



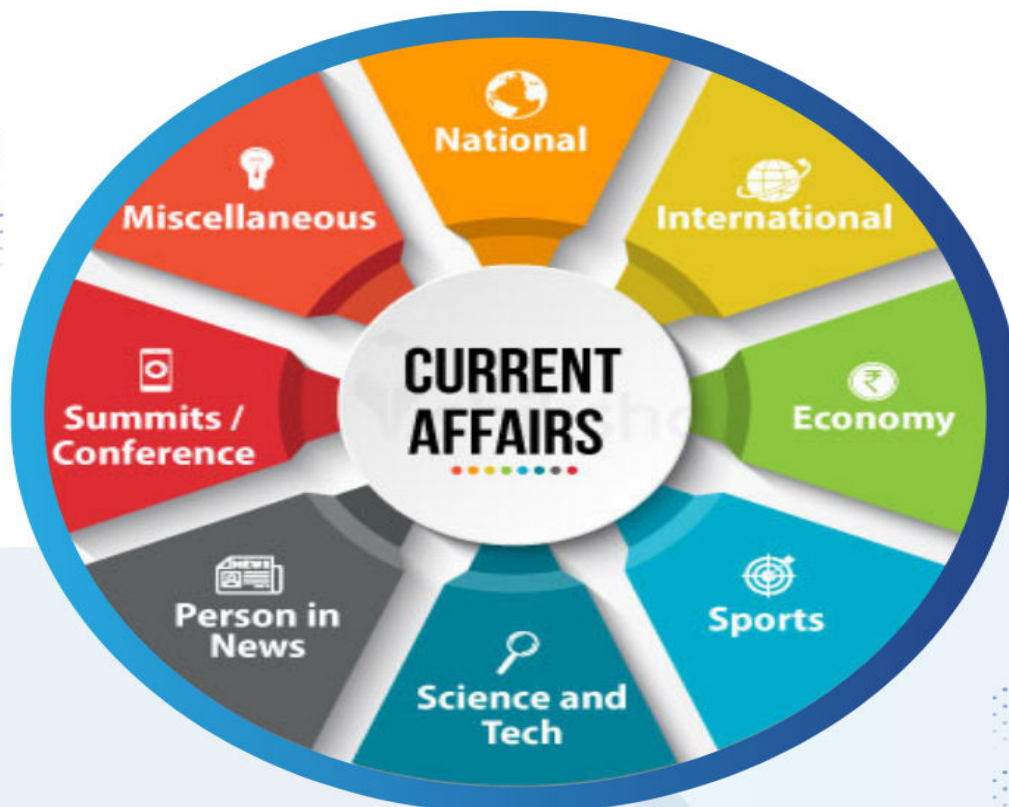
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY
&
STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 23/08/2025 (SATURDAY)



9972258970 & 9740702455

**#317/A SKB Arcade, D. Subbaiah Road,
Ramaswamy Circle, Mysuru-570004**



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1. Forest Rights of Tribals and Great Nicobar Project

1. Background of the Project

- The Government has proposed a **₹72,000-crore mega infrastructure project** on the Great Nicobar Island, which includes a transshipment port, airport, power plant, and township.
- The project requires the diversion of nearly **13,075 hectares of forest land**, raising ecological, tribal, and legal concerns.

2. Key Issue: Settlement of Forest Rights

- The **Andaman & Nicobar Administration** reportedly issued certificates (Aug 2022) claiming that tribal rights under the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006** had been “identified and settled”.
- However, the **Nicobarese Tribal Council** has clarified that **no settlement process or consent** was carried out with the tribal communities.
- The Council contends that their **consent for the project was falsely obtained**, thereby questioning the legality of forest clearance.

3. Constitutional & Legal Provisions Involved

- **Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA):** Empowers Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers with rights over forest land; diversion requires **prior settlement of rights and Gram Sabha consent**.
- **Protection of Aboriginal Tribes (PAT) Act, 1956:** Provides administrative authority over forests and tribal lands in A&N Islands, but does not replace explicit safeguards under FRA.
- Possible **Conflict of Law:** Whether Forest diversion was done under PAT, 1956 or under FRA, 2006 remains unclear.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:**
 - **Article 244(1):** Applies Fifth Schedule provisions for protection of tribal communities.
 - **Article 342:** Recognition of Scheduled Tribes.
 - **Article 21:** Right to life includes right to livelihood and habitat.



4. Concerns of Local Tribes

- The **Nicobarese**, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), fear displacement, destruction of forests, and threat to their cultural survival.
- They claim exclusion from crucial **Gram Sabha deliberations (Aug 2022)**.
- Fear of ecological imbalance as the proposed site is in an ecologically rich and sensitive zone.

5. Role of the Central Government

- Union Tribal Affairs Minister assured that grievances will be looked into but no concrete resolution yet.
- Conflicting administrative communications: UT administration claimed FRA not applicable since land is already protected under PAT, 1956, while Centre says due process under FRA was followed.



6. Larger Implications

- Raises issues of “**ease of doing development vs. protection of tribal and ecological rights**”.
- Highlights **loopholes in implementation of FRA, 2006** and potential misuse of legal provisions to bypass tribal consent.
- Sets precedent of how mega projects can threaten **tribal rights, biodiversity, and ecological sustainability** in sensitive regions.

Key Definitions

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Law recognizing traditional rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other communities.
- **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):** Sub-category of tribals characterized by pre-agricultural level of technology, declining or stagnant population, and subsistence economy.
- **Gram Sabha Consent:** Mandatory democratic approval by village assembly before diversion of forest land under FRA.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar project controversy underscores a critical conflict between **development imperatives and tribal rights**. The alleged bypassing of FRA norms highlights systemic weaknesses in protecting indigenous communities. The case illustrates the **urgent need for balancing ecological security, legal compliance, and tribal welfare in policy-making**.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (Governance):** Rights of Tribals, role of FRA, Centre-State relations in tribal areas.
- **GS III (Environment & Ecology):** Forest conservation, environmental clearances, human-environment conflict.
- **GS I (Society):** Tribal issues, constitutional safeguards, PVTGs.
- **Essay / Ethics:** Balancing development vs. rights of vulnerable groups; ethical governance and environmental justice.

2. India-China Trade through Lipulekh Pass and Nepal's Objection

1. Background of the Issue

- India and China recently decided to **restart border trade through the Lipulekh Pass** in Uttarakhand.
- The region of **Kalapani–Lipulekh–Limpiyadhura** is historically contested, with Nepal claiming it as part of its sovereign territory.
- Nepal views this bilateral decision as “**unexpected and unacceptable**”, although it has stated that it will continue dialogue with India.



2. Nepal's Claim and Historical Context

- Nepal bases its claim on the **Treaty of Sugauli (1816)** with British India, which established the Kali River as its western boundary. Nepal claims Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura fall east of the river, hence within its borders.
- India maintains that the Kalapani region has historically been part of **Pithoragarh district (Uttarakhand)**.
- The dispute escalated in 2020 when **Nepal released a new political map** incorporating the contested area.

3. Constitutional & Legal Provisions (India-Nepal Context)

- **India-Nepal Relations:** Governed by the **1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship**, which ensures close ties and free movement of people and goods.
- **International Law:** Principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as per **UN Charter**, are central to Nepal's protest.
- **India-China Agreements:** Bilateral border trade initiatives should not undermine a third country's territorial sovereignty.



4. Strategic and Geopolitical Importance of Lipulekh Pass

- **Lipulekh Pass:** A key Himalayan pass linking India with Tibet (China), strategically significant for trade and military logistics.
- It provides India with **access to Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route** in Tibet.
- The region is geopolitically sensitive due to the **India-China-Nepal tri-junction** and frequent border tensions between India and China.

5. Key Concerns Emerging

- **For Nepal:** Perception of being sidelined in a matter of territorial sovereignty; fears of India-China alignment undermining Nepal's claims.
- **For India:** Balancing strategic cooperation with China while maintaining historical and cultural closeness with Nepal.
- **For the Region:** The issue could feed into **China's strategy of exploiting Nepal-India differences** for its advantage.

6. Broader Implications

- Reflects the **inherent sensitivities in India's neighborhood diplomacy**.
- Highlights the challenges of **managing overlapping territorial claims** in the Himalayan borderlands.
- Could impact **India-Nepal bilateral ties**, especially at a time when Nepal's domestic politics is closely watching India's China engagement.



Key Definitions

- **Lipulekh Pass:** A high-altitude Himalayan pass connecting Uttarakhand with Tibet, significant for trade and pilgrimage.
- **Treaty of Sugauli (1816):** Treaty between the British East India Company and Nepal, fixing boundaries after the Anglo-Nepalese War.
- **Tri-junction:** A geographical meeting point of three countries' borders, often sensitive and disputed.

Conclusion

The Lipulekh trade decision reflects the **complex interplay of geopolitics, history, and territorial claims** in the India-Nepal-China triangle. While beneficial for India-China trade and connectivity, it poses challenges to Nepal's sovereignty concerns. Managing this issue with **sensitivity, dialogue, and respect for regional stability** is critical for India's neighborhood diplomacy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (International Relations):** India-Nepal relations, India-China relations, border disputes, Treaty of Sugauli, neighborhood first policy.
- **GS I (History & Geography):** Historical treaties, Himalayan frontiers, boundary demarcation.
- **Essay / Ethics:** Balancing national interest with regional harmony; ethical foreign policy in contested regions.

3. Income-Tax Act, 2025 – Key Highlights

1. Background and Enactment

- President Droupadi Murmu has given her assent to the **Income-tax Act, 2025**, replacing the **Income-tax Act of 1961**.
- The Act will come into effect from the **next financial year (April 1, 2026)**.
- It represents one of the most significant overhauls of India's direct tax regime since Independence.

2. Key Features of the New Act

- **No change in tax rates:** The Act only simplifies language and structure without altering tax slabs or rates.
- **Reduction in complexity:** Reduces Sections from **819 in the 1961 Act to 536** and Chapters from **47 to 23**.
- **Simplified drafting:** Removes archaic/ambiguous terminology and redundant provisions to make it more **citizen-friendly**.
- Focus is on **ease of compliance** and reducing litigation arising from misinterpretation of detailed provisions.



3. Objectives of the Reform

- **Modernization:** Update tax law to meet present-day business and digital economy needs.



- **Taxpayer Ease:** Make law understandable for individual taxpayers and small businesses.
- **Efficient Adjudication:** Simplified provisions help reduce disputes and improve clarity in administration.
- **Governance reform:** Part of government's larger agenda of legal simplification to remove obsolete laws.

4. Constitutional & Legal Provisions Involved

- **Article 265 of the Constitution:** "No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law." The new Act strengthens legal clarity.
- **Separation of Powers:** Parliament enacts taxation laws, ensuring fiscal authority rests with legislature.
- **Finance Bill vs. Tax Act:** While annual **Finance Acts** modify tax rates, a comprehensive **Income-tax Act** provides long-term statutory framework.

5. Significance in Indian Economy and Policy

- Reduces **litigation burden** by eliminating contradictory and outdated clauses.
- Enhances **taxpayer trust** through easy-to-understand language and rationalized structure.
- Aligns with global trend of making taxation frameworks more **transparent and predictable**.
- Could promote **ease of doing business** and improve India's attractiveness to investors.

6. Limitations & Challenges Ahead

- Implementation success depends on **clear subordinate rules** and digital integration with tax administration.
- Actual impact depends on **proper training of officials** and awareness creation among taxpayers.
- Though structure is simplified, compliance may still be challenging without further reforms in GST and corporate taxation.

Key Definitions

- **Direct Tax:** Tax levied directly on individuals and organizations (e.g., income tax, corporate tax).
- **Income-tax Act, 1961:** Comprehensive law for levying, collecting, and administering income tax in India, now replaced.
- **Finance Act:** Annual legislation introducing tax rates, exemptions, and budgetary provisions.

Conclusion

The **Income-tax Act, 2025** marks a historic reform by replacing a six-decade-old law with a **modern, simplified, and rationalized framework**. While it does not alter tax rates, its focus on clarity and reduced complexity can foster greater trust between taxpayers and the state, contributing to **better compliance, reduced litigation, and improved governance**.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS III (Indian Economy):** Tax reforms, ease of doing business, fiscal policy.
- **GS II (Governance):** Simplification of laws, citizen-centric administration.



- **GS IV (Ethics):** Transparency and fairness in taxation.
- **Prelims:** Key facts (Year of enactment, Sections reduced, implementation date).
- **Mains:** Essay/GS III – “Tax reforms as tools for governance efficiency and economic growth in India.”

4. Criminal Cases against Chief Ministers – ADR Report

1. Key Findings of the ADR Report

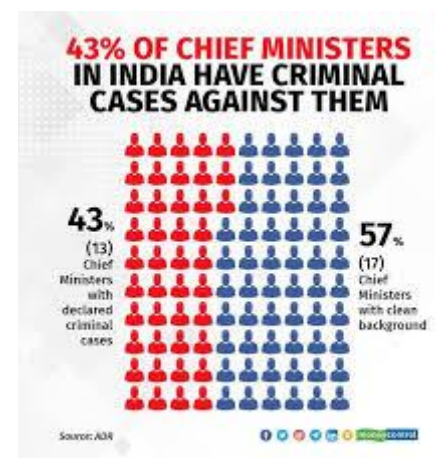
- Out of **30 Chief Ministers (CMs)** across India, **12 CMs (40%)** have declared criminal cases against themselves.
- **10 CMs (33%)** face **serious criminal charges**, such as attempt to murder, kidnapping, bribery, and criminal intimidation.
- Telangana CM **Revanth Reddy** tops the list with **89 cases**, followed by Tamil Nadu CM **M.K. Stalin** with **47 cases**.
- Maharashtra CM **Devendra Fadnavis** (**4 cases**), Kerala CM **Pinarayi Vijayan** (**2 cases**), and Punjab CM **Bhagwant Mann** (**1 case**) also figure in the list.

2. Background: Criminalization of Politics in India

- “**Criminalization of politics**” refers to the entry of individuals with criminal backgrounds into the electoral and political system.
- It has become a serious challenge to democracy, eroding **public trust, rule of law, and governance quality**.

3. Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 102(1) & 191(1):** Disqualification of MPs and MLAs on grounds of conviction under certain laws.
- **Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951:**
 - **Section 8:** Disqualification upon conviction for specific offences (corruption, terrorism, rape, etc.). However, it does not bar individuals with *pending cases* from contesting.
- **Supreme Court Judgments:**
 - **Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013):** Legislators convicted with imprisonment of 2 years or more are disqualified immediately.
 - **Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India (2018):** SC directed political parties to publicize criminal antecedents of candidates.
- Despite rulings, laws largely allow those with pending charges (not convicted) to contest and hold office.





4. Implications for Democracy and Governance

- Weakens **rule of law** and strengthens the culture of **muscle and money power** in elections.
- Leads to **poor governance** as decision-makers may misuse office for personal legal protection.
- Creates **voter disillusionment**, lowering faith in electoral democracy.
- Hampers India's **global democratic credibility**.

5. Recommendations for Reform

- **Fast-tracking criminal cases** against legislators within one year of filing.
- **Amendments to RPA, 1951** to debar individuals with serious criminal charges (not only convictions).
- **Stronger Election Commission powers** to reject candidatures with pending serious trials.
- **Internal political party reforms**, ensuring candidates with no criminal background are prioritized.

Key Definitions

- **ADR (Association for Democratic Reforms):** A civil society group working on electoral reforms, known for election affidavits analysis.
- **Criminalization of Politics:** A process where persons with pending/serious criminal charges actively participate and gain power in politics.
- **Serious Criminal Charges:** Offences such as murder, rape, attempt to murder, kidnapping, corruption, terrorism – generally punishable by imprisonment of 5 years or more.

Conclusion

The ADR findings highlight the **persistent problem of criminalization in Indian politics**, with nearly **1 in 3 CMs facing serious charges**. While the judiciary has intervened, lack of legislative will and loopholes in electoral laws allow this trend to continue. Addressing this requires **stronger reforms, political accountability, voter awareness, and judicial efficiency**.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (Polity & Governance):** Electoral reforms, Representation of People Act, role of Election Commission, criminalization of politics.
- **GS IV (Ethics):** Ethical governance, role of integrity in leadership.
- **Essay Paper:** "Criminalization of politics is the greatest threat to Indian democracy."

5. NITI Aayog Report on Model Policy for Homestays

1. Background and Objective of the Report

- NITI Aayog released a report titled "**Rethinking Homestays: Navigating Policy Pathways**" in New Delhi.
- The report aims to provide a **model policy framework** for States to harmonize regulations and promote an inclusive and sustainable homestay ecosystem.



- It identifies homestays and BnBs as vital tools to unlock the potential of India's tourism sector.

2. Key Recommendations

- Develop a **light-touch, transparent regulatory framework** ensuring ease of business, tourist safety, and protection of local heritage.
- Provide **financial incentives at the destination level** (i.e., supporting tourism infrastructure in areas) instead of focusing narrowly on individual homestay amenities.
- Encourage **culturally immersive tourism experiences** through homestays, which connect travelers with local traditions, cuisine, and heritage.
- Promote **inclusive entrepreneurship and community participation** to generate local employment and empower women and marginalized sections.

3. Economic and Social Significance

- Homestays can help in **spreading tourism benefits beyond big cities** to rural and semi-urban regions.
- Act as a tool for **rural development, sustainable livelihoods, and cultural preservation**.
- Facilitate **sustainable tourism models** by reducing ecological pressure on traditional hotel-based tourism hubs.

4. Constitutional and Legal Aspects

- **Tourism as a subject is in the Concurrent List** (Entry 42, List III, Seventh Schedule), allowing coordinated efforts between Union and States.
- **Article 39(b) of DPSPs:** Calls for equitable distribution of resources, which community-based tourism initiatives like homestays can advance.
- Supports India's commitments under **SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)**, particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

5. Challenges Identified

- Regulatory inconsistencies across States lead to confusion for hosts and aggregators.
- Lack of **standardized norms for safety, taxation, and quality assurance**.
- Need for **digital integration** (registrations, monitoring, online platforms) to ensure transparency.



6. Strategic Roadmap by NITI Aayog

- **State-level adoption** of a uniform model homestay policy.
- **Institutional support** for capacity building, training, and upskilling of homestay owners.
- **Partnerships with private aggregators** (such as Airbnb, MakeMyTrip, etc.) to bring small homestays into mainstream digital tourism networks.



- Promote **destination branding and heritage-based tourism clusters** with community participation.

Key Definitions

- **Homestay:** A form of accommodation where travelers stay in a local family's home, experiencing local culture and lifestyle.
- **Bed and Breakfast (BnB):** Small lodging facility offering overnight accommodation and breakfast, usually run by households.
- **Light-touch Regulation:** Minimal but effective regulatory interventions to enable business ease while ensuring safety and standards.

Conclusion

The NITI Aayog's initiative highlights the rising importance of **community-driven tourism** models that are inclusive, sustainable, and culturally enriching. If implemented effectively, a model homestay policy can **boost employment, empower local communities, and diversify India's tourism economy**, while ensuring safety and heritage protection.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (Governance & Policy):** Cooperative federalism, role of NITI Aayog in policy-making.
- **GS III (Economy):** Promotion of tourism, entrepreneurship, MSMEs, and employment generation.
- **GS I (Society & Culture):** Preservation of local heritage and promotion of cultural tourism.
- **Essay / GS IV (Ethics):** Sustainable tourism and inclusive growth through community participation.

6. Draft UGC Curriculum Framework on Ancient Wisdom

1. Background and Objective

- The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has released a **draft Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (LOCF)** for multiple subjects, including anthropology, chemistry, commerce, economics, geography, mathematics, political science, and others.
- The framework emphasizes **integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** and **ancient wisdom** into higher education curricula.
- UGC has invited **feedback from stakeholders** before finalization, amid political debate and criticism of alleged "saffronisation" of education.

2. Key Features of the Draft Curriculum

- **Subject Integration with Ancient Wisdom:**
 - **Mathematics:** Inclusion of mandala geometry, yantras, rangoli, kolam (algorithmic art forms), temple architecture, ayadi ratios, and contributions of Indian mathematicians to arithmetic, algebra, and calculus.
 - **Commerce:** Study of **Bharatiya philosophy and Kautilya's Arthashastra** linking commerce with ethics, governance, and sustainable practices.





- **Economics:** Concepts of **dharmic thought** on wealth and prosperity, trade ethics, labour codes, role of the king in economy, guild systems, and ecological values.
- **Chemistry:** Traditional Indian fermented beverages (kanji, toddy, mahua), and ancient concept of **Parmanu (atom)** alongside modern theories.
- **Anthropology:** Ideas from Charaka, Sushruta, Buddha, and Mahavira on human-nature relationship and culture.
- **History/Political Science:** Reading list includes Veer Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*.
- Stress on **discipline-specific courses** over multidisciplinary flexibility, which contrasts with **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's holistic vision**.

3. Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 29 & 30:** Protection of cultural and educational rights, relevant in curriculum debates.
- **Article 51A(f):** Fundamental duty to value and preserve India's rich heritage.
- **Concurrent List, Entry 25:** Education is a shared responsibility of Union and State, therefore curricula impact Center-State relations.
- **NEP 2020:** Promotes multidisciplinary and holistic education, global best practices, and integration of India's rich traditions with modern knowledge.

4. Opportunities Presented by the Framework

- Enables **cultural pride** and awareness of India's intellectual contributions to science, math, medicine, and governance.
- Promotes **ethical and sustainable practices** in economics and commerce education by applying indigenous philosophies.
- Provides **culturally immersive pedagogy**, enhancing **soft power** and global academic recognition of Indian systems.
- Can promote **innovation in pedagogy** by blending traditional knowledge with modern scientific inquiry.

5. Key Concerns and Criticism

- Allegations of "**saffronisation**" and ideological bias in knowledge representation.
- Limited scope for **multidisciplinary flexible learning** compared to NEP vision.
- Risk of **romanticizing ancient concepts** without rigorous scientific evaluation, possibly diluting academic standards.
- Potential **center-state friction**, as education is a concurrent subject and many non-BJP ruled states oppose such curriculum changes.

Key Definitions

- **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS):** Traditional frameworks of knowledge including philosophy, mathematics, medicine (Ayurveda), art, architecture, and governance rooted in India's cultural heritage.



- **Arthashastra:** Ancient text by Kautilya (Chanakya) on economics, statecraft, military strategy, and trade regulation.
- **Parmanu:** Ancient Indian philosophical concept of the indivisible particle, similar to the modern idea of an atom.

Conclusion

The UGC's draft LOCF reflects an effort to **rediscover and integrate India's intellectual traditions** into modern higher education. While it offers opportunities for cultural enrichment, ethical grounding, and sustainable practices, it also risks political contestation and academic controversy if not balanced with global standards and multidisciplinary flexibility. A **balanced and evidence-based integration** of ancient wisdom with modern scientific temper is key.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (Governance & Education):** Role of UGC, federal roles in education, NEP 2020.
- **GS I (Culture & Heritage):** Indian knowledge systems, their historical contributions.
- **GS IV (Ethics):** Integrating dharmic/ethical traditions into modern governance and commerce.
- **Essay Paper:** "Education is not merely about information but about inculcating values – Can ancient knowledge guide modern education?"

7. Upcoming GST Council Meeting – September 3, 2025

1. Background of the Meeting

- The **56th GST Council meeting** is scheduled on **September 3-4, 2025** in New Delhi.
- Last GST Council meeting was held in **December 2024**, though rules mandate at least one meeting per quarter.
- The focus will be on key **rate rationalisation proposals** sent by the Ministry of Finance to the **Group of Ministers (GoM)**.

2. Agenda of the Meeting

- Key discussion on **reforming GST tax structure into a possible two-rate system**, as recommended by the Union Government.
- Consideration of **GoM reports** on rate rationalisation and revenue-sharing.
- Balancing **Centre's proposals** with **States' revenue concerns**, especially as States rely heavily on GST compensation.

3. Concerns of States and Revenue Implications

- States, including Kerala, flagged concerns about possible **revenue losses** from rate simplification or reduction.
- Discussions likely around **fiscal federalism and GST compensation mechanism** to ensure States are not adversely affected.





- Need to balance **ease of compliance** with adequate **revenue buoyancy** for both Union and States.

4. Constitutional & Legal Context

- **101st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2016** introduced GST as a single indirect tax replacing multiple levies.
- **Article 279A:** Mandates the creation of the GST Council, chaired by the Union Finance Minister with State Finance Ministers as members.
- GST Council's decisions must reflect **cooperative federalism**, often adopting consensus-based decision-making.
- Four-tier GST rate system currently in place; proposals aim at **simplifying into fewer slabs**.

5. Importance of GST Reforms

- **Rate rationalisation:** Simplifies structure, improves compliance, reduces classification disputes.
- **Uniformity:** Ensures a common national market, reducing cascading effect of taxes.
- **Revenue significance:** GST accounts for a large share of tax revenue for both Centre and States.
- India's economic recovery and growth projections make **a stable and predictable GST regime** crucial.

6. Challenges Ahead

- Difficulty in **achieving consensus** among States with varying economic profiles.
- Balancing **progressive taxation (equity)** with **simplicity in structure (efficiency)**.
- Addressing rising concerns over **tax burden on essentials vs. luxury goods**, and **digital economy taxation**.

Key Definitions

- **GST (Goods and Services Tax):** A comprehensive, destination-based indirect tax levied on the supply of goods and services, subsuming multiple indirect taxes.
- **Rate Rationalisation:** Process of simplifying GST slab structure to fewer rates for ease of compliance and minimal disputes.
- **GST Council (Article 279A):** A constitutional body for making recommendations on issues related to GST, showcasing **cooperative federalism**.

Conclusion

The 56th GST Council meeting is crucial as it may **reshape India's GST structure into a simplified two-rate system**. While this reform aims at improving ease of business and transparency, States' concerns regarding possible revenue shortfalls highlight the need for a careful, consensus-driven approach. The outcome will determine the balance between **tax efficiency, federal interests, and growth-oriented fiscal policy**.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (Polity & Governance):** Constitutional bodies, federalism, Centre-State financial relations.
- **GS III (Economy):** Fiscal reforms, taxation system, GST and its impact on economy.



- **Essay:** Tax reforms and cooperative federalism in India.
- **Prelims:** Article 279A, GST Council composition, constitutional amendment (101st Amendment Act, 2016).

8. UN Declares Famine in Gaza – Key Highlights

1. UN Declaration of Famine

- The **United Nations** has officially declared famine in the **Gaza governorate**, affecting around **500,000 people** (one-fifth of Palestinian territory, including Gaza City).
- The **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Initiative (IPC)**, based in Rome, confirmed that famine conditions (catastrophic food insecurity, mass starvation, destitution, and death) are present.
- The IPC projects famine will spread to **Deir el-Balah and Khan Yunis** by **end of September**, impacting nearly **two-thirds of Gaza**.

2. Role of Israel and Obstruction of Aid

- The UN has blamed “**systematic obstruction of aid**” by **Israel** for turning Gaza’s food insecurity into famine.
- Israel has been accused of **banning or severely restricting humanitarian aid, food, medicine, and fuel** during its nearly two-year war with Hamas.
- Israel rejected the UN-backed report, claiming it relied on “Hamas lies filtered through biased organisations”.

3. Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

- Nearly **one million people** are currently living in Gaza governorate, with the **vast majority of Gaza’s population displaced at least once** due to conflict.
- Severe shortages include **food, clean water, medicines, and shelter**, exacerbating the humanitarian disaster.
- Hamas has called on the **UN and Security Council to impose a ceasefire** and lift the blockade.



4. Statements and International Reactions

- **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres:** Urged a **ceasefire** and end to impunity.
- **UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk:** Stated that **using starvation as a method of warfare is a war crime** and may also amount to “wilful killing” under international humanitarian law.
- Aid experts said the famine was **entirely preventable** if uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid had been allowed.
- Israel’s Defence Minister **Israel Katz** threatened to destroy Gaza City unless Hamas releases hostages and disarms.



5. Legal and Constitutional/International Law Provisions

- **Geneva Conventions (1949) & Additional Protocols:** Explicitly prohibit “starvation of civilians as a method of warfare”.
- **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Article 8(2)(b)(xxv):** Declares use of starvation as a means of warfare a **war crime**.
- **UN Charter & International Humanitarian Law (IHL):** Call for protection of civilians in armed conflicts.
- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P):** Holds the international community responsible to intervene when populations face war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, or genocide.

6. Larger Implications and Geopolitics

- The Gaza famine crisis highlights the **weaponization of humanitarian aid** in modern warfare.
- Raises questions on **enforcement of international laws** when permanent UN Security Council members disagree on action.
- May intensify global divisions on the Israel-Palestine issue, potentially leading to **greater regional instability** in the Middle East.

Key Definitions

- **Famine (as per IPC):** Situation where at least 20% of households face extreme food shortage, acute malnutrition exceeds 30%, and mortality rate is more than 2 deaths per 10,000 people per day.
- **International Humanitarian Law (IHL):** Body of law governing armed conflicts, ensuring protection of civilians and regulating conduct of hostilities.
- **War Crime:** Serious breach of laws of armed conflict, including deliberate attacks on civilians, starvation, and denial of essential humanitarian relief.

Conclusion

The UN’s declaration of famine in Gaza demonstrates a **humanitarian catastrophe caused more by conflict-driven blockade than natural scarcity**. The crisis underlines the **illegal use of starvation as a weapon of war**, raising the stakes for international intervention and accountability. The continuation of hostilities without effective humanitarian aid and ceasefire risks escalating into one of the gravest humanitarian disasters in recent history.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (IR):** India’s position on Israel-Palestine conflict, role of UN, international humanitarian law.
- **GS III (Security & Disaster Management):** Humanitarian crises, role of aid in conflict zones.
- **GS IV (Ethics):** Ethical considerations in warfare, starvation as a tool of conflict.
- **Essay:** “Weaponization of hunger undermines humanity – famine as a man-made disaster.”

9. SCO Summit 2025 – Key Takeaways

1. Background and Scale of the Summit



- The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit** will be held in **Tianjin, China**, from **August 31–September 1, 2025**, chaired by Chinese President **Xi Jinping**.
- This will be the **largest SCO summit in history**, with participation from **20 world leaders**, including Indian PM **Narendra Modi**, Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, Pakistan's PM **Shehbaz Sharif**, and leaders from Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Nepal, and Maldives.
- Representatives of **10 international organisations**, including UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, will also attend.

2. Objectives and Chinese Role

- China, currently the **rotating chair**, seeks to showcase its **growing geopolitical influence** through the “**SCO Plus**” format.
- Xi Jinping will set out a **new vision for SCO**, elaborating on safeguarding the **Shanghai Spirit** (mutual trust, respect, equality, and cooperation) and reinforcing “post-WWII order” and global governance.
- China will announce **new initiatives** for high-quality development, security cooperation, and cultural exchanges within SCO.

3. Strategic Agenda of the Summit

- **Security Cooperation:** Strengthening counter-terrorism, cyber security, and stability in Eurasia.
- **Economic Collaboration:** Expanding trade, connectivity, and sustainable development pathways.
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Boosting people-to-people cooperation and cultural linkages among members and observers.
- **Declarations and Handover:** Adoption of a **10-year SCO development strategy**, commemorations of **80 years of UN and WWII victory**, and signature of joint declarations.

4. Geopolitical Context

- The SCO has emerged as a **counterweight to Western blocs (NATO, G7)**, representing major Eurasian powers like China, Russia, India, and Iran.
- The summit comes amid ongoing **global multipolarity shifts**, where Beijing and Moscow project SCO as an alternative platform to Western-led governance models.
- China is leveraging the summit to align countries through military, economic, and technological collaboration, including showcasing **advanced weaponry** at its **largest-ever military parade (September 4, 2025)**.



5. Constitutional / Legal & International Relevance

- **India's SCO Membership (2017):** Offers platforms for multilateral cooperation in Central Asia and Eurasia.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** India participates in SCO while balancing ties with Quad/Western groupings under its “multi-alignment” foreign policy.



- SCO summit discussions resonate with **UN Charter principles** of peace, security, and cooperation, though critics call it a tool for Chinese and Russian dominance in Eurasian affairs.

6. Opportunities and Challenges for India

- **Opportunities:**
 - Platform to engage with China, Pakistan, and Central Asian nations on regional stability.
 - Enhances India's influence in **Eurasian geopolitics**, connectivity, and energy diplomacy.
- **Challenges:**
 - India's differences with China (border issues) and Pakistan (terror sponsorship).
 - Chinese attempts to dominate SCO and align it against Western alliances may put India in delicate positions.
 - Need to balance SCO commitments with India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Key Definitions

- **SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation):** A Eurasian political, economic, and security grouping founded in 2001; aims at mutual trust, combating terrorism, and strengthening multipolarity.
- **Shanghai Spirit:** SCO's guiding principle emphasizing mutual respect, equality, and win-win cooperation among members.
- **SCO Plus:** An extended format inviting non-member states and international bodies to broaden SCO's global legitimacy.

Conclusion

The 2025 SCO Summit in Tianjin reflects China's ambition to use the platform for **strategic influence, new global governance narratives, and Eurasian integration**. For India, participation is both an opportunity to strengthen connectivity and energy diplomacy and a challenge requiring strategic balance amidst China's growing assertiveness and regional rivalries.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (IR):** India's role in SCO, cooperative vs adversarial relations with China and Pakistan, multilateral diplomacy.
- **GS I (World History/Politics):** Post-WWII order and multipolarity.
- **GS III (Security):** Counter-terrorism, cyber security, regional stability in Eurasia.
- **Essay/IR Themes:** "SCO and the making of a multipolar world order" / "Balancing cooperation and competition in multilateral platforms."

10. Headline Inflation Targeting in India – RBI Debate

1. Background of the Issue

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** is reviewing whether to continue targeting **headline inflation** (which includes food and fuel prices) or shift to **core inflation** (which excludes them) under the **Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework (2016)**.



- Experts and economists largely support continuing with headline inflation as the main target, given India's unique consumption patterns.
- The current inflation targeting framework (4% target \pm 2% band) is valid till **March 2026**.

2. Why Headline Inflation is Preferred for India

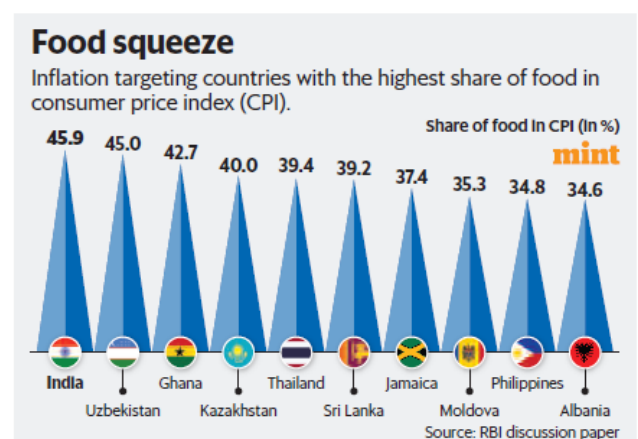
- **High food weight in CPI basket:** In India, **food has 46% weight in CPI**, the highest among countries with inflation targeting. This makes headline inflation more reflective of household realities.
- **Impact on poor households:** Over **90% of the poorest rural families and 50% of urban poor** spend more than half their budgets on food and energy. Thus, headline inflation captures mass welfare concerns.
- **Global practice:** Except for **Uganda**, all inflation-targeting countries use **headline inflation** as policy anchor.
- **Monetary credibility:** Anchoring to headline inflation strengthens the transmission of monetary policy and public trust.

3. Experts' Views and Suggested Adjustments

- **Madan Sabnavis (Bank of Baroda):** Inflation affects "everyone"; targeting headline is logical. Suggests revising target closer to **5% average** and narrowing or removing the wide band.
- **Madhavi Arora (Emkay Global):** Advocates 4% midpoint target but with explicit timelines after supply shocks. Proposes **dual-lens approach**:
 - Target headline inflation as anchor.
 - Use **core inflation tactically** for gauging demand persistence and policy stance.
- **General Consensus:** Keep headline inflation targeting, but refine the **band (currently 2–6%)** to a narrower range (1–1.5%).

4. Constitutional, Legal & Institutional Context

- **RBI Act, 1934 (Amended in 2016):** Legally mandated inflation targeting framework in India.
- **Section 45ZA of RBI Act:** Government sets inflation target in consultation with RBI (currently 4% with \pm 2%).
- **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):** A statutory 6-member body decides interest rates to achieve inflation target.
- **Failure Clause:** If inflation remains outside 2–6% for 3 consecutive quarters, RBI must explain remedial measures to government (as it did in 2022).



5. Broader Implications

- **For Growth & Stability:** Headline targeting ensures monetary policy addresses common citizens' welfare and inflation expectations.



- **For Policy Effectiveness:** Moving away from headline may reduce credibility as it wouldn't reflect real-life inflation burden.
- **Challenge:** Since food inflation is often **supply-driven and outside RBI control**, tight monetary policies may not always curb it, raising questions of effectiveness.

6. Key Definitions

- **Headline Inflation:** Total inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), covering all goods and services including volatile items like food and fuel.
- **Core Inflation:** Inflation excluding food and fuel, reflecting demand-driven pressures and underlying price trends.
- **Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT):** Monetary policy model allowing RBI to target inflation while considering growth needs, introduced via amendment to the RBI Act in 2016.

Conclusion

Headline inflation remains the most suitable anchor for India's monetary policy due to the **high weight of food in CPI, vulnerability of poor households, and international best practice**. While adjustments in target level (closer to 5%) and narrowing tolerance band could improve effectiveness, abandoning headline for core inflation would dilute the social and economic relevance of policy. A **headline-plus-core dual framework** can provide balance—headline for anchoring public expectations, core for tactical monetary decisions.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS III (Economy):** Monetary policy, inflation targeting, RBI functions.
- **GS II (Governance):** Role of statutory institutions like RBI & MPC.
- **GS IV (Ethics):** Balancing monetary stability with welfare of vulnerable classes.
- **Essay:** "Inflation control is not just an economic mandate but a social responsibility."

11. India's Rising Interest Payment Burden – Key Insights

1. Scale of the Problem

- India's **interest payments on government debt** have nearly **tripled in a decade**, expected to touch **₹12.76 trillion in FY26**, according to Finance Ministry data.
- The rise is due to servicing of **pandemic-era loans** borrowed at higher interest rates, even as bond yields have softened since FY24.
- A large stock of **medium- and long-term bonds** is set to mature in the coming years, adding to repayment pressure.



2. Debt and Fiscal Profile

- India's **government debt** rose from **₹71 trillion (51.5% of GDP)** in FY16 to a projected **₹200 trillion (56.1% of GDP)** by FY26.



- Debt-to-GDP peaked at **61.4% in FY21** (pandemic year) before gradual decline due to **fiscal consolidation**.
- Fiscal deficit reduced from **4.8% of GDP in FY25** to a target of **4.4% for FY26**, supported by buoyant tax collections.

3. Debt Management Tools

- The government uses **bond buybacks and switches** to smooth repayment burdens:
 - **Buybacks:** Purchasing bonds before maturity eases repayment bulges.
 - **Switches:** Exchanging near-term bonds for longer-term ones to reduce rollover risk.
- These strategies, while pushing some debt into the future, help **lower refinancing risks and stabilize bond yields**.

4. Bond Market Trends

- The **10-year benchmark yield** averaged **6.6% in FY21**, and now remains around **6.5–6.55%**, dropping to **6.4% in April 2025 (3-year low)**.
- Lower yields signal **investor confidence** and expectations of **monetary easing**, which reduce borrowing costs.
- However, interest payment obligations remain high due to earlier high-cost borrowings during pandemic years.

5. Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Article 292 of the Constitution:** Allows the Union government to borrow upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **FRBM Act, 2003:** Legally binds the government to maintain fiscal discipline, including targets for fiscal deficit and debt-to-GDP ratio.
- Annual **Budget** and **Finance Acts** provide borrowing authorisations and projections for fiscal deficit management.

6. Broader Economic Implications

- Rising **interest payments crowd out capital expenditure**, limiting government's ability to spend on infrastructure and development.
- Persistent high debt creates **intergenerational fiscal burden**, reducing fiscal space for future shocks.
- Fiscal consolidation, stable bond yields, and revenue buoyancy are critical for maintaining **debt sustainability and macroeconomic stability**.

Key Definitions

- **Fiscal Deficit:** Excess of government expenditure over revenue (excluding borrowings).
- **Debt-to-GDP Ratio:** Proportion of government debt relative to the economy's GDP, an indicator of debt sustainability.
- **Bond Buyback:** Repurchasing existing bonds to reduce repayment pressure.
- **Bond Switch:** Exchanging shorter maturity bonds with longer tenure bonds to defer repayment load.



Conclusion

India's interest bill nearing **₹12.8 trillion in FY26** is a fiscal warning sign, reflecting the long shadow of pandemic-era borrowings. Despite falling bond yields and fiscal consolidation, **debt servicing costs are consuming a larger share of revenues**, demanding careful fiscal management. Sustained revenue growth, prudent debt strategies, and adherence to FRBM targets will be essential for long-term fiscal sustainability.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS III (Economy):** Fiscal policy, debt management, FRBM Act, interest burden.
- **GS II (Governance):** Legal provisions on borrowing, budgetary control.
- **Essay:** "Rising public debt and its implications for future generations."
- **Prelims:** Article 292, FRBM Act, debt-to-GDP trends, meaning of buybacks and switches.

12. Supreme Court Order on Street Dogs – Analysis

1. Background of the Case

- On **August 11, 2025**, the Supreme Court ordered that all street dogs in New Delhi be **rounded up and confined in shelters** to address the stray dog menace.
- The directive was stayed by the Court itself on **August 22, 2025**, pending final hearing.
- The initial order was criticized as **scientifically unsound, legally dubious, and ethically problematic**, ignoring evidence-based animal management practices.

2. Scientific and Practical Issues

- Mass confinement of lakhs of dogs would lead to **overcrowded, disease-prone shelters** (rabies, leptospirosis, etc.) and uncontrollable aggression due to stress.
- Historical evidence (e.g., U.S. "pound system") shows mass shelters fail, resulting in capture-kill cycles.
- Ecological science warns of **"vacuum effect"**: removed dogs are soon replaced by migrating populations, defeating the purpose.
- Absence of dogs (efficient scavengers) can cause **explosions in rodents and monkey populations**, creating **new public health hazards**.

3. Humane and Proven Alternative – ABC Programme

- The **Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023** and the **National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination (NAPRE)** recommend **mass sterilisation and vaccination** as the only sustainable solutions.
- Successful examples: **Jaipur and Jodhpur** recorded significant dog population control and rabies coverage through ABC.
- Failures are due to **poor implementation by civic bodies** (MCD in Delhi), not flaws in the method.





4. Legal and Constitutional Dimensions

- The **2024 SC judgment (Justice J.K. Maheshwari Bench)** upheld humane management under ABC Rules; the August 11, 2025 order conflicted with this.
- **Article 51A(g)**: Fundamental duty of every citizen to show compassion to living beings. State-sanctioned cruelty (mass incarceration/killings) violates this constitutional mandate.
- Supreme Court jurisprudence previously recognised **animal rights within Article 21 scope** (right to life and dignity extends to animals).
- The August 22, 2025 stay rightly re-aligned with established legal and scientific principles.

5. Broader Ethical and Governance Issues

- Court order seen as a **smokescreen**, diverting attention from Delhi's real governance crises—corruption, flooding infrastructure, inflation, and alleged voter theft.
- Stray dogs form part of **urban ecosystems** and also serve as **companions and protectors for homeless populations**, making mass removal an act of cruelty to both animals and marginalized humans.
- The problem lies in **administrative apathy (MCD's failures)**, not in the animals themselves.

6. Evidence-Based Policy Approach Needed

- Targeted responses to aggressive individuals rather than indiscriminate removal.
- Investment in **sterilisation, vaccination, public awareness, and better waste management**.
- Holding municipal bodies accountable for implementing statutory duties under **ABC Rules, 2023** and other animal welfare laws.

Key Definitions

- **Vacuum Effect**: Population phenomenon where removal of territorial animals (like street dogs) creates space for migration of others into the same niche.
- **Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023**: Central rules that mandate sterilisation and vaccination of street dogs as the humane method of population and rabies control.
- **NAPRE (National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination)**: India's strategy aligned with WHO to eliminate dog-mediated rabies by 2030 through vaccination and sterilisation.

Conclusion

The SC's August 11 order to mass-incarcerate street dogs ignored **scientific evidence, ecological balance, and constitutional compassion**. Humane, scientifically proven approaches like the **ABC program** offer the only sustainable path to rabies control and population management. The episode highlights the need to align judicial interventions with **scientific rationality, constitutional morality, and accountability of governance institutions**.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS II (Governance & Polity)**: Judicial accountability, role of local bodies (MCD), implementation of laws.
- **GS III (Environment)**: Human-animal conflict, ecological balance, zoonotic diseases.



- **GS IV (Ethics):** Constitutional morality, compassion towards animals, humane governance.
 - **Essay:** “Science and compassion must guide governance, not hysteria and populism.”
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