safety and maintaining the ease of doing business for authentic pharmaceutical players.
- **The Core Thesis**
- The central argument behind the tightening of regulations is that public health and social order are actively compromised when high-alcohol medicinal formulations escape standard licensing channels. By removing exemptions for large-volume, high-concentration alcohol preparations, administrative oversight aims to eliminate a loophole that allows medicines to be diverted as cheap, toxic substitutes for liquor.
- **Key Arguments and Supporting Evidence**
- **Closing Regulatory Loopholes:** For decades, traditional formulations like tinctures of ginger or cardamom enjoyed a free pass under Schedule K, allowing unchecked production and distribution. By stripping away this exemption for any product exceeding a 12% v/v alcohol threshold in volumes greater than 30 ml, the administration brings these vulnerable commodities under the strict radar of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
- **Escalating Public Abuse Concerns:** The rationale for this intervention is rooted in ground-level evidence. Reports from various state governments highlighted a trend: products with up to 80-90% v/v alcohol were being bought in bulk for recreational intoxication rather than health benefits. This trend was especially prevalent in regions with strict liquor prohibitions or among low-income communities seeking cheap alternatives to alcohol.
- **Mandating the Paper Trail via Schedule H1:** Shifting these preparations to Schedule H1 introduces a mandatory paper trail. By forcing buyers to present a doctor's prescription and requiring pharmacists to document the transaction, the policy adds a significant barrier to bulk, illicit purchases, ensuring that these items remain confined to legitimate medical supply chains.
- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The Pre-Independence Baseline (1940):** The enactment of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act in 1940 was primarily driven by the need to regulate sub-standard imported medicines and rudimentary local fabrications. At this stage, controls were elementary, focused mostly on basic chemical purity rather than granular socio-economic misuses like substance addiction.
- **Post-Independence Adaptations and the Birth of Exemptions (1945 onwards):** With the formulation of the Drugs Rules in 1945, the state recognized the vast, sprawling nature of rural India, where access to certified doctors was scarce. To prevent structural gridlock, **Schedule K** was designed as an administrative safety valve, allowing standard household remedies, traditional digestive aids, and aromatic tinctures to bypass the licensing labyrinth.
- **The Late 20th-Century Crisis of Diversion:** As state governments began experimenting with varying degrees of alcohol prohibition and high excise duties, a dark parallel market emerged. Cheap, mass-produced pharmaceutical tinctures, high-alcohol cough syrups (like those containing codeine), and spirit-based formulations became popular substitutes for illicit liquor, leading to sporadic local tragedies and public health warnings.
- **The Schedule H1 Intervention (2013):** Recognizing that the generic Schedule H list was too broad to halt the rapid spread of habit-forming drugs and multi-drug-resistant bacteria, the government carved out **Schedule H1 in 2013**. This created a high-security tier within retail pharmacy, introducing strict logbook mandates and explicit warnings on packaging.
- **The Current Correction:** The modern era marks a shift toward comprehensive supply-chain containment. Recognizing that local restrictions were insufficient to stop the misuse of high-alcohol tinctures, the central health ministry stepped in to strip away decades-old Schedule K exemptions. This move brings these products under the rigid prescription-only architecture of Schedule H1.

- **Way Forward**
- Addressing the misuse of high-alcohol medicinal products requires a balanced strategy that protects public health without hurting legitimate small businesses or cutting off access to traditional remedies.
- **Implementing End-to-End Digital Supply Chain Tracking:** Instead of relying entirely on physical paper logs under Schedule H1, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) should roll out a streamlined, mobile-friendly QR-code tracking system. Tracking bulk shipments of alcohol-heavy tinctures from the factory floor to the retail counter makes illicit diversion easily visible without burying small pharmacists under endless paperwork.
- **Strengthening Local Regulatory Teams:** The policy's success depends heavily on real-world enforcement. State governments need to invest in training and expanding their Drug Control departments, giving inspectors the tools and staffing they need to conduct regular, fair audits without resorting to arbitrary harassment.
- **Encouraging Safer Alternative Formulations:** The government should collaborate with institutions like the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) to help manufacturers develop alternative, water-based, or lower-alcohol extraction methods for traditional remedies. Providing subsidies or technical support to small companies making this shift can preserve the availability of these medicines while reducing the risk of abuse.
- **Launching Targeted Community Awareness Campaigns:** Regulatory bans work best when backed by public education. Launching clear, accessible awareness campaigns in vulnerable areas helps communities understand that consuming large amounts of medicinal tinctures is just as dangerous as drinking toxic, adulterated liquor.
- **Improving Coordination Between Excise and Drug Enforcement:** States should set up joint task forces that bring together Excise Officers and Drug Inspectors. Sharing information on unexpected spikes in tincture sales allows authorities to step in quickly, making sure that public health rules and state revenue protections work hand in hand.

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COMPREHENSIVE UPSC ANALYSIS: HIGH-ALCOHOL MEDICINE REGULATION

Decoding the Recent Government Amendment

1. THE PROBLEM: ABUSE & MISUSE (SUSCEPTIBLE TO MISUSE)

ABUSE

INTOXICATION

Tincture of Cardamom

HIGH ETHYL ALCOHOL % (e.g., 80-90% v/v)

Tincture of Ginger

- Traditional exemption under Schedule K for easy over-the-counter access.
- Misused as a cheap, potent substitute for alcohol in prohibition areas.
- Loss of regulatory oversight in illicit markets.

REGULATORY SHIFT

- Simple OTC Sale
- Large quantities allowed

SCHEDULE K: EXEMPTION

- Sale ONLY on RMP Prescription
- Strict Records Mandated

UNION HEALTH MINISTRY RULES AMENDED

SCHEDULE REGULATION

>30 ml quantities and >12% v/v ethyl alcohol were often exempted.

AMENDMENT REMOVES EXEMPTION FOR POTENT MEDICATIONS (>12% v/v & >30ml)

Tinctures of Cardamom, Ginger, and Aromatic preparations.

2. THE SOLUTION & GOALS: NEW MANDATES

LICENSING: OBTAIN REQUISITE LICENSES under Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 1940.

PRESCRIPTION: SALE AGAINST RMP PRESCRIPTION only.

RECORD-KEEPING: STRICTER RECORD-KEEPING & INVENTORY LOGS.

GOAL: SECURE SUPPLY CHAIN & PREVENT ILLICIT DIVERSION to improve public health.

One million women and girls lose access to support amid aid cuts: UN

Agence France Presse
GENEVA

The United Nations (UN) warned Friday that at least one million women and girls had lost access to vital support due to dramatic cuts to foreign aid spending since January 2025.

The UN Women agency decried a collapse of women's organisations at a time when needs are soaring.

U.S. President Donald Trump slashed foreign aid after taking office last year, while other key donor countries have also tightened their belts.

As a result, "at least one million women and girls affected by conflict and crisis have lost access to critical services and support", Sofia Calltorp, UN Women's head of humanitarian action, told reporters in Geneva.

Displaced Palestinian women and children gather to receive meals distributed by a charity kitchen in the Nuseirat camp in Gaza. AFP

"We know that this number... is just the tip of the iceberg," she said, describing the findings in a new report as "deeply disturbing".

Speaking from Stockholm, she highlighted that the women's organisations at risk of being shut down "work on the frontlines of the world's most complex and dangerous crises", in places like Afghanistan, Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Yemen.

"Every dollar withdrawn from women's organisations is a dollar withdrawn from survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, displaced mothers, girls forced from school, and communities struggling to survive," she said.

With armed conflicts at their highest levels since World War II, around 120 million women and girls require humanitarian assistance and protection, UN Women said.

Its report, based on responses from 855 women-led and women's rights organisations across 52 crisis-affected countries, found that 84% of the groups had seen demand for their services increase since January 2025.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Humanitarian Aid and Foreign Assistance:** This refers to the voluntary transfer of resources—including financial capital, medical supplies, food, and technical expertise—from developed donor nations or international bodies to crisis-afflicted regions. Unlike long-term development aid, its primary objective is short-term life-saving and the alleviation of immediate suffering. For example, emergency funding sent to conflict zones to establish community kitchens or field hospitals falls under this category.
- **Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV):** This term encompasses incidents of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity inflicted upon women, men, or children, directly or indirectly linked to a political conflict. In war-torn regions like eastern Congo or Sudan, CRSV is frequently weaponized by armed factions to destabilize communities and destabilize social cohesion.
- **Women-Led and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs):** These are civil society groups and non-governmental organizations where women hold primary leadership roles, focusing on advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's rights. At the grassroots level in crisis zones, these organizations operate as essential frontlines, offering safe spaces, legal counseling, and maternal health services that large, bureaucratic international agencies often struggle to deliver directly.
- **The "Tip of the Iceberg" Metric:** An analytical concept used in humanitarian reporting to signify that documented data represents only a fraction of a much larger, systemic problem. In data collection across volatile regions, a reported figure of one million individuals losing aid represents only the visible, quantifiable demographic, while millions more remain uncounted due to communication blackouts and operational collapse.
- **Gender Mainstreaming in Humanitarian Action:** The strategic process of assessing the distinct implications for women and men of any planned public action, including legislation or funding allocation. It ensures that the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls—such as menstrual hygiene, maternal health, and protection from gender-based violence—are integrated into the foundational design of displacement camps and aid distribution networks.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The geopolitical shifts in funding highlight a critical mismatch between escalating global crises and retreating international solidarity. The core problem centers on the severe consequences that follow when major world powers reduce their foreign aid budgets.
- **The Core Thesis**
- The sudden retraction of international humanitarian funding by major donor states triggers a disproportionate, cascading collapse of local women's protection networks. This occurs precisely when global armed conflicts have escalated to heights not seen since the Second World War, leaving millions of women and girls isolated facing systemic violence, displacement, and deprivation.
- **Key Supporting Arguments**
- **The Asymmetry of Demand and Supply:** While nearly 120 million women and girls globally are trapped in environments requiring urgent humanitarian protection, the financial resources dedicated to them are being sharply reduced. Data collected from hundreds of women-led groups across more than 50 crisis-hit nations reveals that over 80% experienced an immediate surge in demand for services just as their funding streams were cut.
- **The Strategic Value of Localized Relief:** Grassroots women's organizations operate on the frontlines of the world's most dangerous flashpoints, including Afghanistan, Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen. Withdrawing financial support from these entities does not simply reduce a budget line; it immediately shuts down targeted services like trauma counseling for survivors of sexual violence and protection mechanisms for displaced mothers.
- **The Domino Effect on Human Capital:** The withdrawal of foreign aid triggers a chain reaction across multiple developmental sectors. When a protection program loses funding, young girls are pushed out of schools, rates of forced child marriages rise as a survival strategy, and maternal mortality rates climb due to the absence of secure birthing centers in displacement camps.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- The relationship between international foreign aid, conflict resolution, and gender protection has evolved considerably over the last eight decades, moving from basic charity to a structured, human-rights-based framework.
- **The Post-WWII and Cold War Era (1945–1989)**
- The modern architecture of foreign aid emerged alongside the United Nations and the Marshall Plan. During this period, humanitarian assistance was heavily state-centric and driven by geopolitical alignments. Aid was primarily viewed through the lens of food drops and infrastructure reconstruction. Women and girls were largely treated as passive recipients of charity rather than active agents of change, and the distinct gendered impacts of warfare were rarely factored into global policy.
- **The Paradigm Shift and Gender Mainstreaming (1990–2000)**
- The end of the Cold War allowed the international community to re-evaluate human security. The turning point arrived with the **Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995)**, which formally introduced "gender mainstreaming" into global governance. Shortly after, in 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed **Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)**. This historic resolution officially acknowledged that war impacts women differently and mandated their inclusion in peace negotiations and humanitarian design.
- **The Era of Localized Aid and the "Grand Bargain" (2001–2019)**
- The influx of aid during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighted the limitations of massive international NGOs that lacked local trust. At the **World Humanitarian Summit in 2016**, the global community signed the "Grand Bargain," committing to direct a significant portion of humanitarian funding straight to local and national responders. Grassroots women-led organizations were recognized as the most efficient and culturally competent actors for managing resources in volatile areas.
- **The Present Crisis of Retreat and Austerity (2020s–Present)**
- The current era is marked by a resurgence of fiscal nationalism, domestic economic pressures within donor states, and shifting political leadership among major global powers. The convergence of post-pandemic inflation and isolationist foreign policies has led major donor nations to reduce their foreign aid allocations. This retreat coincides with a sharp increase in protracted conflicts across Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa, rolling back decades of hard-won progress in global gender justice.

- **Way Forward**
- **Diversification of the Donor Pool (De-risking Aid Monopolies):** The global humanitarian framework must reduce its dependency on a small number of Western nations. Emerging economies within the global south, including the expanded BRICS+ grouping, sovereign wealth funds, and major philanthropic foundations, should establish a joint Global South Humanitarian Fund to insulate relief work from domestic political shifts in traditional donor states.
- **Institutionalization of Direct Funding (The Localization Mandate):** International bodies must legally commit to channeling a fixed, non-divertable minimum percentage (e.g., 30%) of all humanitarian aid directly to local, grassroots, women-led organizations. This approach eliminates expensive international intermediary bureaucracies and ensures funds reach the frontline actors who possess the necessary local trust and access.

GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN FUNDING: SHIFTS, IMPACTS & A WAY FORWARD

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KEY CONCEPTS & CORE THESIS

humanitarian Aid vs Foreign Assistance

VS

Emergency Life-Saving

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)

Linked to unstable environments not held.

Weapon of War

Women-Led & Women's Rights Orgs (WROs)

Frontline Responders

THE CORE THESIS

RETRACTION OF FUNDING TRIGGERS CASCADING COLLAPSE COLLAPSE OF WOMEN'S PROTECTION NETWORKS AMIDST ESCALATING GLOBAL CONFLICT.

'Tip of the Iceberg' Metric: documented data

systemic problems & uncounted millions

Gender Mainstreaming

Displacement camp

Displacement camp

Maternal centers

Menstrual hygiene hygiene facilities

Integrated Protection

THE CORE PROBLEM & CASCADING IMPACTS

Geopolitical Shifts / Fiscal Cuts by Donors

↓

Rapid Funding Shortfalls in UN & INGOs

↓

Operational Collapse of Grassroots WROs

↓

Compounded Vulnerabilities

Demand vs. Supply

>80% experience surge in demand

Resources Reducing

Vulnerable Population increasing

>60% experience surge in demand is while (~120m Women & Girls)

EVOLUTION & MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

Post-WWII & Cold War (1945-1989)	Paradigm Shift & Gender Mainstreaming (1990-2000)	Localized Aid & "Grand Bargain" (2001-2019)	Present Crisis (2020s+)
State-centric aid, passive recipients	Beijing (women icon); 1995 UN Res 1325	WROs Recognized	Retreat, Austerity, Isolationism

CRISIS DIMENSIONS

SOCIAL — Soaring Child Marriage & Literary Dropouts

POLITICAL — Leadership Vacuum & Rise of Extremism

LEGAL — Impunity & Culture of Impunity

LEGAL — Impunity & Culture of Impunity

ETHICAL — Universal Obligations vs domestic priorities

INTERNATIONAL

Fragile UN Systems & Shifting Policies

Development Stalls & Post-Conflict Recovery Decay

PHILOSOPHICAL BASE & SYLLABUS LINKS

Deontology vs. Utilitarianism

(Duty-Based) Deontology	(Outcome-Based) Utilitarianism
Universal Moral Imperative	Highest Net Benefit (community survival)

Realist Approach to Aid	Liberal Internationalist

Feature	Realist	Liberal
Realist		
Approach		

UPSC & NCERT CONNECTIONS

GS PAPER 1	Society	Women's Empowerment, Globalization
GS PAPER 2	Polity	IR, UN Multilateralism, NGO Governance
GS PAPER 3	Security	Non-Traditional Security, Post-Conflict Stability
GS PAPER 4	Ethics	Ethical Dimensions, Global Morality

NCERT Connections

XII Pol Sci (Human Security)	XI Pol Sci (Justice)	XII Soc (Social Change)

THE WAY FORWARD: BUILDING RESILIENCE

DIVERSIFY DONOR POOL

Global South Fund (e.g., BRICS+), de-risk monopolies

INSTITUTIONALIZE DIRECT FUNDING

The Localization Mandate: ~30% for local WROs

TRANSITION TO MULTI-YEAR, FLEXIBLE COMMITMENTS

Calendar core funding, sustain staff & programs

INDEPENDENT MULTILATERAL REVENUE STREAMS

CARBON

UN micro-levies, global taxes (digital/carbon)

Suspend, not remove, high functionaries after 30 days in jail: parliamentary panel

Draft report backs objective of preventing 'governance from jail', but seeks to dilute the Bill's arrest-based trigger, which can unseat a PM, CM or Minister; panel records concern that mechanism could be misused against Opposition leaders; most BJP rivals have boycotted the joint committee

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

A Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill has recommended replacing the provision for automatic "removal" of a Prime Minister, Chief Minister or Minister after 30 consecutive days in judicial custody with "suspension", though the immediate consequence in both cases would be that the public functionary demits office.

Most Opposition parties, arguing that the Bill was driven by "malicious intent", had declined to join the panel headed by BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi.

The proposed constitutional amendment seeks to address what the government describes as a vacuum in cases where public functionaries continue in office during prolonged incarceration.

The panel has made five recommendations. These include replacing the Bill's provisions for a Minister's "removal" or requirement to "cease to be a Minister" with "suspension". The recommendation follows submissions from stakeholders that terms such as "removed" and "shall cease to be a Minister" carried "an unwarranted air of finality and stigma". By contrast, suspension is seen as a reversible measure, akin to service rules that place government employees under suspension after prolonged detention without presuming guilt.

Constitution silent

The committee has also recommended defining "serious criminal offences" as offences punishable with imprisonment of five years or more. It proposed an automatic reversal clause under which suspension would lapse upon discharge, acquittal, or failure of the prosecution to proceed within a specified period.

The panel called for fast-track courts to hear cases involving high constitutional functionaries and for a separate schedule listing offences that would attract the proposed provisions.

According to the committee's draft report, there was broad agreement among stakeholders that the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, are presently silent on the consequences of a sitting Prime Minister, Chief Minister, or Minister being arrested and held in custody on serious criminal charges.

However, the report notes that the sharpest disagreements centred on the mechanism chosen by the Bill rather than its objective. "Notably, even within the supportive cluster, no stakeholder defended the Bill's present formulation without qualification; and even within the critical cluster, no stakeholder rejected the legislative objective itself," the report says. "The disagreement lies overwhelmingly in the design of the trigger mechanism and the safeguards attending it, not in the underlying policy goal."

The Union Home Ministry, the Ministry of Law and Justice, the 23rd Law Commission, and the State governments of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh have broadly supported the Bill, treating it as a legitimate and overdue constitutional response to "governance from jail" and as an extension of constitutional morality.

Joint Parliamentary Committee chairperson Aparajita Sarangi (centre) addressing a press conference in New Delhi in June. PTI

Problematic clause

The most contested provision was the Bill's trigger mechanism, under which a public functionary would automatically lose office after spending 30 continuous days in custody in connection with offences punishable with five years' imprisonment or more.

The report says that "an overwhelming majority of stakeholders", including institutions otherwise supportive of the legislation, found the trigger constitutionally problematic because it was not linked to any judicial finding of guilt.

It notes that law universities, civil society organisations, and political parties repeatedly argued that arrest is "an executive/procedural device" and "is not a judicial determination of guilt". Consequently, attaching constitutional consequences to custody rather than conviction or even trial "risks treating an unproven accusation as a *de facto* disqualification".

Several institutions, including NALSAR, Hyderabad; National Law University, Delhi; West Bengal National University of Juridical Science, Kolkata; and the Association for Democratic Reforms proposed shifting the trigger to the stage of framing of charges by a court.

Several stakeholders argued that the five-year threshold was "poorly calibrated" and inconsistent with other laws that use a seven-year threshold for serious offences. Some pointed out that the provision could cover more than 140 offences, many of which have no direct connection with probity in public life.

The committee rejected the demand to raise the threshold to seven years but recommended a separate schedule of offences punishable with five years or more in prison.

The panel also recorded concerns that the mechanism could be misused against non-BJP-ruled States through the actions of Central investigative agencies.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill:** A proposed legislative measure aimed at filling a distinct constitutional lacuna. It seeks to establish clear legal consequences for high public functionaries—specifically the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, or Ministers—who face prolonged detention while in office.
- **Governance from Jail:** A constitutional anomaly where an elected executive attempts to run the day-to-day administration, chair cabinet meetings, and clear official files while being held inside a correctional facility.
- **Suspension vs. Removal:**
    - **Removal** implies a final, irreversible termination of office, which carries an inherent social and political stigma.
    - **Suspension** acts as a temporary, reversible holding pattern. It mirrors civil service regulations by temporarily divesting a public servant of their official duties during an ongoing investigation, notably without presuming their ultimate guilt.
- **Judicial Custody vs. Police Custody:** Police custody involves an accused being held in a police station for interrogation. Judicial custody means the accused is under the direct purview of a magistrate and housed in a central or district jail, signaling that a court has found prima facie reason to prolong their detention.
- **Constitutional Morality:** A philosophical concept popularized by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It dictates that governance must be guided not just by the literal text of the Constitution, but by its underlying spirit, democratic ethics, institutional propriety, and healthy conventions.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The debate centers on a delicate constitutional tightrope: maintaining administrative probity without weaponizing the state's investigative machinery against political adversaries.
- **The Core Thesis**
- The central objective of the proposed legislative framework is to prevent the paralysis of governance that occurs when a high functionary is incarcerated. However, the mechanism chosen to achieve this must not trample upon the fundamental principles of criminal jurisprudence or disrupt the democratic mandate.
- **The Automative Trigger and the JPC's Shift**
- **The Original Proposal:** The initial draft proposed that any Minister, CM, or PM would automatically lose their office if they spent 30 consecutive days in judicial custody for an offense carrying a prison sentence of five years or more.
- **The Committee’s Correction:** A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) intervened, advocating that "removal" be replaced with "suspension." The panel argued that outright removal carries an unwarranted stamp of finality and presumes guilt before a formal trial concludes.
- **The Reversal Clause:** To safeguard the rights of the accused leader, the JPC recommended an automatic reversal mechanism. If the leader is acquitted, discharged, or if the prosecution fails to proceed within a stipulated period, the suspension immediately lapses, restoring them to office.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The Framing Era (Pre-Independence to 1950):** The framers of the Indian Constitution chose to remain silent on the specific consequences of a sitting Minister or Chief Minister being arrested. They operated under the assumption that healthy democratic conventions would prevail—meaning a leader would voluntarily resign out of moral propriety if faced with serious, credible criminal charges.
- **The Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951:** Section 8 of the RPA established clear rules for the disqualification of Members of Parliament and State Assemblies. However, it focused entirely on *conviction*. The law created a protective shield for sitting legislators, allowing them to retain their seats while appeals were pending.
- **The Lily Thomas Landmark (2013):** The Supreme Court of India struck down Section 8(4) of the RPA, ruling that sitting MPs and MLAs would face immediate disqualification the moment they were convicted of an offense with a prison term of two years or more. While this sanitized legislatures to an extent, it still did not address the issue of unconvicted leaders held in prolonged pre-trial custody.
- **The Modern Conundrum:** In recent years, political dynamics have shifted. Incarcerated leaders have chosen to retain their executive posts while in jail, creating an administrative vacuum. This has forced the legislature to consider amending the Constitution itself to mandate an exit or suspension pathway.

- **Way Forward**
- **Shifting the Trigger to Judicial Action:** Rather than tying suspension to an executive arrest, the law should ideally be triggered when a competent court **frames formal charges** after evaluating the prima facie evidence. This introduces a vital layer of judicial vetting.
- **Carving Out a Specific Schedule of Offenses:** The blanket five-year threshold should be replaced with a precise schedule of offenses. The law should specifically target economic offenses, corruption under the Prevention of Corruption Act, money laundering, and serious offenses against the state, while excluding minor administrative infractions.
- **Mandating Fast-Track Adjudication:** To prevent the indefinite suspension of an elected leader, a strict statutory timeline (e.g., 60 to 90 days) must be mandated for fast-track courts to resolve the bail or trial stages for high constitutional functionaries.
- **Codifying Interim Delegations of Power:** The law should clearly outline a temporary delegation mechanism. If a Chief Minister is suspended due to judicial custody, their administrative powers should automatically devolve to a designated Deputy CM or a senior cabinet committee, ensuring that governance never grinds to a halt.

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AXIA IAS ACADEMY: ANALYSIS ON EXECUTIVE TENURE & INCARCERATION

KEY TERMS & EXPLANATIONS

- **The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill**
  Proposal to set consequences of sobritire constitution for for nonrcoraticat for emoposes
- **Governance from Jail**
  Constitutional anomaly to comparitison with constitutional diseculter

Removal vs. Suspension

STOP vs.

Permanent stop sign	Temporary pause button
Holding pattern definition in sating pattern	Holding pattern definitiom noting pattern

Judicial Custody vs. Police Custody

Definition anomaly definitions for expericence of **central jails**

Central Jail | Lock-up

VS.

Constitutional Morality

THE CORE DEBATE & JPC SHIFT

Incarcerated Executive

- Empty chair
- Blocked files

Original Proposal

- **Automatic Removal**
- 5 yrs+ sentence offense

Presumptions of Guilt, Finality

Committee Correction

- **Recommended Suspension**
- Temporary divestment of duties

Reversal mechanism: Acquittal restores them to office

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

- **Pre-Independence to 1950**
  Framers: Conventions
- **1951: Passing of the RPA**
  Section 8, Vacuum for sitters
- **2013: Lily Thomas Judgment**
  Immediate disqualification on conviction
- **Present Day: The 130th Amendment Bill**
  Shift to Incarcerated Executives

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

LEGAL

- **SOCIAL**
  Public confidence erosion disruption
- **POLITICAL**
  Weaponization of agencies, state destabilization
- **ECONOMIC**
  Mature democracy perception, rule of law indices
- **INTERNATIONAL**
- Articles 75/164, Probity in governance, vs. impartial duties compromised

WAY FORWARD

Solution Framework

1. **Shifting trigger to judicial action** (framing charges)
2. **Carving specific schedule of offenses** (corruption, ML, not traid, not minor)
3. **Mandating fast-track adjudication** (strict timelines)
4. **Codifying interim delegations** (Deputy CM/cabinet committee)

NCERT & SYLLABUS LINKAGES
Class XI/XII chapters, GS Papers 2, 4, Essay

PYQs & PRACTICE QUESTIONS
Illustrative questions on Lily Thomas case and probity

PM's New Zealand visit will unlock new avenues of cooperation: govt.

Press Trust of India
AUCKLAND

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday arrived in New Zealand on the final leg of his three-nation visit.

He will hold talks with his counterpart Christopher Luxon and address the Indian diaspora in New Zealand.

Mr. Luxon received Mr. Modi at the airport. "This visit is historic, being the first Prime Ministerial visit to New Zealand in four decades. I look forward to holding talks with Prime Minister Luxon and discussing the complete range of the India-NZ friendship," Mr. Modi said in a post on X.

Boosting trade ties

During his two-day visit, he will hold talks with Mr. Luxon on ways to enhance economic, trade and commercial engagements.

In a post on X, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said: "This historic visit is set to strengthen bilateral ties and unlock new avenues of cooperation across several areas especially trade, defence, sports, culture, education, and people-to-people exchanges."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his New Zealand counterpart Christopher Luxon at the Auckland airport on Friday. ANI

Mr. Modi arrived in New Zealand after concluding a three-day visit to Australia, where he held summit talks with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Both leaders reinforced the vital role of the bilateral partnership in ensuring a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

A major highlight of the summit talks between the two leaders was their focus on significantly ramping up defence ties, especially in the maritime domain. An agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel New Delhi's nuclear power projects was sealed after over two years of negotiations.

He also met Australia's Leader of the Opposition Angus Taylor on Friday and discussed bilateral ties.

Mr. Modi was in Indonesia before that, where 14 agreements were inked to boost cooperation in critical minerals, maritime security, and other key sectors.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Indo-Pacific Region**
- This term defines a unified geopolitical and strategic space combining the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Rather than treating these maritime zones as separate entities, it recognizes their economic and security interconnectedness. For instance, a disruption in the Strait of Malacca impacts energy flows to East Asia and commercial trade moving toward India and Europe simultaneously.
- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation & Uranium Supply**
- This framework allows nations to exchange nuclear material, technology, and equipment strictly for peaceful energy production under international oversight. For India, a country that maintains a distinct separation between its civilian and military nuclear facilities, receiving uranium from international resource rich-partners ensures a steady fuel supply for its commercial nuclear reactors, directly supporting clean energy targets.
- **Critical Minerals**
- These are metallic or non-metallic elements essential for modern technologies, green energy transitions, and national defense, yet face significant supply chain vulnerabilities. Examples include lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements. Securing access to these minerals is foundational for domestic manufacturing of electric vehicle batteries, solar panels, and advanced electronics.
- **Diaspora Diplomacy**
- This strategy involves a nation engaging actively with its overseas community to further its foreign policy goals, economic interests, and soft power presence. The thriving Indian community in Oceania acts as a living bridge, facilitating bilateral investments, technological collaborations, and generating geopolitical goodwill in host countries.
- **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)**
- MDA refers to the effective understanding of anything associated with the global maritime environment that could impact security, safety, the economy, or the environment. Practically, it involves sharing real-time tracking data of commercial and non-commercial vessels to counter piracy, illegal fishing, and unauthorized maritime deployments in shared ocean spaces.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **Deepening the Maritime Anchor in the Indo-Pacific**
- The core strategic focus rests on reinforcing a rules-based order across the Indo-Pacific corridor. By expanding defense ties with key regional players, India aims to create a robust network of maritime security partnerships. The emphasis on the maritime domain highlights a shared anxiety regarding unilateral assertions over global sea lanes, making collective vigilance and intelligence sharing a priority.
- **Resource Diversification as Strategic Resilience**
- Securing energy and technological manufacturing inputs underpins these diplomatic engagements. Finalizing long-negotiated civil nuclear agreements for uranium supply allows India to scale up its clean energy capacity without expanding its carbon footprint. Simultaneously, ink-signed pacts focusing on critical minerals insulate India’s domestic industries from global supply shocks and monopsonistic vulnerabilities.
- **Revitalizing Neglected Bilateral Vectors**
- True comprehensive diplomacy requires closing long-standing gaps in bilateral engagement. Revitalizing relationships that have experienced multi-decade lulls in high-level visits demonstrates a conscious effort to convert latent goodwill into active commercial partnerships. This involves moving beyond traditional trade parameters to embrace digital technology, sports education, and institutional agricultural cooperation.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The Post-Colonial and Cold War Inertia**
- During the immediate decades following independence, India’s relations with the Oceania region and parts of Southeast Asia remained warm but strategically limited. While sharing a common Commonwealth heritage and parliamentary traditions, the ideological realities of the Cold War created structural distance. India’s commitment to Non-Alignment stood in contrast to the rigid Western alignment of traditional Pacific powers, resulting in long periods of diplomatic stagnation where top-level interactions were sporadic.
- **The Post-1991 Economic Pivot and 'Look East'**
- The launch of India’s 'Look East' policy in 1991 marked a fundamental shift, driven by domestic economic reforms and the collapse of the Soviet Union. India recognized the need to integrate its economy with the fast-growing markets of Southeast Asia and the wider Pacific. Over the next two decades, this resulted in sectoral dialogue partnerships, free trade agreements, and early-stage defense cooperation, setting the stage for deeper regional engagement.
- **The Modern Transformation: 'Act East' and the Indo-Pacific Paradigm**
- Since 2014, this policy has transitioned into a more proactive 'Act East' posture, occurring alongside the formalization of the Indo-Pacific strategic framework. The modern era features a dense network of bilateral partnerships alongside minilateral groupings like the Quad. The focus has moved from standard trade exchanges to highly strategic sectors, including critical mineral supply chain security, advanced maritime domain awareness, and deep civil nuclear cooperation.

- **Way Forward**
- **Establishing Structured Annual Dialogues**
- To ensure long-term stability and momentum, high-level diplomatic interactions should be insulated from political scheduling conflicts. Moving away from irregular visits toward a predictable, institutionalized annual summit framework creates sustained bureaucratic momentum, ensuring that joint working groups meet their targets on time.
- **Accelerating Trade Agreement Frameworks**
- While strategic and defense ties have advanced rapidly, economic negotiations can sometimes lag due to domestic protectionist concerns. Establishing balanced, high-standard Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements that protect sensitive domestic sectors while offering meaningful market access for services and high-tech collaborations remains a priority.
- **Building Joint Resource Infrastructure**
- Signing agreements is a vital first step, but the real benefit comes from operationalizing them on the ground. India should encourage public-private partnerships to invest directly in joint exploration, mining, and processing facilities for critical minerals in partner nations, securing long-term supply lines for its domestic green transition.
- **Expanding Maritime Domain Intelligence Networks**
- To build a safer maritime environment, look to expand shared tracking networks. Integrating white shipping information, connecting naval fusion centers, and conducting regular joint patrols in critical sea lanes will build real-world interoperability and safeguard the global maritime commons.

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INDIA'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW

KEY TERMS & EXPLANATIONS

- INDO-PACIFIC REGION
- CIVIL NUCLEAR & URANIUM SUPPLY
- CRITICAL MINERALS
  - Rare earth elements
- DIASPORA DIPLOMACY
- MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS (MDA)

MAIN ARGUMENTS & SUBSTANTIVE PARTS

Deepening Maritime Anchor
- Rules-based order
- Security partnerships
- Maritimemmons vigilance

Resource Diversification
- Energy security
- Civil nuclear agreements
- Critical minerals supply chains

Revitalizing Bilateral Vectors
- Closing engagement gaps
- Modern technology
- Agriculture

PHILOSOPHICAL & LOGICAL BASE

- Realism & Balance of Power
- Strategic Autonomy through Diversification

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Pre-1990s: Post-Colonial Divergence
- Common heritage but strategic distance

1991-2014: Look East Policy
- Economic liberalization

2014-Present: Act East Policy
- Strategic convergence
- Critical resources
- Quad

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

India in Indo-Pacific

- **POLITICAL**: Diplomatic regularization, Bipartisan consensus
- **SOCIAL**: Diaspora, Cultural ties
- **LEGAL**: IAEA safeguards, UNCLOS
- **ECONOMIC**: Critical inputs, High-tech manufacturing
- **ETHICAL**: Environmental imperative, democratic global commons
- **INTERNATIONAL**: ASEAN centrality, Multipole diplomacy

PREVIOUS YEARS' UPSC & APSC QUESTIONS

- ASEAN partners
- Quad significance
- Nuclear power constraints
- Act East relevance
- Net security provider

EDUCATIONAL LINKAGES

NCERT LINKAGES (Class 12): Contemporary World Politics & India - People and Economy
- Alternative Centres of Power
- Energy Security
- International Trade

UPSC CSE SYLLABUS LINKAGES:
- GS Paper 2 (International Relations)
- GS Paper 3 (Economy, Security, Science & Technology)
- Essay & Optional Subjects

WAY FORWARD

Prioritised steps in howing:

- Structured Annual Dialogues
- Accelerating Trade Agreement Frameworks (CECA)
- Building Joint Resource Infrastructure
- Expanding Maritime Intelligence Networks

Govt. defends E20, admits mileage may drop by 3-5%

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

While admitting that E20-blended fuel could result in a 3%-5% reduction in the fuel economy of "some vehicles", the government has sought to explain why the blended fuel is not currently cheaper than pure petrol or fuel with lower ethanol levels.

The core reason, it said, was that the government is seeking to compensate farmers adequately, and so E20 fuel becomes relatively more expensive to produce than pure petrol whenever oil prices fall to around $70 a barrel.

This statement, issued on Friday as an FAQ document by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, comes at a time when critics are questioning why fuel with 20% ethanol is not cheaper than pure petrol or fuel with 10% ethanol.

The document added that E20 fuel has a higher-octane rating and provides several other vehicular and emission-related advantages over unblended fuel.

"It is true that in some vehicles there may be a 3-5% reduction in fuel economy," the Ministry said. "But mileage is only one parameter. E20 offers a significantly higher-octane rating, superior anti-knock characteristics, faster combustion, better pickup, smoother acceleration and cleaner engine operation."

"It produces negligible particulate emissions and substantially reduces lifecycle carbon emissions by around 40%," it added.

"Today, the government purchases ethanol at remunerative prices so that Indian farmers are fairly compensated," it said. "Take maize-based ethanol. We have progressively increased its procurement price and today it is around ₹71.86 per litre, even before GST, transportation, storage and depot handling costs." "Therefore, if international crude oil is trading at around $70 per barrel, E20 is actually costlier to produce than pure petrol," the government explained.

Youth Congress workers protest in Delhi on Friday against the Centre's E20 fuel policy. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

However, it added that the price advantage of ethanol kicks in when crude oil prices reach $120-130 per barrel, as the economics naturally reverse and ethanol becomes even cheaper.

The fact that 20% of the fuel sold in India is ethanol has also insulated the Indian market against global oil price volatility and allowed the Indian government to pass on much lower fuel price hikes than in comparable nations.

Overall, the government also sought to assure the public that the decision to move to ethanol-blended fuel was not a "rushed" one.

"This has been a journey spanning over two decades from pilot projects in 2001, policy notification in 2013, institutional reforms after 2018, massive investments beginning in 2021, and then a carefully calibrated, phased increase in blending levels," the document said.

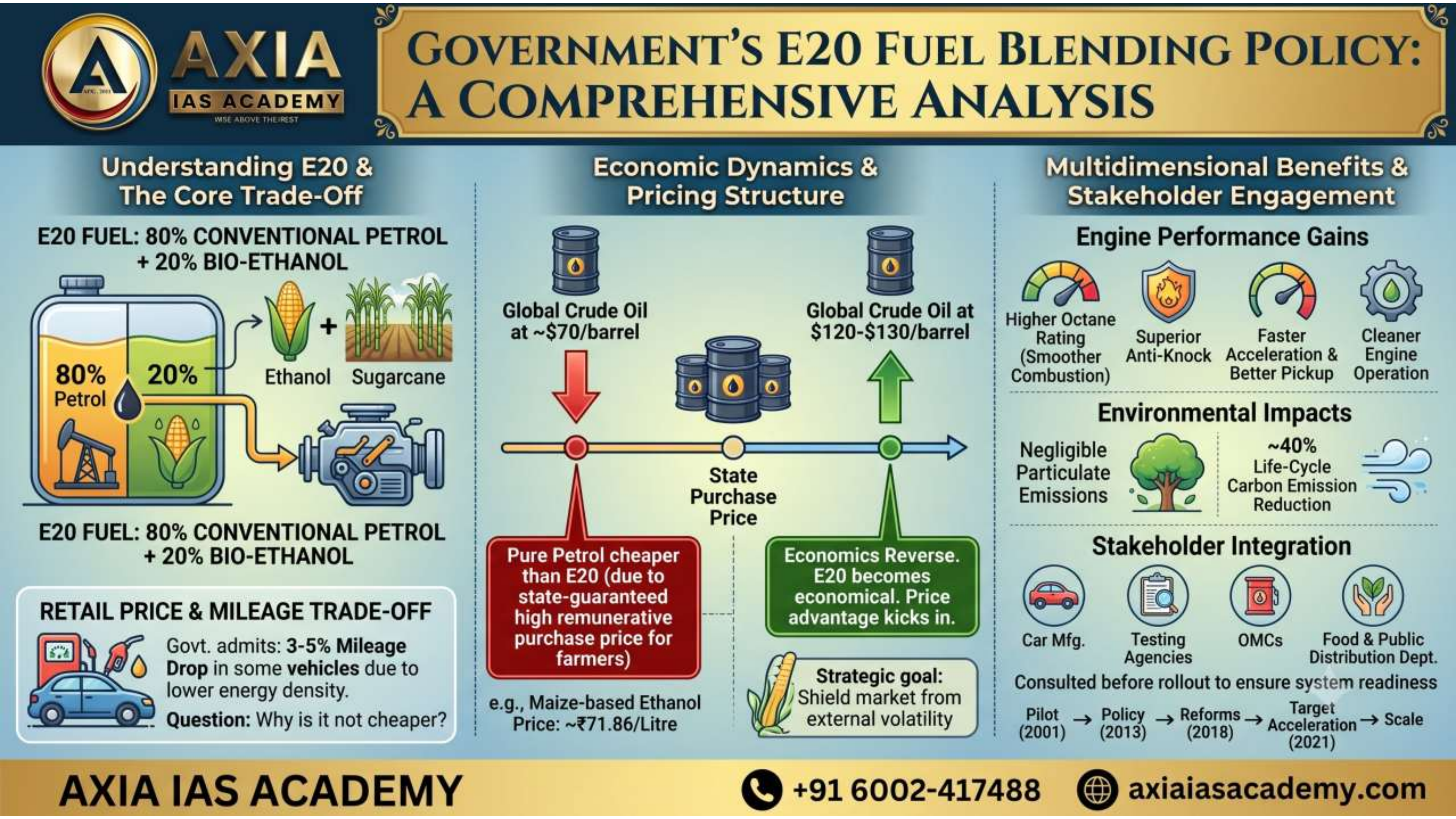
The document added that all stakeholders, including automobile manufacturing companies, testing agencies, oil marketing companies, and the Department of Food and Public Distribution, were consulted before rollout.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Ethanol Blending Program (EBP)**
- A strategic national initiative aimed at mixing bio-ethanol with conventional petrol. The primary goals are to curb India's massive crude oil import bills, reduce environmental pollution, and provide an alternative remunerative market for surplus agricultural produce.
- **E20 Fuel**
- A specialized fuel blend consisting of 20% ethanol and 80% conventional petrol. For example, in a single liter of E20 fuel, 200 milliliters is plant-derived bio-ethanol, while the remaining 800 milliliters is petroleum-based petrol. It represents a significant step up from lower blends like E10.
- **Octane Rating**
- A standard measure of a fuel’s capability to withstand compression within an internal combustion engine cylinder before detonating. A higher octane rating implies the fuel can endure higher compression, ensuring smoother, controlled combustion and minimizing engine knocking.
- **Anti-Knock Characteristics**
- Properties inherent in a fuel that prevent premature, uneven ignition of the fuel-air mixture. Premature detonation causes "knocking," which can severely damage engine components over time. Enhanced anti-knock traits ensure uniform energy release and prolonged engine life.
- **Life-Cycle Carbon Emissions**
- The comprehensive assessment of total greenhouse gas emissions generated across a product's entire lifespan. In the context of biofuels, this covers everything from agricultural cultivation, harvesting, and transport to industrial distillation and final vehicular tailpipe combustion.
- **Remunerative Pricing**
- A regulated financial mechanism where the state sets guaranteed purchase prices for raw materials or intermediate goods to safeguard producers from market volatility. For instance, setting fixed procurement prices for maize-based or sugarcane-based ethanol ensures that farmers recover their input costs and maintain profit margins regardless of global energy price drops.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **The Retail Price and Mileage Trade-Off**
- A core issue surrounding the adoption of E20 fuel is the noticeable 3% to 5% reduction in vehicular fuel economy. Because ethanol has lower energy density than pure petrol, vehicles consume slightly more fuel to cover the same distance. Concurrently, consumers often wonder why E20 is not priced significantly cheaper than pure petrol at the pump, given its renewable domestic origin.
- **The Cost Dynamics of Domestic Procurement**
- The underlying reason E20 is not cheaper than pure petrol when global crude oil prices hover around $70 per barrel rests on domestic agricultural support. The production cost of ethanol is deliberately kept elevated because the state purchases it at premium, remunerative rates—such as pricing maize-based ethanol at approximately ₹71.86 per liter before accounting for GST, transportation, and depot handling. Consequently, when international crude prices are moderate, producing E20 is actually more expensive than refining pure petroleum. The economic advantage of ethanol blending only fully materializes when global crude prices spike to the $120–$130 per barrel range.
- **Microeconomic Cost vs. Macroeconomic Cushioning**
- While individual consumers face a marginal drop in mileage, the policy serves as a macroeconomic shock absorber. By anchoring a fixed portion of the national fuel supply to domestic agriculture, the domestic energy market is insulated against wild fluctuations in global oil markets. This structural buffer allows the government to mitigate extreme retail price shocks during geopolitical crises, protecting the broader economy.
- **Environmental Gains and Vehicular Performance**
- The immediate economic trade-offs are countered by major environmental and mechanical advantages. E20 delivers a significantly higher octane rating, superior anti-knock behavior, faster combustion, and smoother acceleration. More importantly, it reduces lifecycle carbon emissions by nearly 40% and produces negligible particulate matter, directly addressing the urban air quality crisis.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **The Genesis and Pilot Phase (2001)**
- The journey toward bio-ethanol integration began with modest pilot projects testing a 5% ethanol blend in restricted geographical pockets. The primary focus during this era was technical validation—ensuring that existing internal combustion engines could handle alcohol blends without immediate material degradation or mechanical failure.
- **Policy Formalization and Systemic Launch (2013)**
- Recognizing the twin challenges of rising import dependencies and recurring sugar surpluses, the government formally notified the structured Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) program. This period marked the transition from exploratory pilots to a mandated administrative framework, setting early targets for oil marketing companies to source ethanol.
- **Institutional Reforms and Raw Material Diversification (2018)**
- The release of the National Policy on Biofuels in 2018 transformed the program's scope. Previously, ethanol production was rigidly tied to heavy molasses from sugarcane, which limited supply and triggered "food versus fuel" concerns. The 2018 policy introduced crucial institutional reforms, expanding the allowable feedstock basket to include maize, damaged food grains, broken rice, and rotten potatoes.
- **Investment Scaling and Target Acceleration (2021)**
- Driven by intensifying climate commitments and foreign exchange pressures, the government advanced its target of achieving a 20% national ethanol blend from the original deadline of 2030 forward to 2025–26. This policy shift triggered massive public and private capital investments into decentralized distillation infrastructure, fast-tracking regulatory approvals and credit subsidy schemes.
- **Widespread Rollout and Multisectoral Consolidation (Present)**
- Today, the policy has matured into a nationwide market reality with E20 fuel available across thousands of retail outlets. This phase is characterized by deep cross-sectoral alignment, uniting vehicle manufacturers, testing agencies, oil marketing companies, and agricultural departments to manage the structural transition smoothly.

- **Way Forward**
- **Accelerating Second-Generation (2G) Feedstocks**
- To completely resolve the "food versus fuel" dilemma, India must aggressively transition from first-generation feedstocks (sugar, maize) to second-generation variants. This involves utilizing non-edible agricultural waste, such as rice straw, wheat stalk, and cotton residue. Investing in advanced enzymatic technologies will allow the country to produce bio-ethanol from crop waste, simultaneously reducing agricultural stubble burning and protecting food supplies.
- **Technical Upgrades in the Automotive Sector**
- Automobile manufacturers should be given targeted fiscal incentives to speed up the production of dedicated flex-fuel engines. While current engines are adapted to handle E20 blends, optimization via specialized materials and recalibrated engine control units (ECUs) can help recoup the 3% to 5% drop in mileage, delivering maximum efficiency to consumers even at higher blend ratios.
- **Decentralized Distillation and Logistics Optimization**
- To reduce the high handling costs of ethanol, the country should develop decentralized clusters of mini-refineries near major maize and sugarcane production hubs. Minimizing long-distance transport of raw ethanol reduces the current overhead before retail distribution, making E20 more cost-competitive even when global crude prices drop.
- **Consumer Incentives and Differential Pricing**
- To encourage public acceptance of the minor drop in mileage, the government could introduce a differential taxation framework (such as a lower GST slab for E20 fuel). Lowering the pump price slightly below that of pure petrol would provide consumers an immediate financial incentive, smoothing the transition to greener fuels.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GOVERNMENT'S E20 FUEL BLENDING POLICY: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS
Understanding E20 & The Core Trade-Off
E20 FUEL: 80% CONVENTIONAL PETROL + 20% BIO-ETHANOL
80% Petrol
20%
Ethanol
+
Sugarcane
E20 FUEL: 80% CONVENTIONAL PETROL + 20% BIO-ETHANOL
RETAIL PRICE & MILEAGE TRADE-OFF
Govt. admits: **3-5% Mileage Drop** in some **vehicles** due to lower energy density.
Question: Why is it not cheaper?
Economic Dynamics & Pricing Structure
Global Crude Oil at ~$70/barrel
Global Crude Oil at $120-$130/barrel
State Purchase Price
Pure Petrol cheaper than E20 (due to state-guaranteed high remunerative purchase price for farmers)
Economics Reverse. E20 becomes economical. Price advantage kicks in.
e.g., Maize-based Ethanol Price: ~₹71.86/Litre
Strategic goal: Shield market from external volatility
Multidimensional Benefits & Stakeholder Engagement
Engine Performance Gains
Higher Octane Rating (Smoother Combustion)
Superior Anti-Knock
Faster Acceleration & Better Pickup
Cleaner Engine Operation
Environmental Impacts
Negligible Particulate Emissions
~40% Life-Cycle Carbon Emission Reduction
Stakeholder Integration
Car Mfg.
Testing Agencies
OMCs
Food & Public Distribution Dept.
Consulted before rollout to ensure system readiness
Pilot (2001) → Policy (2013) → Reforms (2018) → Target Acceleration (2021) → Scale
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