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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & **STUDY CENTRE**

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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Table of Contents

1. Right to Vote vs. Freedom of Voting	2
2. India's First Digital Census (2027) Initiatives	3
3. Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) Expansion	4
4. CAG Audit on Indian Railways' Multimodal Logistics & Freight Share	5
5. Push for World-Class Banks: Consolidation and Scale for India's Economy	7
6. Services PMI Moderation: Key Economic Indicator	8
7. India's Trade Diplomacy Pivot: Engaging with Peru and Chile	9
8. India-New Zealand FTA: Boosting Trade and Strategic Ties	11
9. ISRO's Plan to Transfer PSLV Project to Industry	12
10. Key World Leaders Skip COP30 Prelude Talks: Implications for Climate Action	13
11. Universal Basic Income (UBI) in India: Policy Imperative for the 21st Century	15
12. Need for Electoral Nomination Process Reform	16



1. Right to Vote vs. Freedom of Voting

• Core Legal Distinction & Definitions:

- The **Centre's argument** to the Supreme Court makes a key distinction:
 - **'Right to Vote'** is a **Statutory Right** (derived from law, primarily the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and its origin is in the Constitution via Article 326).
 - **'Freedom of Voting'** (which includes the right to express disapproval) is contended to be a part of the **Fundamental Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression** under **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution.
- **NOTA (None of the Above)** option: An extension of the freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a), enabling voters to reject all candidates (**PUCL vs. Union of India, 2013** judgment).



• Challenge to Uncontested Elections:

- The petition challenges **Section 53(2) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951**, and **Rule 11** of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961.
- **Section 53(2) of RPA, 1951**: Mandates the Returning Officer (RO) to declare candidates **'duly elected'** forthwith if the number of contesting candidates equals the number of seats to be filled (uncontested election).
- **Contention**: This provision, by precluding a poll, **violates the citizens' freedom of voting (Article 19(1)(a))** by denying them the opportunity to exercise the **NOTA** option and voice dissatisfaction with the sole/equal number of candidates.

• Constitutional & Legal Provisions:

- **Article 326 (Constitution)**: Guarantees the **Right to Vote** based on universal adult suffrage (age 18+), but the right itself has historically been legally viewed as **Statutory** (governed by the RPA) or a **Constitutional Right** (derived from Article 326 but shaped by statute), **not a Fundamental Right**.
- **Article 19(1)(a) (Constitution)**: Guarantees the **Freedom of Speech and Expression**. Judicial precedent has held that casting a vote, and implicitly casting a negative vote (NOTA), is a form of political expression under this Article.
- **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951**: The key statute governing the conduct of elections, including the contested Section 53(2).

• UPSC Relevance (GS-II: Polity and Governance):

- **Constitutional Law**: The nuanced legal status of the 'Right to Vote' (Statutory/Constitutional) versus the 'Freedom of Voting' (Fundamental Right).
- **Electoral Reforms**: The effectiveness and scope of the **NOTA** option, particularly in uncontested elections, and the need for legislative changes to Section 53(2) of the RPA to uphold voter's right to dissent.



- **Basic Structure:** Free and fair elections are considered a part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution; the challenge relates to whether denying the NOTA option in uncontested polls infringes on this principle.
- **Conclusion:** The case centers on balancing the **procedural efficiency** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which allows for uncontested declarations, against the **fundamental democratic principle** of political expression and dissent, particularly through the use of **NOTA**. The Supreme Court's ruling will be crucial in defining the boundaries of a citizen's right to vote and their freedom of expression within the electoral framework.

2. India's First Digital Census (2027) Initiatives

- **First Fully Digital Census & Key Tech Tools:**
 - **Census 2027** will be India's **first fully digital census**, shifting from paper to a **smartphone-based** data collection using two mobile applications: **Digital Layout Map (DLM)** and **Census 2027-Houselist**.
 - **DLM App (Digital Layout Map):** This tool replicates the traditional drawing of **House Listing Blocks (HLBs)**—the primary unit for data collection—but digitally. It records **building coordinates (latitude and longitude)** and other details for **geo-tagging** every structure, enhancing spatial accuracy for planning.
 - **Self-Enumeration:** For the first time, a portal allows citizens in pre-test areas to submit their details **online** before an enumerator's visit, promoting **public participation** and efficiency.
- **Two-Phase Process and Pre-Test:**
 - The Census is conducted in two main phases: **Phase I: House Listing and Housing Operations (HLO)** (collecting data on housing amenities/30 questions) and **Phase II: Population Enumeration** (collecting detailed individual socio-economic data).
 - The pre-test (Nov 10-30 in select areas) is for **system evaluation** and refinement of digital tools and does not form part of the official database.
- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions:**
 - **Article 246** of the Constitution places **Census** under **Entry 69 of the Union List (Seventh Schedule)**, giving the **Union Government** exclusive authority to legislate on it.
 - The entire exercise is governed by the **Census Act, 1948**, which authorizes the Central Government to conduct the Census and ensures the **confidentiality** of individual data collected.
 - The Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India, under the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**, is the nodal authority.

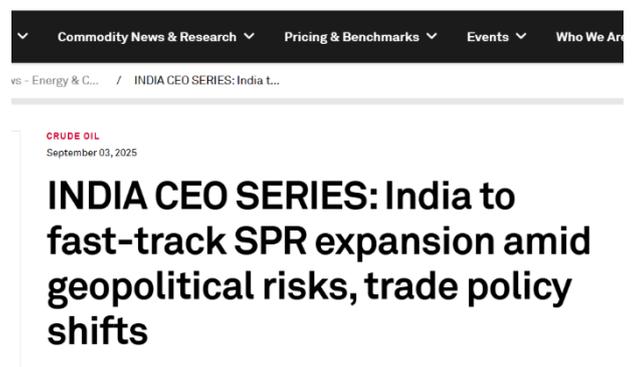




- **Additional Key Feature: Caste Enumeration and Delimitation:**
 - The 2027 Census is expected to include **caste enumeration** for all communities (not just SCs/STs) for the first time since 1931, which is crucial for evidence-based social justice and reservation policies (**Article 340**).
 - The data from the 2027 Census will be used for the next **delimitation** exercise (redrawing constituency boundaries) and for the implementation of the **Women's Reservation Bill (106th CAA, 2023)**, as per **Article 82** and the first Census after **2026**.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-II: Governance & Social Justice):**
 - **Digital Governance:** Transition to digital census (real-time data, less processing time, better accuracy) is a major move under **Digital India**.
 - **Policy Formulation:** Accurate and timely data is vital for **resource allocation** (Finance Commission under **Article 275**), welfare scheme targeting, and planning in sectors like health, education, and urban development.
 - **Federalism & Political Impact:** Data from this census, especially caste and population figures, will have significant implications for political representation and the distribution of financial resources between the Centre and States.
- **Conclusion:** The launch of mobile applications and a self-enumeration portal marks a monumental step in modernizing India's decennial Census, positioning it as a tool for **data-driven governance**. Its success is critical, as the **Census 2027** data is directly linked to key social and political outcomes, including reservation policy, delimitation, and fiscal federalism, making it a pivotal event for the future of Indian policy.

3. Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) Expansion

- **Strategic Imperative and Current Scenario:**
 - India, heavily dependent (over **85%**) on crude oil imports, aims to **fortify its energy security** against global price volatility, tightening supplies (e.g., from major oil groupings), and geopolitical risks (e.g., US sanctions).
 - The current move is a **market opportunity strategy**: to refill the reserves and fast-track expansion when **global crude prices are subdued** (below \$65/barrel), which saves significant public expenditure.
- **Current SPR Capacity and Locations (Phase I):**
 - **Definition:** Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) are **government-owned stockpiles** of crude oil held in underground rock caverns for use during external supply disruptions.
 - **Nodal Agency:** Managed by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL)**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.
 - **Total Capacity (Phase I): 5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT).**





- **Locations: Visakhapatnam** (Andhra Pradesh), **Mangaluru** (Karnataka), and **Padur** (Karnataka). This capacity meets only about **9.5 days** of India's crude oil requirement.
- **Expansion Plans (Phase II) & New Model:**
 - The government has approved the establishment of **two additional commercial-cum-strategic petroleum reserve facilities** with a total storage capacity of **6.5 MMT**.
 - **New Locations: Chandikhol** (Odisha - 4 MMT) and additional capacity at **Padur** (Karnataka - 2.5 MMT).
 - **New Model:** Phase II is being developed on a **Public-Private Partnership (PPP)** mode, allowing private sector participation to reduce government expenditure and enable commercial utilization.
- **India's Overall Oil Security & Global Standards:**
 - India's **total oil reserve capacity** (SPR + Oil Marketing Companies' commercial storage) is about **74 days** of consumption.
 - **IEA Requirement:** The **International Energy Agency (IEA)**, of which India is an Associate Member, requires its full member countries to maintain reserves equivalent to **90 days** of net imports. India's long-term goal is to reach this 90-day stock level.
 - **Role of Reserves:** SPRs act as a crucial **buffer** during crises and help **stabilize domestic prices** by releasing oil to OMCs.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-III: Economy & Security):**
 - **Energy Security:** SPRs are a cornerstone of India's energy policy, mitigating high dependency on imports and vulnerability to geopolitical risks in the Middle East.
 - **Fiscal Management:** The decision to procure and fill reserves during low price periods demonstrates prudent fiscal management and risk hedging against the **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**, which swells when crude prices are high.
 - **Infrastructure:** The construction of underground rock caverns (considered safer and more secure) is a major strategic infrastructure project.
- **Conclusion:** The ongoing expansion and refilling of Strategic Petroleum Reserves are vital steps toward securing India's economic resilience and achieving its goal of 90 days of reserve capacity. The shift to a commercial-cum-strategic, **PPP model** in Phase II reflects a dynamic approach to financing and managing national energy security infrastructure against an increasingly volatile global oil market.

4. CAG Audit on Indian Railways' Multimodal Logistics & Freight Share

- **Audit Focus: Efficiency and Logistics Cost Reduction:**
 - The **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** of India has initiated a comprehensive **Performance Audit** on the Indian Railways' **multimodal transport and logistics initiatives**.
 - **Core Objective:** To ascertain whether major investments and modernization efforts, particularly under the **PM Gati Shakti** plan, have translated into a **measurable fall in logistics costs** and improved freight mobility.



- **Context:** India's logistics cost is pegged at **7.97% of GDP** (FY24 NCAER study), significantly higher for MSMEs (16.9%), reflecting structural inefficiencies that the audit seeks to address.
- **National Rail Plan (NRP) 2030 Targets under Scrutiny:**
 - The audit directly assesses the progress and outcomes of the **National Rail Plan (NRP) 2030** objectives.
 - **Key NRP Targets:**
 - Increasing the Railways' **freight modal share to 45%** (from current $\sim 27\%$).
 - Raising the average speed of freight trains to **50 km per hour**.
 - The audit will evaluate key policy initiatives like the **Gati Shakti Cargo Terminal (GCT) policy**, which aims for capacity creation and private participation.
- **Multimodal Integration and Inter-Ministerial Coordination:**
 - The performance audit is a **multi-sectoral exercise**, covering nine Railway Zones and the coordination among key Ministries: Railways, Road Transport & Highways, Ports, Shipping & Waterways, and DPIIT.
 - **Challenge Highlighted:** Lack of seamless '**first-mile and last-mile**' connectivity often necessitates multiple handling (e.g., coal movement, as cited in the text), which increases costs, transit time, and pilferage.
 - **Digital/Policy Integration:** Progress of the newly approved **Gati Shakti Transport Planning and Research Organisation (GTPRO)** for unified transport planning will also be evaluated.
- **Constitutional and Legal Provisions (Role of CAG):**
 - **Constitutional Provision:** The **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** is established under **Article 148** of the Constitution and is the guardian of the public purse.
 - **Audit Mandate:** The CAG performs **Performance Audits** (discretionary) to look into the **economy, efficiency, and effectiveness** of government expenditure and programs, in addition to the obligatory Legal and Regulatory Audit.
 - **Accountability:** The CAG's report on this audit will be tabled in Parliament (expected Monsoon Session 2026), reinforcing the **Executive's financial accountability to the Parliament** (via the Public Accounts Committee).
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-II: Governance; GS-III: Economy & Infrastructure):**
 - **Infrastructure & Economy:** Freight modal shift (Road to Rail) is crucial for **reducing logistics costs** (National Logistics Policy aims for single-digit figure) and improving India's global **competitiveness** and **Logistics Performance Index (LPI)** ranking.
 - **Governance & Auditing:** The audit demonstrates the **CAG's role as a watchdog** in assessing the measurable impact of flagship government schemes like **PM Gati Shakti** and the **National Rail Plan**, ensuring efficient use of massive infrastructure investments.





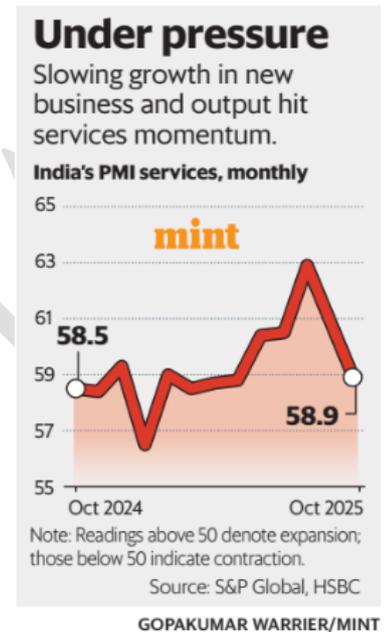
- **Definition of Key Term (Bank Consolidation):**
 - **Bank Consolidation:** The strategic process of combining two or more banks (mergers, acquisitions) into a single, larger entity, typically aimed at achieving **economies of scale**, improving **operational efficiency**, strengthening the **capital base**, and enhancing **global competitiveness**.
- **Constitutional & Legal Context (Regulatory Oversight):**
 - **RBI Act, 1934 & Banking Regulation Act, 1949:** The RBI, as the central bank and regulator, oversees all bank mergers, acquisitions, and the licensing of new institutions, ensuring financial stability and protecting depositors' interests.
 - **Government Ownership:** Most large banks in the consolidation exercise are PSBs (Public Sector Banks), where the government is the majority shareholder, necessitating close coordination between the Ministry of Finance and the RBI.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-III: Economy, Banking & Infrastructure):**
 - **Banking Reforms:** The move is a critical part of financial sector reforms aimed at creating a **robust and resilient banking system**. The discussion directly relates to the debate on the structure and governance of PSBs.
 - **Infrastructure Funding:** The creation of "**Mega Banks**" is essential for meeting the financing gaps in massive infrastructure projects outlined under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) and PM Gati Shakti, linking the financial sector directly to economic growth.
 - **Financial Stability:** Consolidation is seen as a way to address the issue of fragmented lending capacity and manage **Non-Performing Assets (NPAs)** more effectively by merging weaker banks with stronger ones.
- **Conclusion:** The call for large, world-class banks underscores the government's commitment to creating a financial sector commensurate with India's growth aspirations, especially the need for sustained, long-term funding for large-scale projects. The success of this next phase of reform will depend on a carefully calibrated strategy involving both government policy and RBI regulation to balance scale efficiency with maintaining market competition and financial inclusion.

6. Services PMI Moderation: Key Economic Indicator

- **Key Finding: Deceleration of Services Growth:**
 - The **HSBC India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)**, compiled by S&P Global, fell to **58.9 in October** from 60.9 in September, marking the **slowest pace of expansion in five months** (since May).
 - **Definition: Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI):** A survey-based **leading economic indicator** that measures the economic health of the manufacturing and services sectors. A reading **above 50** indicates **expansion**, while a reading below 50 indicates contraction. The current reading (58.9) still signals **strong expansion**, despite the moderation.
- **Drivers of the Sequential Slowdown:**
 - **External Demand:** Growth in **new export business** softened, suggesting a **softer export demand** and rising global competition, a likely fallout of a global economic slowdown and protectionist policies.



- **Domestic Factors: Competitive pressures** within the domestic market and **heavy rains/adverse weather conditions** in some regions were cited by firms as factors constraining output and new business growth.
- **Inflationary and Employment Trends:**
 - **Price Pressures Easing:** Input costs and selling prices (output charges) rose at a **more measured/slowest pace** in several months (14 and 7 months, respectively). This trend, partly aided by **GST relief measures**, suggests **easing inflationary pressures** in the services sector.
 - **Employment:** Firms continued to **add staff** to meet new business intake and delivery deadlines, though the pace of job creation remained marginal/softest in 18 months.
- **Economic Significance of Services Sector:**
 - The Services sector is the **largest contributor to India's GDP** (over 50%) and a significant driver of exports and employment. Its sustained expansion (above 50 for over four years) signals the **resilience** of the Indian economy amidst global headwinds.
 - The **HSBC India Composite PMI** (combining services and manufacturing) also moderated to 60.4, primarily driven by the services slowdown, even as the manufacturing PMI showed a quicker rate of expansion.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-III: Economy & Policy):**
 - **Macroeconomic Indicators:** Understanding PMI as a **leading indicator**—released before official data like GDP and IIP—is vital for economic analysis. Its movements influence **Monetary Policy** decisions by the RBI.
 - **External Sector Vulnerability:** The softening export demand highlights India's exposure to global economic cycles, particularly concerning the IT and outsourcing segments, underscoring the need for **export diversification** and monitoring **trade tensions**.
 - **Sectoral Dynamics:** The data provides real-time insight into the health of key sectors (e.g., IT, finance, transport) and helps policymakers tailor responses, such as focusing on **infrastructure investment** (Gati Shakti) and addressing supply-side bottlenecks.
- **Conclusion:** While India's services sector remains in a state of **robust expansion**, the moderation in the PMI reading underscores the dual challenge posed by cooling global demand and domestic structural constraints like competition and seasonal disruptions. Easing price pressures, however, offer a positive signal, potentially giving the RBI greater flexibility in future monetary policy decisions.



7. India's Trade Diplomacy Pivot: Engaging with Peru and Chile

- **Strategic Push for Market Diversification:**
 - India is **intensifying trade talks** with the Latin American nations of **Peru and Chile** to finalize respective trade agreements.
 - **Primary Motivation:** This strategic focus on Latin America is driven by the need to **diversify export markets** and reduce reliance on single large destinations, particularly after



the escalation in **US tariffs** (up to 50% on goods like engineering, textiles, and chemicals) on Indian exports.

- **Key Trade Agreements and Progress:**

- **India-Peru Trade Agreement (TA):**

The recent **Ninth Round** of negotiations in Lima saw substantive progress across key areas: **Trade in Goods and Services, Rules of Origin, Customs Procedures, Dispute Settlement, and Critical Minerals**. Both sides aim for a timely conclusion.



- **India-Chile Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** The recent **Third Round** of talks covered a wide range of issues, including **Trade in Goods and Services, Investment Promotion, Intellectual Property Rights, and Critical Minerals**, with a mutual commitment to early conclusion.

- **Definition: Rules of Origin:** Criteria used to determine the **national source** of a product, essential for applying tariffs and trade remedies under a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or Trade Agreement (TA).

- **Economic Complementarity and Mutual Benefit:**

- **India's Exports:** Latin American economies, specifically Peru and Chile, can absorb a significant portion of India's goods currently headed to the US, particularly in sectors like **pharmaceuticals, textiles, engineering goods, and processed foods**.
- **Critical Minerals Focus:** The region's rich reserves of **Copper, Lithium, and other critical minerals** align directly with India's industrial, energy security, and **Electric Vehicle (EV) policy** priorities, making mineral access a key component of the trade talks.

- **Trade Pacts as a Framework for Cooperation:**

- These agreements aim to enhance **market access, strengthen supply-chain resilience, and deepen economic integration** through mutually beneficial and comprehensive economic cooperation frameworks.
- The focus reflects India's broader strategic goal of building stronger, long-term economic partnerships with the **Latin American region** as part of its expanding trade diplomacy beyond traditional partners.

- **UPSC Relevance (GS-II: International Relations; GS-III: Economy & Trade):**

- **Trade Diplomacy & FTA Strategy:** Illustrates India's shift towards pursuing **Trade Agreements** as a tool for economic resilience and geopolitical influence, especially in response to protectionism in developed markets.
- **Geopolitical Economy:** Highlights the increasing importance of **Critical Minerals** in India's foreign policy and trade negotiations, linking trade to long-term industrial and energy security needs.
- **Export Promotion:** The move is vital for sustaining India's export growth momentum, supporting key domestic sectors (e.g., textiles, pharma), and managing the **Balance of Payments (BoP)**.



- **Conclusion:** India's concerted effort to fast-track trade agreements with Peru and Chile signifies a proactive and pragmatic pivot in its trade strategy. By deepening ties with Latin America, India seeks to mitigate the impact of rising global protectionism and secure essential raw materials, positioning these agreements as crucial pillars for both its immediate export diversification goals and long-term economic security.

8. India-New Zealand FTA: Boosting Trade and Strategic Ties

- **Ambitious Trade Target and Fast-Track Negotiations:**
 - The proposed **India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** is projected to boost the current bilateral trade (around **\$1.5-1.75 billion**) **tenfold to \$20 billion** in the coming years, signifying a massive opportunity.
 - Negotiations, formally re-launched in March 2025 after stalling in 2015, are progressing rapidly, with five rounds completed in just seven months, indicating a strong political will to finalize the pact soon.
- **Key Pillars of the Agreement (Beyond Tariffs):**
 - The FTA is framed as a **comprehensive agreement** covering much more than traditional tariff reduction on goods.
 - **Focus Areas:** Trade in **Goods**, Trade in **Services** (including **labour mobility** and skilled migration), **Investment**, **Rules of Origin**, and cooperation in **Science, Innovation, and Farm Technology**.
 - **Definition: Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A pact between two or more countries that significantly **reduces or eliminates tariffs and non-tariff barriers** on the maximum number of goods traded between them, while also easing norms for trade in services and investment.
- **New Zealand's Core Interests and Indian Sensitivities:**
 - **New Zealand's Interests:** Seeking greater market access in India for its advanced **dairy and agricultural products**, which is a highly sensitive area for India due to the need to protect the domestic **dairy industry, fishermen, and MSMEs**. New Zealand also offers expertise in **agri-tech and innovation**.
 - **India's Interests:** Seeking easier access to New Zealand for its **pharmaceuticals, textiles, IT services, and skilled professionals** (labour mobility).
 - Both sides have committed to approaching the deal while **respecting each other's sensitivities** and seeking "win-win solutions."
- **Strategic and Sectoral Opportunities:**
 - **Strategic Dimension:** The FTA strengthens India's presence in the **Indo-Pacific** economic architecture and aligns with New Zealand's '**Opening Doors to India**' strategy, diversifying their trade away from heavy reliance on countries like China.





- **Cooperation Sectors:** The agreement aims to unlock new opportunities in **defence, space, education, tourism, and food processing**, leveraging New Zealand's strengths in technology and India's growing consumer market.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-II: International Relations; GS-III: Economy & Trade):**
 - **FTA Strategy:** The deal is a prime example of India's current strategy of signing "**balanced and beneficial**" FTAs to integrate with the global economy while protecting vulnerable sectors, contrasting with its prior withdrawal from RCEP.
 - **Economic Diplomacy:** Highlights the link between trade pacts, **skilled migration** (services liberalization), and access to **technology transfer** (agri-tech), which is vital for modernizing Indian agriculture.
 - **Bilateral Ties:** The FTA, along with cooperation on the **Indian diaspora** (which constitutes $\sim 6\%$ of NZ's population), will elevate the overall **strategic partnership** between the two Commonwealth nations.
- **Conclusion:**

The potential India-New Zealand FTA represents a significant opportunity to transform a modest bilateral trade relationship into a strategic \$20 billion partnership. While sensitive issues like market access for New Zealand's dairy remain, the swift progress and political commitment signal a strong intent to conclude a comprehensive pact that benefits both countries' businesses, farmers, and skilled professionals, thereby strengthening the overall Indo-Pacific economic outlook.

9. ISRO's Plan to Transfer PSLV Project to Industry

- **Core Policy Shift: Transferring PSLV Responsibility:**
 - The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** plans to transfer **50% of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)** project development and production to a consortium of domestic industries.
 - **PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle):** Defined as ISRO's **workhorse launch vehicle**, known for its reliability and capability to launch satellites into **Polar Sun-Synchronous Orbits (SSO)** and Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits (GTO), particularly for Earth observation and remote sensing satellites.
- **Rationale: Scaling Up and Focusing on Advanced R&D:**
 - **Industry's Current Contribution:** The domestic aerospace, defense, and engineering sector already contributes an estimated **80-85% of systems** for ISRO's missions. The proposed transfer is a formal step toward greater private sector responsibility.
 - **ISRO's New Focus:** This transfer aims to **free up ISRO's limited resources** (manpower and infrastructure) to concentrate on **advanced research and development (R&D)**, cutting-edge technologies, and complex deep-space missions (e.g., Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan).





- **Mechanism for Private Participation (IN-SPACE & NSIL):**
 - The transfer will be facilitated through the recently created entities:
 - **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL):** ISRO's commercial arm, mandated to **transfer mature technologies** and oversee the complete production of operational launch vehicles like PSLV and SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) by the industry.
 - **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACE):** Acts as a **single-window, independent nodal agency** to promote, authorize, and supervise private sector space activities, ensuring a level playing field.
- **Key Objective: Creating a Robust Space Ecosystem:**
 - The move is central to the government's space sector reforms aimed at significantly enhancing the **role of the private sector** in all aspects of space activity—from manufacturing and launching to providing space-based services.
 - **Expected Outcome:** Establishment of a **sustainable, self-reliant, and globally competitive space industry** in India, meeting both domestic needs and exploiting the global commercial launch market.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-III: Science & Technology and Economy):**
 - **Space Sector Reforms:** The transfer of PSLV is a crucial implementation step of the new space policy, demonstrating the government's commitment to **privatization and commercialization** in the strategic sector.
 - **Make in India & Self-Reliance:** It supports the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* vision by leveraging the technical expertise and scale of Indian industry for high-tech manufacturing, reducing reliance on public sector monopolization.
 - **Technology Transfer:** The move is a classic case study of how public R&D institutions (like ISRO) transfer mature technology to the industry for mass production and commercial viability, improving the **national innovation ecosystem**.
- **Conclusion:** ISRO's plan to hand over half of the PSLV project to an industry consortium is a landmark decision in India's space journey. It marks a paradigm shift from a government-led R&D model to a **demand-driven, industry-executed commercial model**, vital for accelerating ISRO's advanced research and making India a major player in the global space economy.

10. Key World Leaders Skip COP30 Prelude Talks: Implications for Climate Action

- **Lacklustre High-Level Attendance and Context:**
 - A preliminary summit of world leaders in Belém, Brazil, ahead of the official **COP30** (30th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC) saw **low attendance** (fewer than 60 officials confirmed) from heads of state, signaling diminished global ambition and political distractions (e.g., wars, economic strain).
 - **Notable Absences:** The leaders of the world's top three emitters, **China (Xi Jinping), India (Narendra Modi), and the US (Donald Trump)**, are forgoing in-person addresses. The US is sending no high-level delegation, as President Trump is actively withdrawing the country from the **Paris Agreement**.



- **The Fading 1.5°C Goal of the Paris Agreement:**
 - The summit takes place against the backdrop of a **gnawing sense of urgency** as the Paris Agreement's most ambitious goal—to limit global warming to **1.5°C** above pre-industrial levels—is slipping further out of reach.
 - **Scientific Warning:** Reports confirm that current global policies are projected to lead to heating of up to **\$2.8^{\circ}\text{C}** by 2100, and the **1.5°C threshold** (measured as a long-term average) is now projected to be breached significantly sooner than anticipated a decade ago (possibly by May 2029).
- **Logistical and Geopolitical Constraints:**
 - **Logistical Challenges:** The choice of Belém, an Amazonian city with **limited tourism infrastructure** and accommodation challenges, may have deterred some leaders and smaller delegations.
 - **Geopolitical Headwinds:** The US's formal withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and its rhetoric against climate action underscore a broader **rollback of multilateral commitments** and a preference for bilateral energy deals, creating significant global division.
- **India's Role and Stance (COP30 Relevance):**
 - **Position:** India is represented by deputies or the climate minister, which is standard protocol for many major economies. India remains firm on the principle of **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)**.
 - **Expectations:** India is expected to submit its **First National Adaptation Plan (NAP)** and potentially **updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** for 2035 at or around COP30, balancing development needs with climate action.
- **Definition and Context of COP:**
 - **COP (Conference of the Parties):** The **supreme decision-making body** of the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**, established at the 1992 Earth Summit. COPs meet annually to review the progress of implementing the Convention and the Paris Agreement.
 - **Host Significance:** The host, **Brazil**, hopes to use the location in the Amazon rainforest to highlight the urgency of forest preservation (e.g., the proposed **Tropical Forests Forever Facility**) and the need for **climate justice** for the Global South.
- **Conclusion:**

The pre-COP30 summit highlights a critical moment of implementation failure in global climate governance, with the 1.5°C goal at severe risk and political will constrained by geopolitical and domestic priorities in major emitting countries. The success of the upcoming formal COP30 negotiations will rely on matching rhetoric with concrete financial commitments from developed nations and raising the ambition of new NDCs to prevent catastrophic long-term warming.



11. Universal Basic Income (UBI) in India: Policy Imperative for the 21st Century

• Core Concept and Rationale for UBI:

- **Definition: Universal Basic Income (UBI):** A periodic, unconditional cash transfer delivered to every citizen, irrespective of income, wealth, or employment status, anchoring security in **citizenship alone**.
- **Primary Rationale:** To cushion the coming socio-economic crises: mass **job displacement due to automation** (McKinsey forecasts up to 800 million global jobs displaced by 2030), gig economy precarity, climate-driven displacement, and extreme **wealth inequality** (India's top 1% owns 40% of national wealth; Gini coefficient of wealth is 75).

• Addressing Welfare Inefficiency and Exclusion:

- **Current System Flaws:** India's expansive welfare landscape is plagued by fragmentation, **leakage, duplication, and complex eligibility filters** that cause significant exclusion of the genuinely needy (Bismarckian/Beveridgean models of targeted welfare).



- **UBI's Solution:** UBI offers a **radical, rights-based, and streamlined pipeline** for social protection, bypassing bureaucratic complexities and removing the stigma associated with poverty-based entitlements. Its simplicity is facilitated by maturing **digital infrastructure** like **Aadhaar and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** platforms.

• Economic and Moral Advantages (Beyond GDP):

- **Restoring Demand:** UBI ensures a **basic floor of income security** for all, restoring consumer demand when technology replaces human labor, thus anchoring growth in broad-based consumption rather than quarterly spreadsheets alone.
- **Recognizing Unpaid Labor:** It implicitly recognizes and rewards **unpaid care work**, predominantly undertaken by women, which remains invisible in traditional GDP metrics (**Joseph Stiglitz's critique** of GDP).
- **Pilot Results:** Indian (SEWA-led in MP) and international (Finland, Kenya) pilot studies showed positive impacts on **nutrition, school attendance, mental health, and earnings** without reducing the willingness to work.

• Fiscal and Implementation Challenges:

- **Funding Concerns:** A minimal UBI, equivalent to the poverty line ($\sim ₹7,620$ per person annually), is estimated to cost around **5% of India's GDP**. Funding requires difficult choices: **raising taxes, rationalizing existing subsidies, or increasing borrowing**.
- **Dilution of Intent: Universality** could dilute the redistributive intent by allocating resources to affluent sections alongside the poor.
- **Technological Gaps:** Despite advances in Jan Dhan and Aadhaar, gaps in **digital literacy, mobile access, and bank connectivity** in tribal and remote areas must be closed to prevent exclusion from a universal scheme.



- **Constitutional & Legal Context / Reworking the Social Contract:**
 - **Directive Principles:** While not a fundamental right, the concept aligns with the spirit of **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)**, particularly **Article 38** (State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people).
 - **Political Reform:** UBI removes the political incentive for populist, transactional "**freebies**" (ad hoc loan waivers, subsidized power) by establishing economic security as a basic right of citizenship. This encourages citizens to demand good governance (quality schools, rule of law) rather than mere patronage.
- Conclusion and Path Forward:

UBI is no longer a utopian concept but an urgent policy imperative in an era defined by mass insecurity and technological disruption. A pragmatic approach for India involves a phased introduction, prioritizing vulnerable groups (women, elderly, disabled) and allowing UBI to initially complement essential schemes like PDS and MGNREGA, while simultaneously closing critical technological access gaps. The core question for India's 21st-century welfare state is not whether it can afford UBI, but whether it can afford the democratic cost of mass insecurity.

12. Need for Electoral Nomination Process Reform

- **The Problem of Procedural Absolutism:**
 - The most "**undemocratic part**" of India's electoral process occurs at the **nomination scrutiny** stage, where candidates' nominations are often rejected on **procedural technicalities** rather than substantive disqualifications.
 - **Key Issue:** The process vests **extraordinary and largely unreviewable discretion** in a single official, the **Returning Officer (RO)**, under **Section 36 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951**, which allows for a "summary inquiry" and rejection for "defects of a substantial character."
- **Constitutional Bar and Lack of Remedy:**
 - **Constitutional Bar:** **Article 329(b)** of the Constitution bars courts from interfering in the electoral process once the notification for the election is issued, effectively preventing any judicial review of the RO's rejection order before polling.
 - **Ineffective Remedy:** The only legal remedy available is filing an **Election Petition** *after* the election is over, by which time the denial of the right to contest is **irreversible**, making the process vulnerable to political exclusion.
- **Procedural Traps and Perverse Outcomes:**
 - **Technical Traps:** Nominations can be rejected for minor errors like a missing signature, a blank column in an affidavit, a late oath, or a delayed "no-dues certificate" from a government department.
 - **Perverse Legal Outcome:** The Supreme Court ruling in **Resurgence India vs. Election Commission (2013)** established that while false declarations lead to prosecution, only **incomplete declarations** lead to the rejection of the nomination. This inadvertently punishes good-faith procedural errors more harshly than intentional dishonesty.



- **Violation of Rights and Democratic Principles:**
 - **Dual Violation:** Arbitrary rejection violates two fundamental aspects of democracy: the **candidate's legal right to contest** (derived from the right to vote) and the **voter's fundamental right to choose** from a full slate of candidates.
 - **Burden of Proof:** The current system places the **entire burden of proof** on the citizen to prove their right to contest, rather than on the state (RO) to justify exclusion, which is argued to be constitutionally backward.
- **Proposed Reforms for a Citizen-Friendly System:**
 - **RO as Facilitator:** The RO's role must shift from a "sentinel" to a "**facilitator**" (as seen in the UK, Canada, and Germany), with a **mandatory written notice** of deficiency and a **guaranteed 48-hour window** to fix correctable errors.
 - **Defect Classification:** Deficiencies should be legally classified: (1) **Technical/Paperwork Defects** (cannot justify rejection); (2) **Verification Matters** (require investigation before rejection); and (3) **Constitutional/Statutory Bars** (immediate disqualification).
 - **Digital Solution:** Implementing a **digital-by-default nomination portal** linked to the electoral roll to automate verification of routine details and provide a **public dashboard** with timestamps and clear reasons for all rejections.
- **UPSC Relevance (GS-II: Governance, Polity & Constitution):**
 - **Electoral Reforms:** This topic is central to the debate on strengthening democratic processes and ensuring **free and fair elections** by addressing procedural flaws in the RPA, 1951.
 - **Role of Institutions:** Highlights the **discretionary power of the Returning Officer** and the limits imposed by **Article 329(b)** on judicial intervention in electoral matters.
 - **Constitutional Rights:** The discussion links the right to vote (Statutory/Constitutional) to the **candidate's right to contest** and the voter's right to information, which are essential for a functioning democracy.
- **Conclusion:** The current electoral nomination process, by prioritizing rigid bureaucratic compliance over democratic legitimacy, risks transforming procedure into a tool for political exclusion. Implementing reforms that shift the RO's role to facilitation, mandate reasonable time for error correction, and classify defects based on their substantial character is essential to ensure that every qualified citizen has a presumptive right to contest, thereby upholding the integrity of Indian democracy.