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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY
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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 14/08/2025 (THURSDAY)



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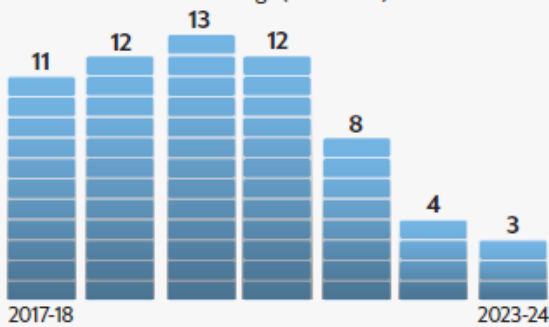
I. India's Unemployment Data – Nuances & Policy Concerns

- **Understanding the Multiple Figures** – India's official unemployment rate (PLFS data) is reported as **3.2% (2023–24 annual)**, **5.6% (June 2025 monthly)**, but can be much higher for certain segments—**graduates: 13%**, **youth (15–29 years): 10.2%**, **urban women: 9.1%**. All figures are valid for the specific groups they represent, highlighting that one headline number cannot reflect the full picture for a country of 1.4 billion.
- **Robustness of PLFS** – The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** is India's primary source of labour market data, following international standards and using a **large-scale stratified, multi-stage random sampling** method. It captures employment trends through **two reference periods**—Usual Status (365 days) and Current Weekly Status (7 days). While credible, it may not fully capture **underemployment**.

India's official unemployment number is 3.2%, it is also 4.9%, 5.6%, 13% and 10.2%. All of these numbers are true for the people they represent. *Mint* breaks down the nuances behind the job data.

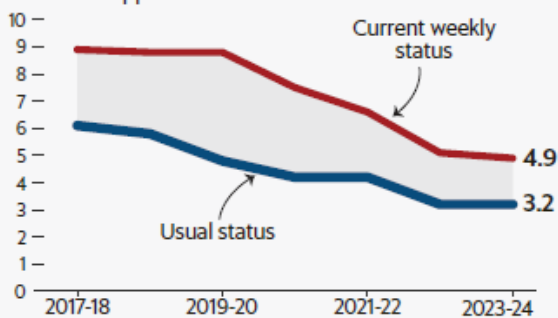
Unemployment data is more regular now and shows a declining trend

The gap between the completion of the annual PLFS and the release of its findings (in months)



The PLFS year until 2023-24 ran in a July to June cycle. It has now moved to the calendar year cycle from 2025.

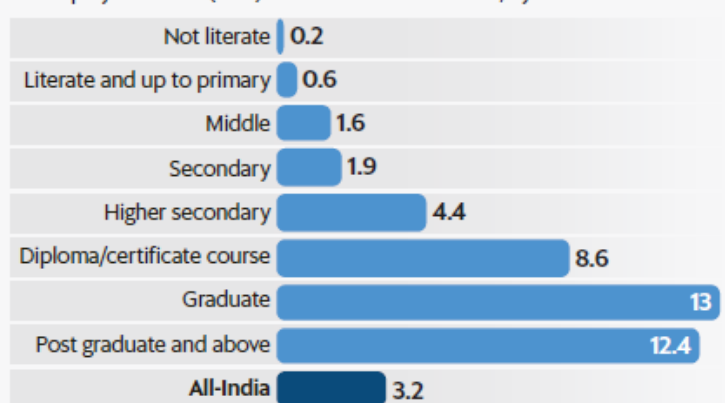
Unemployment rate (in %), for all ages, by estimation approach



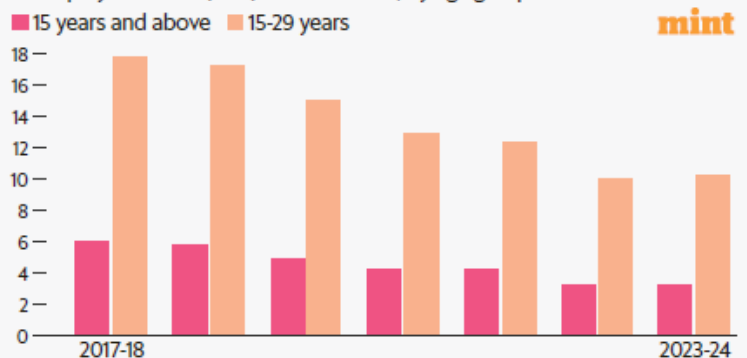
Usual status refers to unemployment in the year preceding the survey date. Current weekly status refers to unemployment in the seven days preceding the survey date

Joblessness rate depends on where you look—it's quite high for the young and educated

Unemployment rate (in %) in usual status in 2023-24, by education level



Unemployment rate (in %) in usual status, by age groups



Source: Statistics ministry, Periodic Labour Force Survey, Mint analysis

- **Policy Blindspot: Nature of Employment** – Decline in unemployment rates post-COVID is partly due to **rise in self-employment, unpaid family work, and informal jobs**, which may not signify healthy labour market conditions. Lack of **quality, skill-based jobs** for educated youth indicates a structural employment challenge.
- **Underemployment & Informality** – Many workers report being employed within the last year but may not be fully utilized (working fewer hours or in low-productivity jobs). This **hidden underemployment** affects economic productivity and household incomes but is harder to measure in current surveys.



- **Data Frequency & Gaps** – Monthly PLFS data (since April 2025) helps track **seasonal patterns** in unemployment but is less detailed than annual reports. Experts suggest **increasing PLFS sample size** beyond 1 lakh households to improve granularity, especially for smaller demographic groups like urban graduates.
- **Key Definitions** – *Unemployment* refers to people who are **not working and actively seeking work**; *Underemployment* refers to workers employed below their skill level or for fewer hours than desired; *Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)* measures the proportion of working-age population either working or seeking work.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Directive Principles of State Policy (Art. 41)** – State to secure the right to work.
- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005** – Legal guarantee of 100 days wage employment to rural households.
- **Labour Codes (2020)** – Aim to consolidate labour laws, improve employment conditions, and formalize work arrangements.

Conclusion – India’s unemployment story is **multi-layered**—headline figures understate the distress among educated youth, women, and urban workers. While PLFS remains the most credible source, improvements in **sample size, underemployment measurement, and job quality assessment** are necessary for informed policymaking. The real challenge lies in **generating quality jobs** matching the skill base of the population.

UPSC Relevance – Important for **GS Paper 3 (Indian Economy – Employment, Growth, Development)**, **GS Paper 2 (Governance & Policy Implementation)**, Essay topics on jobless growth, and **Prelims** questions on PLFS methodology, unemployment types, and labour reforms.

2. Modernizing Defence Communications through Satellite Partnerships

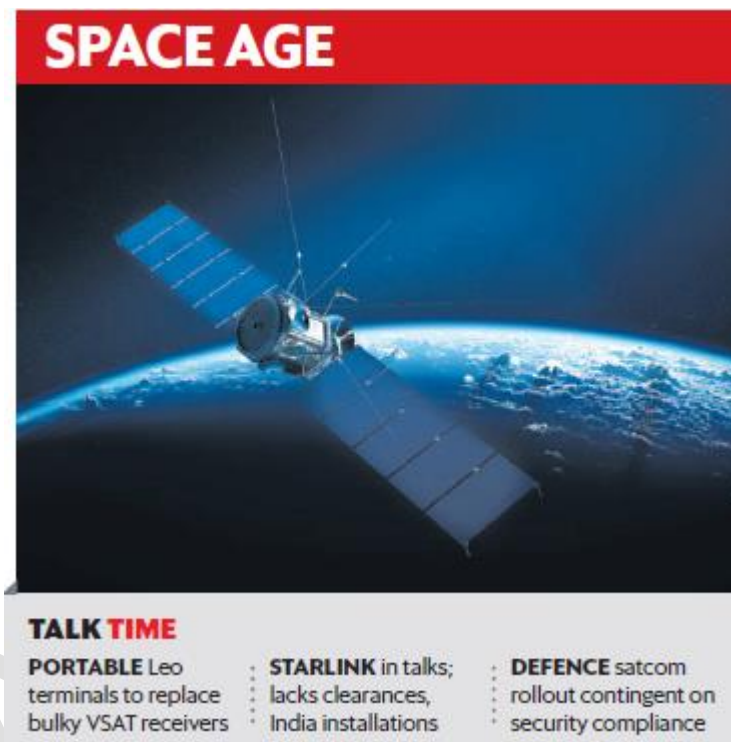
- **Strategic Shift towards Advanced Satcom** – India’s armed forces are exploring partnerships with private satellite communication (satcom) providers like **OneWeb** and **Jio-SES** to replace outdated **VSAT Geo-satellite systems** with **low-earth orbit (LEO) satellite networks**, offering **low-latency, portable, and high-speed** connectivity crucial for drones, remote surveillance, and tech-heavy defence operations.
- **Trials & Operational Use** – Multiple trials have been conducted during **India-Vietnam joint exercise (Nov 2024)** and **Operation Brahma in Myanmar (Apr 2025)**, demonstrating military-grade encrypted connectivity. Talks are also underway with **Starlink** for a vast secure satellite network, though it lacks installations, trials, and security clearance in India.
- **Advantages over Legacy Systems** – Portable LEO-based satcom terminals are **backpack-sized**, easier to transport, and provide faster connectivity compared to bulky Geo-based VSAT systems. They also support **real-time battlefield communications** and enable operations in **remote or cross-border areas**.
- **Security & Regulatory Framework** – The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is set to allocate spectrum for satcom; security protocols will ensure **national security norms** are not compromised. Defence access will be allowed only after strict clearance. Global models are being evaluated, but **indigenization of satellite technology** is emphasized for security and self-reliance.



- **Economic & Strategic Implications** – The move opens new business opportunities for satcom firms in **defence, maritime, and border security**, alongside potential rural broadband applications. Large satellite constellations offer extensive coverage, aligning with **Digital India** and strategic communication goals.
- **Key Definitions** – *Satcom* (Satellite Communication) refers to wireless communication via satellites; *LEO Satellites* operate at ~500–2000 km altitude, offering low latency; *Geo Satellites* orbit at ~36,000 km, covering larger areas but with higher latency.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A(d) & (i)** – Fundamental duty to defend the country and develop scientific temper.
- **Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)** – Promotes indigenous defence manufacturing and technology adoption.
- **Telecommunication Act & DoT Licensing Norms** – Regulate spectrum allocation and satcom operations with security safeguards.
- **Draft Space Activities Bill** – Proposes regulation of private space activities while ensuring national security.



Conclusion – India's shift to **LEO-based satcom**

for defence represents a major leap in military communication capability, enabling real-time, secure, and mobile connectivity vital for modern warfare. Balancing global collaborations with **indigenous satellite capability** will be key to ensuring both technological advancement and strategic autonomy.

UPSC Relevance – Significant for **GS Paper 3 (Security, Defence Technology, Space Sector, Indigenization)**, **GS Paper 2 (Government Policies, Strategic Partnerships)**, and Essay topics on modern warfare, technology in national security, and public-private defence cooperation.

3. India-US Relations and Concerns over Indian Diaspora Welfare

- **Rising Diplomatic Strain & Diaspora Risks** – India-US ties face friction over **market access disputes** and **India's purchase of Russian oil**, prompting concerns in New Delhi about possible adverse impacts on the large Indian diaspora in the US, particularly **tech professionals and students**.
- **Economic & Strategic Significance of Diaspora** – The Indian diaspora contributes significantly through **remittances**, acts as a source of **soft power**, and serves as a **buffer against global economic uncertainties**. Any disruption in their status or employment could have direct economic and diplomatic repercussions.
- **H-1B Visa Trends & Job Market Concerns** – Registrations for Indian **H-1B visas for 2026** dropped **27% from last year** and are over **54% lower** than the previous year, with **only 120,141**



selected out of 358,000 registrations against an **85,000 annual cap**, indicating a cooling US job market for foreign workers.

- **Government's Parliamentary Briefing** – Senior officials, including the **Foreign Secretary, Commerce Secretary, and India's BTA negotiator**, informed the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs** that trade tensions could result in **tighter immigration policies, higher compliance burdens, and reduced hiring**, particularly in **technology and professional services**.
- **Potential Policy Fallout** – Strained relations could lead to **restrictive visa rules, stringent work permit compliance, and hiring caution** by US companies. This may disproportionately affect Indian tech workers, who form a significant portion of the US high-skilled immigrant workforce.
- **Key Definitions** – *Indian Diaspora* refers to people of Indian origin living outside India, including Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs); *H-1B Visa* is a US non-immigrant visa allowing companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations, often used by Indian tech professionals.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51(c)** – Directive to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations.
- **Article 246 & List I (Union List)** – External affairs, treaties, and foreign trade are Union subjects.
- **Emigration Act, 1983** – Regulates the emigration of Indian citizens and protects overseas workers.
- **Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA)** – Framework for resolving trade disputes and enhancing market access.

Conclusion – The well-being of the Indian diaspora, especially in the **US tech sector**, is closely linked to India-US diplomatic and trade relations. While temporary visa or job market fluctuations are common, prolonged strain could undermine economic, strategic, and people-to-people ties, necessitating **diplomatic balancing and proactive diaspora engagement policies**.

UPSC Relevance – Important for **GS Paper 2 (International Relations, Indian Diaspora, Bilateral Agreements)**, **GS Paper 3 (Economic Impact of Remittances & Trade)**, and Essay topics on diplomacy, globalisation, and migration trends.

4. RBI's New Continuous Cheque Clearing Mechanism

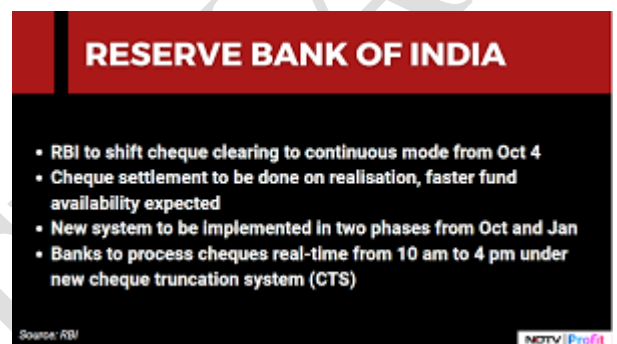
- **Faster Cheque Settlement from 4 October 2025** – The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will introduce a **continuous cheque clearing system** under the Cheque Truncation System (CTS), reducing the settlement cycle from **T+1 days (up to two working days)** to **a few hours** during business hours.
- **Key Operational Changes** – Cheques will be **scanned, presented, and processed continuously** between **10:00 AM to 4:00 PM**. For each cheque, the drawee bank must give a **positive (honoured)** or **negative (dishonoured)** confirmation within **three hours**; if not, the cheque will be **deemed approved** for settlement.



- **Implementation in Two Phases** – Phase 1 starts on **4 October 2025**, and Phase 2 on **3 January 2026**. This will replace the current **batch processing** with **on-realisation settlement**, reducing settlement risks and improving customer experience.
- **Benefits for Banking & Economy** – The system will **enhance efficiency**, **reduce settlement risk**, ensure **faster fund availability** for customers, and strengthen **financial market liquidity**. It will also aid in fraud reduction by enabling real-time tracking of dishonoured cheques.
- **Key Definitions** – *Cheque Truncation System (CTS)* is an image-based clearing system where the physical cheque is replaced with a scanned image for faster processing; *Settlement Risk* is the risk that a payment will not be settled as expected, affecting financial stability.
- **Regulatory Context** – RBI regulates payment and settlement systems under the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**. This reform aligns with **Digital India** objectives and RBI's mandate to ensure efficient, secure, and quick payment systems.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Entry 45, Union List (Seventh Schedule)** – Banking falls under Union jurisdiction.
- **Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881** – Governs cheques and related liabilities.
- **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007** – Empowers RBI to regulate and supervise payment systems.



Conclusion – RBI's move to a **continuous, same-day cheque clearing system** is a significant step towards modernising India's payment infrastructure, improving settlement efficiency, and enhancing customer trust in cheque-based transactions. It marks a critical shift from batch to real-time-like processing, reducing delays and risks in financial settlements.

UPSC Relevance – Important for **GS Paper 3 (Indian Economy – Banking, Monetary Policy, Payment Systems)**, **Prelims** questions on RBI functions, CTS, and Payment Acts, and Essay topics on financial system reforms and digital payment infrastructure.

5. India's ₹600-Crore Hydrogen Fuel Highway Pilot Project

- **Strategic Green Hydrogen Push** – The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) will launch a **₹600 crore pilot project** across **10 selected national highway stretches** to test hydrogen fuel and repair infrastructure for hydrogen-powered vehicles, as part of India's broader **energy security and decarbonisation strategy**.
- **Pilot Objectives & Scope** – The project will assess **green hydrogen supply chain feasibility**, set **technical standards for fuel stations and storage**, and address **logistical and geographical challenges** before scaling to a **national hydrogen highway network**.
- **Stakeholder Participation** – State-run refiners **IOCL, BPCL, and HPCL** will develop hydrogen storage and fuelling facilities; major commercial vehicle manufacturers like **Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland, and Volvo Eicher** will create hydrogen vehicle prototypes for trials.



- **Integration with National Missions** – The project is part of **Vision 2047** and supports the **National Green Hydrogen Mission (₹19,744 crore)** targeting production of **5 million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2030** to achieve **net-zero emissions by 2070**.
- **Environmental & Economic Impact** – Hydrogen adoption in road transport could cut carbon emissions from the sector, which currently accounts for **~12% of India's total emissions**, while also reducing fossil fuel dependency and creating new green industry jobs.
- **Key Definitions** – *Green Hydrogen* is produced using renewable energy to split water into hydrogen and oxygen via electrolysis, emitting no greenhouse gases; *Hydrogen Highway* refers to a transport corridor equipped with hydrogen refuelling and support infrastructure.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A** – State's duty to protect and improve the environment.
- **Article 51A(g)** – Fundamental duty of citizens to protect the natural environment.
- **Energy Conservation Act, 2001** – Provides the legal framework for promoting energy efficiency and clean energy.
- **National Green Hydrogen Mission Guidelines** – Policy framework for hydrogen production, storage, and utilisation.



Conclusion – The hydrogen highway pilot marks a **transformative step in India's clean mobility transition**, complementing EV adoption and enabling a diversified low-carbon transport system. Successful implementation could place India at the forefront of hydrogen mobility innovation globally.

UPSC Relevance – Relevant for **GS Paper 3 (Environment, Energy, Infrastructure)**, **GS Paper 2 (Government Policies, Climate Commitments)**, Prelims questions on hydrogen technology and missions, and Essay topics on sustainable transport and energy security.

6. Headline Inflation to Average 3.5% in FY 2025 (Crisil Report)

- **Definition – Headline Inflation:** Headline inflation measures the total inflation in an economy, including all items in the consumer price index (CPI), such as food and fuel, unlike *core inflation* which excludes volatile components.
- **Crisil's Forecast:** Ratings agency Crisil projects headline inflation to average **3.5% in FY 2025**, down from **4.6% in FY 2024**, indicating an easing price environment.
- **Key Factors:** Healthy agricultural production, especially **kharif crop sowing** up by 4% year-on-year (as of 8 August), is expected to keep food inflation under control.
- **Monetary Policy Outlook:** The report anticipates another **repo rate cut** by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) this fiscal, aiming to support growth while maintaining inflation within the target band.

India's headline inflation likely to average 3.5% in FY26: Crisil

BUSINESS STANDARD AUGUST 14, 2025



Ratings firm Crisil said that headline inflation is expected to average 3.5 per cent this fiscal as compared to 4.6 per cent in the last financial year. In its research report for August, the rating agency said that healthy agricultural production is likely to keep food inflation in check. India's retail inflation rate has slid to 1.6 per cent in July from 2.1 per cent in June.



- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**

- **RBI's Mandate:** As per the RBI Act, 1934 (amended in 2016), the **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** targets CPI inflation at **4% ± 2%**.
- **Food Security & Price Stability:** Linked to Article 39(b) & (c) of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) ensuring equitable distribution of resources and preventing concentration of wealth.

- **Macroeconomic Implications:** Lower inflation can boost purchasing power, reduce cost of borrowing, and encourage investment; however, excessive monetary easing could risk inflation resurgence.

Conclusion: Crisil's projection of lower headline inflation reflects a favourable macroeconomic environment supported by good agricultural output and possible monetary easing.

UPSC Relevance: Important for **Economy (GS-3)** under topics like *Inflation Trends, Monetary Policy, Agricultural Economics*, and *RBI's Role*. It can be linked to **current affairs-based mains answers** and **Prelims MCQs on economic indicators**.

7. Why Invest Beyond India Despite Being the Fastest-Growing Big Economy

- **Currency Depreciation Risk:** The Indian rupee has fallen 2.2% against the USD in 2025, but significantly more against the euro (15%), Swiss franc (15%), and pound (9%), highlighting the long-term trend of rupee depreciation (nearly 90% since the 1980s), which erodes overseas purchasing power and increases costs of foreign education, travel, and imports.
- **Concept – SCCARs:** *Single Country, Single Currency, Single Asset Risks* refer to concentrated investment exposure in one economy and currency, which increases vulnerability to local economic shocks, currency depreciation, and sectoral downturns.
- **Home Country Bias in Investing:** Indian investors typically over-invest in domestic markets (similar to global trends but more pronounced), even though India accounts for less than 5% of global market capitalization; diversification across geographies and asset classes is essential to manage risks.
- **Regulatory Framework – Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS):** Under RBI's LRS, Indian residents can invest up to USD 250,000 per person annually abroad; a family of four can remit up to USD 1 million (~₹8.8 crore), enabling significant global diversification.
- **Historical Lessons:** Past events like the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis wiped out 50–90% of market value in some of the then fastest-growing economies, proving that even high-growth nations are not immune to steep downturns; reliance solely on domestic markets can be risky.
- **Global Investing Principle:** True diversification requires investing beyond US indices (like Nasdaq, S&P 500) into multiple regions and asset classes, as market leadership changes over time; past strong performers may underperform for years.



Conclusion: Even though India is currently the fastest-growing large economy, overexposure to domestic markets, currency risks, and historical precedents underscore the need for diversified, global investment strategies.

UPSC Relevance: Relevant for **Economy (GS-3)** – *Investment Patterns, Currency Risks, RBI's LRS*



Policy, Financial Market Regulations; useful for **Prelims** on financial terminology (SCCARs, LRS) and for **Mains** under topics like *Globalization & Indian Economy, Risk Management in Investments*.

8. Disappearance of Forest Rights Titles in Chhattisgarh

- **Key Issue:** Thousands of *Individual Forest Rights (IFR)* and *Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR)* titles under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 have reportedly “vanished” from official records in Chhattisgarh over the last 17 months, despite there being no legal provision for withdrawal once granted.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006 – Key Provisions:** FRA recognises rights of *Scheduled Tribes* and *Other Traditional Forest Dwellers* to use forest land; once titles are granted, they are *non-transferable, non-alienable, and inheritable only*. The Act has no provision for cancellation except in proven cases of fraud before grant.
- **Data Discrepancies:** In Bastar district, IFR titles dropped from 37,958 (Jan 2024) to 35,180 (May 2025); in Rajnandgaon, CFRR titles halved from 40 to 20 within a month; similar reductions reported in Bijapur. State officials attributed this to “miscommunication” and “reporting errors” at various administrative levels.
- **Possible Legal and Governance Concerns:** FRA experts term such decreases an “anomaly” and legally questionable. Past attempts to cancel titles (2016) are pending judicial review in Chhattisgarh High Court, raising concerns over potential violation of FRA provisions and tribal rights under *Article 244* and *Fifth Schedule* of the Constitution.
- **Implementation Gaps:** FRA not implemented in Raipur, Durg, and Bemetara districts. Chhattisgarh accounts for over 43% of forest area under FRA titles nationwide, yet progress is slow in districts recently declared Naxalism-free, reflecting administrative and governance challenges.
- **Key Definitions:**
 - **IFR** – Individual rights to cultivate forest land for livelihood.
 - **CFRR** – Community rights over forest resources for collective use and management.
 - **Gram Sabha** – Village assembly empowered to initiate and verify claims under FRA.



Conclusion: The unexplained reduction in granted forest rights titles in Chhattisgarh raises serious governance, transparency, and legal concerns. If due to administrative error, it reflects weak record-keeping; if deliberate, it may violate constitutional and statutory protections for tribal and forest-dwelling communities.

UPSC Relevance: Important for *GS-2* (Governance, Government Policies, Welfare Schemes), *GS-3* (Environment, Conservation, Forest Rights, Tribal Issues), and *GS-4* (Ethics in Public Administration, Transparency, Accountability). Also relevant for *Essay* and *Case Study* topics on **tribal rights, land reforms, and governance lapses**.



9. Undocumented Migrants Leaving via Eastern Border Tripled in 2025

- **Sharp Rise in Voluntary Exits:** In 2025 (till July 15), 3,536 undocumented migrants, suspected to be from Bangladesh, were apprehended by the Border Security Force (BSF) while attempting to leave India through the eastern border — over three times higher than 1,049 in 2024.
- **Impact of Political Changes in Bangladesh:** Surge in voluntary exits linked to the regime change in Bangladesh on 5 August 2024; political instability has influenced cross-border migration trends.
- **Difference Between Voluntary Exit and Pushback:**
 - *Voluntary Exit:* Migrants attempt to leave on their own.
 - *Pushback:* Deportation-like act without legal process, not defined under Indian law, often involving immediate return across the border. Estimated 2,500 such pushbacks have occurred in 2025.
- **Government Action Post Pahalgam Terror Attack (22 April 2025):** Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) directed states to detect and deport Bangladeshi nationals living on forged documents; BSF instructed to block entry without valid documents.
- **Legal & Constitutional Aspects:**
 - *Foreigners Act, 1946:* Governs detection, detention, and deportation of illegal migrants.
 - *Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920:* Regulates entry requirements.
 - *Article 21:* Right to life extends to all persons, including foreigners, but subject to due legal process.
 - *Habeas Corpus Writ:* Used in Calcutta HC to challenge illegal pushbacks, resulting in return of at least 7 persons.
- **Border Management Context:** BSF patrols the 4,096 km India-Bangladesh border; heightened surveillance post-2024 political changes.



Definition – Undocumented Migrant: A person residing or moving across borders without valid legal authorization, such as visa, passport, or other required documents.

Conclusion: The sharp rise in undocumented migrants leaving India through the eastern border reflects the complex interplay of political changes in neighboring countries, security concerns, and legal challenges in managing borders. It also raises questions about adherence to legal norms in deportation and the humanitarian obligations of the state.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** International relations, India-Bangladesh relations, border management.
- **GS Paper III:** Internal security, cross-border migration, role of security forces.
- **GS Paper II (Polity):** Constitutional rights of foreigners, legal framework on deportation.
- **Current Affairs:** Linkage of terrorism incidents with migration control measures.



10. India's First Private EO Satellite Constellation under PPP Model

Key Development: The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) has selected the Pixxel-Space India-led consortium (including Piersight Space, Satsure Analytics India, and Dhruva Space) to design, build, and operate India's first fully indigenous commercial Earth Observation (EO) satellite constellation under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. This is the first time in Indian space history that a private consortium will undertake such a large-scale EO project.

- **Project Scale & Investment:** The consortium will invest over ₹1,200 crore in the next five years to launch a constellation of 12 state-of-the-art EO satellites. The selection followed a competitive bidding process involving three consortia.
- **Applications & Strategic Importance:** The constellation will provide **Analysis Ready Data (ARD)** and **Value-Added Services (VAS)** for critical sectors such as climate change monitoring, disaster management, agriculture, marine surveillance, national security, and urban planning. It will also cater to the global demand for high-quality geospatial intelligence.
- **Data Sovereignty & Reduced Foreign Dependence:** Indigenous high-resolution satellite data generation will reduce India's reliance on foreign EO data sources, ensuring **data sovereignty**, which is crucial for strategic, defence, and policy-making purposes.
- **Institutional & Legal Context:**
 - **IN-SPACe:** A nodal agency under the Department of Space, set up to promote and regulate private sector participation in India's space activities.
 - **PPP Model:** Allows sharing of risks, investments, and returns between the government and private entities.
 - **Space Policy 2023:** Enables private players to build and operate satellites, ensuring commercial viability and fostering innovation.
 - **Data Sovereignty:** The principle that data is subject to the laws and governance of the nation where it is collected.
- **Significance for India's Space Sector:** This initiative marks the **coming of age of India's private space industry**, showcasing capability to lead technologically advanced and commercially viable space missions, in line with the government's vision to make India a global space hub.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance:

This development is a milestone in India's space sector reforms, reflecting the **shift towards privatisation, innovation, and global competitiveness**. It strengthens India's strategic autonomy in space-based data, aligns with national security priorities, and boosts economic opportunities in the geospatial sector.

UPSC Relevance: Important for topics under GS-3 (Science & Technology – Developments in Space Technology, PPP in Strategic Sectors, Data Sovereignty, and Space Policy 2023), Prelims (space organisations, PPP model), and Essay/Interview (role of private sector in India's space ambitions).



II. Ceding of Academic Freedom in Universities

Definition & Importance of Academic Freedom: Academic freedom refers to the right of students, faculty, and institutions to question, research, and express opinions without external interference. It is essential for the pursuit of excellence, development of knowledge, and fostering of independent, critical, and creative thinking in higher education.

- **Current Challenges in India:** University curricula and reading lists are often centrally prescribed; dissenting research in social sciences and humanities is discouraged; research funding is controlled by government bodies; and faculty/student debates critical of the ruling establishment face administrative or legal action. Such restrictions are expanding to private universities as well.
- **Global Context & Comparisons:** Academic freedom is curtailed in several democracies (e.g., Argentina, Hungary, Türkiye) and severely restricted in authoritarian regimes (e.g., China, Russia, Vietnam). Even the U.S., traditionally a bastion of academic freedom, has seen research funding cuts and policy interference in recent years. Governments often seek control to suppress dissent or enforce ideological conformity.
- **Autonomy & Accountability:** Universities must have administrative, financial, and academic autonomy, as envisaged in the **constitutional spirit of freedom of speech and expression (Article 19(1)(a))**. Accountability should be ensured through transparent governance structures, rankings, and peer review, not through direct political or bureaucratic control. Liberation from excessive regulation (e.g., UGC restrictions) is vital.
- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**
 - **Article 19(1)(a)** – Freedom of speech and expression (applicable to academic discourse).
 - **Article 51A(h)** – Fundamental duty to develop scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry.
 - **University Acts** – Governing statutes that often need reform to enhance autonomy.
 - **Right to Education (Article 21A)** indirectly supports quality higher education, which is linked to academic freedom.
- **Implications for Economy, Society, and Polity:** Suppressing academic freedom harms innovation, stifles research, reduces global competitiveness, and weakens universities' role as conscience-keepers and contributors to evidence-based policy-making.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance:

Academic freedom is foundational for knowledge creation, democratic debate, and socio-economic progress. Curtailing it undermines teaching quality, research excellence, and institutional credibility. For UPSC, the topic is relevant under GS-2 (Polity – Fundamental Rights, Education Policy, Role of NGOs and Institutions), GS-3 (Science & Technology – R&D ecosystem), and Essay/Interview (freedom of thought, role of universities in democracy, balancing autonomy with accountability).



12. Drone Warfare and India's Strategic Opportunities in Asia

- **Shift in Modern Warfare:** The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and India's Operation Sindoor (2024) highlighted the transition of drones from reconnaissance tools to key platforms for precision strikes. India's procurement of 31 MQ-9B Reapers from the U.S. addresses maritime awareness but gaps remain for high-altitude surveillance and cost-effective strike systems suited for its terrain.
- **India's Current UAV Capabilities & Gaps:** Existing platforms include Israeli Harop loitering munitions and Heron drones, along with older imports and some indigenous models. These are insufficient to meet all operational needs, especially for high-altitude, long-range, and diverse payload missions. Heavy reliance on imports from Israel, Europe, and the U.S. persists.
- **Global Drone Market Dynamics:** The U.S. share in the UAV export market is just 8% due to MTCR restrictions, with China and Türkiye dominating exports. While reforms are planned, U.S. capacity constraints persist. India's strained relations with China and Türkiye limit procurement options, pushing it towards self-reliance and partnerships with Israel and friendly nations.
- **China Factor & Indo-Pacific Security:** Many Indo-Pacific nations (Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan) face Chinese 'gray-zone' maritime tactics and need advanced UAVs for maritime domain awareness. Israel's preoccupation in West Asia and U.S. lag in drone exports create space for India to emerge as a trusted UAV supplier.
- **Strategic Opportunity for India:** By developing UAVs suited for its own high-altitude and maritime needs, India can cater to similar requirements of Indo-Pacific partners. Filling the U.S.-shaped vacuum in the regional drone market can enhance India's defence exports, regional influence, and strategic partnerships. Technology-sharing with like-minded nations can boost trust and resilience in the region.
- **Key Definitions & Legal/Constitutional Provisions:**
 - *UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle):* Aircraft without a human pilot onboard, used for surveillance or strike missions.
 - *UCAV (Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle):* UAVs designed for combat operations and precision strikes.
 - *Maritime Domain Awareness:* The effective understanding of activities in maritime areas impacting security, economy, and environment.
 - *Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR):* A voluntary export control regime aimed at preventing proliferation of missile and UAV technology capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction.
 - *Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution:* Encourages respect for international law and treaty obligations, relevant in defence trade and technology sharing.
 - *Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP):* Governs acquisition of defence equipment, including UAVs, ensuring transparency and indigenisation.



Conclusion: Drones have emerged as decisive assets in modern warfare, offering precision, surveillance, and strategic deterrence capabilities. India's operational gaps, combined with global market shifts, create a strong case for it to become both self-reliant in UAV technology and a key supplier in the Indo-Pacific.

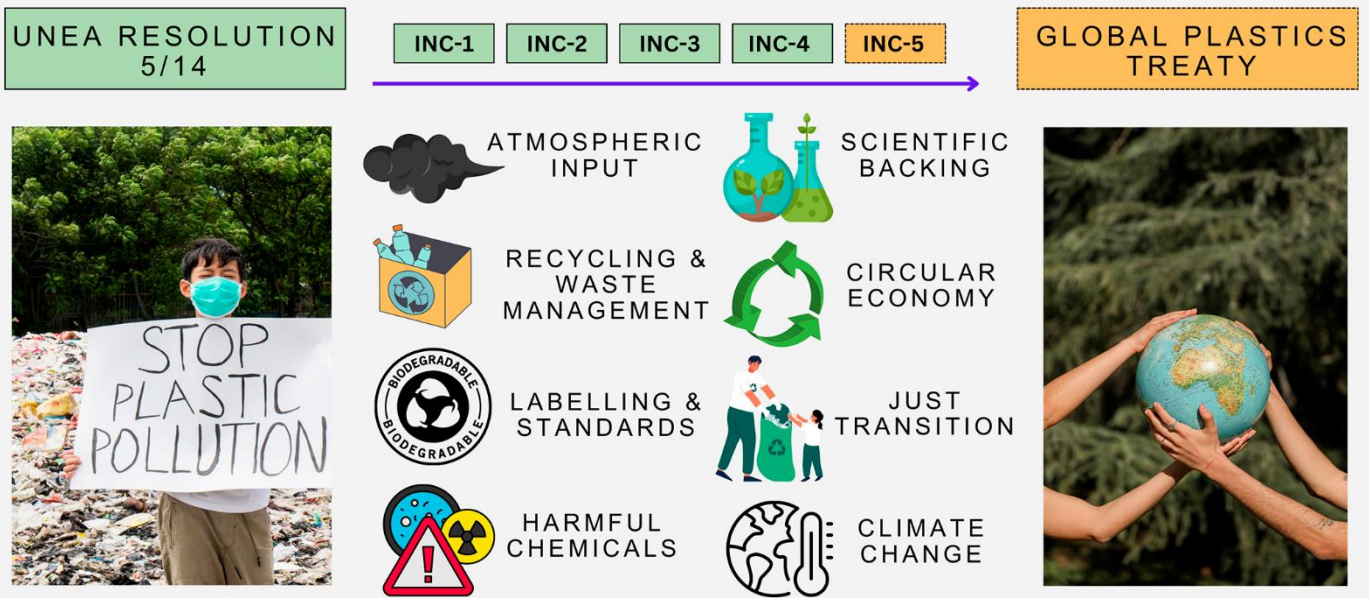


UPSC Relevance: Important for *GS Paper 2* (International Relations, Defence Diplomacy), *GS Paper 3* (Internal Security, Science & Tech in Defence), and topics like “Indo-Pacific Strategy,” “Defence Indigenisation,” and “Emerging Warfare Technologies.”

13. Plastics Treaty Draft Controversy

- **Background** – The ongoing negotiations in Geneva aim to finalise a *global treaty on plastic pollution* under the UN Environment Assembly Resolution 5/14 (2022), which mandated addressing the *full life-cycle of plastics*, including production, consumption, and disposal.
- **Current Draft Dispute** – The new Chair’s draft *omits binding curbs on plastic production*, a key demand of over 80 countries. This has caused widespread disapproval, with many stating the draft cannot be used as a negotiation basis.
- **India’s Position** – India, along with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and several petrochemical-producing nations, supports addressing plastic pollution without restricting production. The Indian delegation expressed willingness to discuss improvements but largely approved the draft.
- **Opposition View** – Countries like Colombia and Panama, along with environmental groups, argue the draft undermines the treaty’s intent, fails to address chemicals of concern, ignores reuse/refill mandates, and caters to petrostate interests with weak, voluntary measures.
- **Constitutional & Legal Context** –

THE ZERO DRAFT PLASTICS TREATY: GAPS AND CHALLENGES



- *Article 48A*: State’s duty to protect and improve the environment.
- *Article 51A(g)*: Fundamental duty of citizens to protect the environment.
- *Environment (Protection) Act, 1986*: Enables central government to regulate environmental pollutants, including plastics.
- *India’s Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016* (amended in 2022) already ban certain single-use plastics.



- **Key Terms –**

- *Plastic Life-Cycle*: Stages from extraction of raw materials to manufacturing, usage, and disposal/recycling.
- *Full Life-Cycle Approach*: Tackling pollution at every stage rather than only waste management.
- *Petrostate*: A nation whose economy heavily depends on petroleum exports.

Conclusion – The plastics treaty negotiations highlight a deep divide between production-focused and waste-management-focused approaches. For effective environmental governance, global agreements must integrate *full life-cycle controls* to ensure sustainable solutions.

UPSC Relevance – Important for *GS-3 (Environment, Conservation, Pollution Control)*, *GS-2 (International Treaties & Environmental Governance)*, and *Essay* papers, linking to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water).