



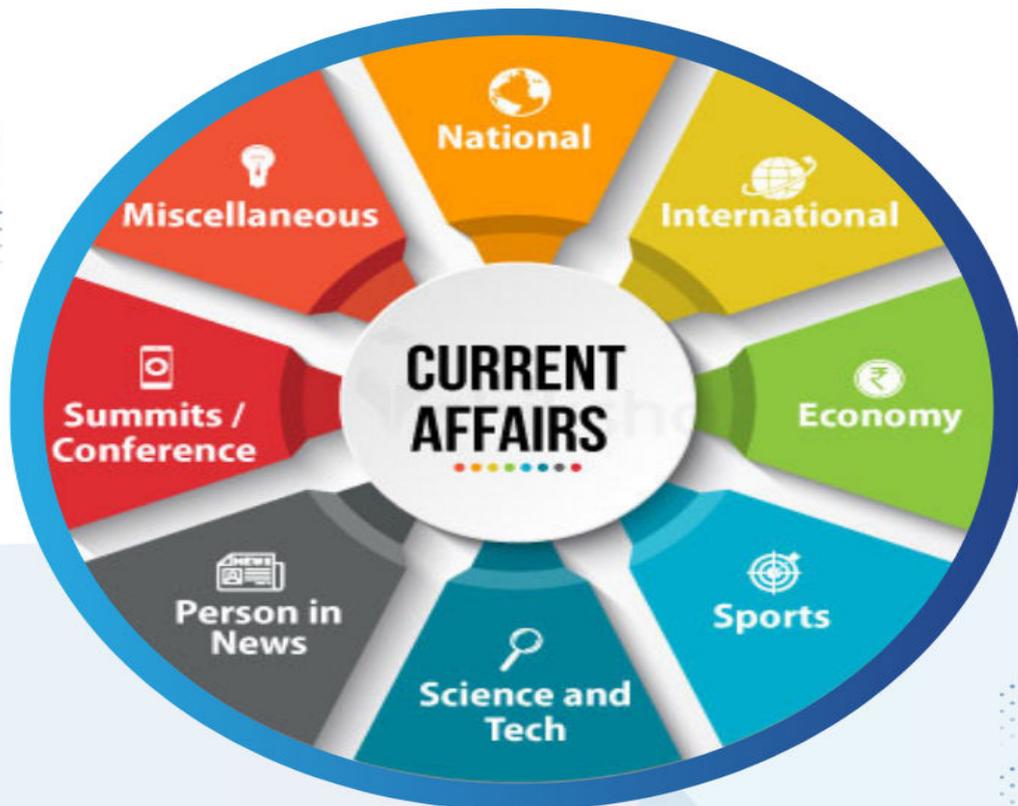
“ We help you reach for the star ”

VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & **STUDY CENTRE**

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 04/12/2025 (THURSDAY)



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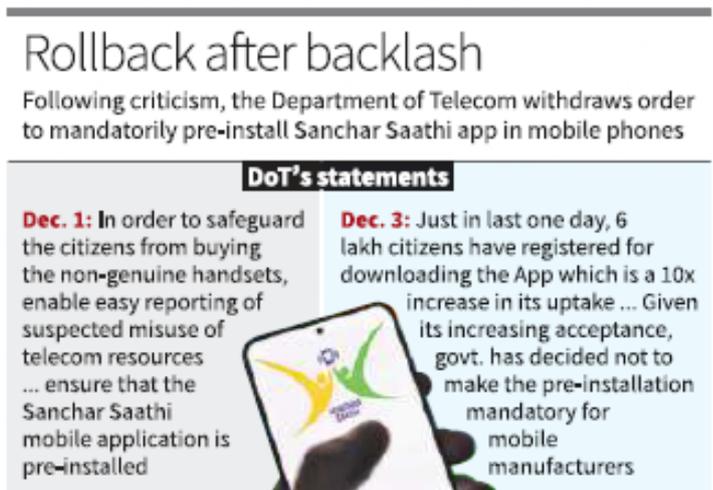
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1. Sanchar Saathi App: Govt. Order Withdrawal and Key Concerns

- **Context of Withdrawal:** The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) withdrew its directive to phone manufacturers mandating the pre-installation of the **Sanchar Saathi app** on all new devices starting next year. The withdrawal followed an outcry from Internet users, civil society, and the Opposition over installing a government app "**without people's knowledge.**"
- **Official Justification and Purpose:** DoT's stated reason for the withdrawal was a "**rapid increase**" in the app's downloads, meaning there was "no need" for pre-loading. The app's purpose, as defended by the Communications Minister, is to help citizens **track lost/stolen phones** and **identify/disconnect fraudulent mobile connections**. The Minister cited the disconnection of \$1.5\$ crore fraudulent connections and the tracing of \$26\$ lakh lost phones as proof of its utility.
- **DoT's New Regulatory Powers (TIUE):** The initial direction was issued after DoT created a new concept: **Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUE)**. This allows DoT to issue orders to **any entity that uses phone numbers**, extending its regulatory reach beyond just telecom operators to entities like handset makers. The order was part of at least three such directions issued under these new powers.
- **Definition: Sanchar Saathi App:** A government-developed mobile application launched by the DoT designed to empower mobile phone users by providing services like blocking and tracing lost/stolen mobile phones (via **CEIR** - Central Equipment Identity Register), checking the mobile connections registered in their name (via **TAF COP** - Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection), and other security/fraud management tools.
- **Constitutional & Legal Provisions:** The controversy touches upon fundamental rights, primarily the **Right to Privacy** (part of the Right to Life under **Article 21** of the Constitution, as affirmed in the *Puttaswamy* judgment). Mandatory pre-installation of a government app without explicit consent raises concerns about potential **surveillance** and unwarranted access to user data, thus impinging on the principles of **informed consent** and **data protection**.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

The Sanchar Saathi app episode highlights a crucial intersection of **Digital Governance**, **Citizen Privacy**, and **Cyber Security**. While the app's stated goal of combating telecom fraud is important, the method of mandatory, non-consensual pre-installation was deemed violative of digital rights norms and the principle of **minimal governmental intrusion**. For the UPSC, this topic is relevant for **GS-II (Governance and Policy)**, covering issues of **e-governance**, **government interventions**, and **Fundamental Rights (Right to Privacy)**, and **GS-III (Security)**, concerning **cyber security and tackling cyber-enabled financial fraud**. It serves as a case study for the necessary balance between **national security/fraud prevention** and **individual digital liberties**.



2. Revamping the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI): Autonomy vs. Governance Reforms

- **Core Issue and Proposed Change:** The controversy revolves around the Central Government's plan to **repeal the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Act, 1959**, and replace it with a new Bill. Academics, including approximately 1,500 petitioners, are protesting, claiming the move will **significantly strip the ISI of its academic autonomy** and alter its functioning. The ISI, founded by **P.C. Mahalanobis** and headquartered in Kolkata, is India's premier statistical research institute.
- **Concerns over Academic Autonomy:** The primary concern is that the proposed Bill allows the **Board of Governors to override the decisions of the Academic Council**, which is the current statutory authority on academic matters. Petitioners argue this severely **undermines academic freedom** and alters the original spirit of the agreement between society and the government.
- **Financial and Administrative Alarms:** Academics raised alarm over new **financial provisions** that emphasize **revenue generation** through student fees and the **commercialisation of research**. They claim this undermines ISI's historical mission focused on the **public good**. Furthermore, the petitioners warned that the Bill allows the **relocation of the institute's headquarters from Kolkata**, disturbing its historical establishment.
- **Constitutional and Legal Provisions/Key Principles:** The protests invoke the principle of **Cooperative Federalism**, arguing the move disturbs the relationship between the Centre and the state-based institute (ISI is an Institute of National Importance). Legally, the issue touches upon the degree of **institutional autonomy** granted to academic bodies under the original Act versus the proposed control under the new Bill. The push for change aligns with recent government focus on **governance reforms** in higher education.
- **Government's Stated Rationale (Mashelkar Committee):** The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation noted that the Bill follows the recommendations of the **R.A. Mashelkar Committee (2020)**. This committee had recommended "major reforms" to **strengthen governance**, expand academic programs, and make the institute **globally competitive**, suggesting the Bill is an effort toward modernizing the ISI's structure.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

The move to revamp the ISI highlights the persistent tension between the government's need for **modernizing governance** and the demands of academic institutions for **unfettered academic and operational autonomy**. The proposed shift from a public good mission to a revenue-generating model is a critical debate in Indian higher education policy. For UPSC, this is highly relevant for **GS-II (Governance and Social Justice)**, covering the role of **statutory bodies, issues related to academic freedom and quality of education**, and the balance between central control and **institutional autonomy**. It also connects to **GS-I (Post-Independence)**, as the ISI is a legacy institution tied to **P.C. Mahalanobis's** pioneering work in statistical planning.

3. Karnataka's Reservation Conundrum: Judicial Scrutiny and the 50% Cap

- **Breaching the 50% Cap:** The core of the issue stems from the **Karnataka Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) Act, 2022**. This State legislation raised the reservation quota for SCs from **15% to 17%** and for STs from **3% to 7%**. This increase, coupled with existing quotas, took



the state's total reservation to **56%**, thus **breaching the 50% ceiling** mandated by the Supreme Court in the landmark **Indira Sawhney case (1992)**.

- **Judicial Intervention and Recruitment Stall:** The implementation of the 2022 Act has been challenged via Public Interest Litigations (PILs) in the **Karnataka High Court**. The High Court recently restricted the State government from issuing **any fresh recruitment notifications** under the increased quota for now. This judgment has put the future of thousands of public service aspirants in limbo and stalled public recruitments.
- **Definition: Indira Sawhney Judgement (1992):** This landmark Supreme Court case upheld the reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) but established the principle that the total percentage of reservation for backward classes **must not exceed 50%**. This ceiling is considered essential for maintaining the balance between affirmative action and the principle of **Equality of Opportunity** (Article 16).
- **The Internal Reservation Challenge:** Separately, the government has been dealing with the issue of **internal reservation** for SCs. Following the report of the one-man commission headed by retired Justice **H.N. Nagmohan Das**, the government modified and accepted a proposal for sub-categorisation within the 17% SC quota to ensure **equitable distribution of benefits** among the most deprived sub-groups. Public recruitment was stalled for a year awaiting this report, compounding the current employment crisis.
- **Constitutional and Legal Provisions:** The controversy involves **Article 16(1) and 16(4)** (Equality of opportunity in public employment and special provision for backward classes) and the **9th Schedule** of the Constitution. States exceeding the 50% limit often attempt to place their laws in the 9th Schedule to shield them from judicial review, a strategy Tamil Nadu used for its 69% quota. The Supreme Court has ruled in the past that laws under the 9th Schedule are not immune to judicial review if they violate the **Basic Structure** of the Constitution.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

Karnataka's reservation saga is a classic example of the legal and political complexities surrounding affirmative action in India. It highlights the conflict between **societal demands for proportional representation** (justified by increasing population of disadvantaged groups) and the **constitutional mandate of the 50% ceiling** (aimed at protecting equality of opportunity for all). For UPSC, this topic is critical for **GS-II (Polity and Governance)**, directly dealing with **Fundamental Rights (Article 16)**, **Judicial Review**, the concept of the **Basic Structure Doctrine**, and the debate on **Reservation Policy**. It serves as a case study for the judicial-executive tussle over breach of the 50% quota limit.

4. Indonesia's \$1 Billion Commitment to the New Development Bank (NDB)

- **Financial Commitment to NDB:** Indonesia has committed **\$1 billion** to the BRICS-led **New Development Bank (NDB)**, formalizing its financial participation after joining the BRICS bloc earlier this year. This contribution is expected to help fund **sustainable development projects** and infrastructure within member countries.
- **Definition: New Development Bank (NDB):** The NDB is a multilateral development bank established by the original BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in 2014. Its primary purpose is to **mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects** in BRICS and other emerging economies, serving as an alternative to Western-dominated institutions like the World Bank and IMF.



- **Strategic Rationale: Diversification and Non-Alignment (Non-Polar World):** Indonesia, as Southeast Asia's largest economy and a proponent of a **non-aligned (or *bebas aktif* - free and active)** foreign policy, seeks to **diversify its economic partnerships** and secure alternative funding sources. This move is seen as a strategic pivot to mitigate risks from global trade uncertainties (e.g., US tariffs) and to enhance its profile as a key player in the **Global South**.
- **Context of BRICS Expansion:** Indonesia formally joined the **BRICS** grouping (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) earlier this year. BRICS has since expanded to include other nations like **Egypt** and the **United Arab Emirates**, with Indonesia becoming the first Southeast Asian member. Joining the NDB is a prerequisite for leveraging the bank's financing for its own national projects.
- **Implications for India and Global Governance:** Indonesia's inclusion in BRICS/NDB strengthens the bloc's claim to represent the Global South and provides a significant voice from ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), a major regional bloc. For India, this expands the NDB's geographical footprint and potential for cooperation in sustainable development projects in the broader Asian region, reinforcing efforts towards a **multi-polar world order** and **reforming global financial governance**.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

Indonesia's significant financial commitment to the NDB underscores the **geopolitical shift** towards strengthening institutions of the Global South. The move is driven by pragmatic economic needs (alternative funding for sustainable development) and strategic foreign policy goals (maintaining non-alignment and seeking a higher global profile). For the UPSC Civil Services Examination, this topic is vital for **GS-II (International Relations and Governance)**, covering the evolution and role of **multilateral institutions (BRICS, NDB)**, **India's Foreign Policy (non-alignment, South-South Cooperation)**, and the increasing importance of **Global South** alignment in challenging the established Western-led world order.

5. Supreme Court Recalls Ban on *Ex Post Facto* Environmental Clearances (CREDAI vs. Vanashakti)

- **Context of Judicial Reversal:** On November 18, 2025, the Supreme Court of India, in a **2:1 majority verdict** (Justice Ujjal Bhuyan dissenting), reviewed and **recalled its earlier May 2025 judgment (*Vanashakti*)** which had declared notifications permitting **ex post facto Environmental Clearances (ECs)** illegal. The earlier judgment had struck down the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's **2017 Notification** and **2021 Office Memorandum** that allowed for retrospective ECs.
- **Definition: *Ex Post Facto* Environmental Clearance (EC):** An *ex post facto* or retrospective EC is a clearance granted to a project **after it has already commenced construction or operation** without the legally mandated **prior environmental clearance**. The foundational document for this requirement is the **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006**, issued under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- **Rationale for the Review/Recall (Majority View):** The majority recalled the ban on the grounds that the initial judgment **misinterpreted binding precedents** that had previously allowed *ex post facto* ECs in **exceptional circumstances** (e.g., *Alembic Pharmaceuticals* and *Electrosteel Steels*



cases). The primary justification cited was the "**public interest**" and the need to prevent the **demolition of completed or near-completion projects**, which would result in the loss of thousands of crores of public investment and wasted resources.

- **The Dissent and Environmental Jurisprudence:** The strong dissenting opinion, led by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, emphasized that retrospective ECs are an "**anathema**" to environmental law, as they violate the **Precautionary Principle**—a cornerstone of Indian environmental jurisprudence. Allowing non-compliance to be regularised through fines creates a "**pay and legalise**" system, rewarding unlawful conduct and dismantling the statutory requirement of **prior environmental scrutiny** and **public consultation**.
- **Constitutional and Legal Provisions:** The controversy fundamentally involves the **Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment**, which the Supreme Court has interpreted as an integral part of the **Right to Life** guaranteed under **Article 21** of the Constitution. It also touches upon the **Fundamental Duty** to protect and improve the natural environment under **Article 51A(g)**. The recall is seen as potentially weakening the deterrence mechanism established by the EIA regime.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

The Supreme Court's decision to recall its ban on *ex post facto* ECs reopens a critical debate on balancing **developmental needs (protecting investments)** with **environmental sustainability and the Rule of Law**. It creates legal uncertainty by restoring the issue for a fresh hearing and highlighting a tension between the **Precautionary Principle** (prevent harm first) and **pragmatic governance/economic expediency**. For the UPSC, this is a highly relevant topic for **GS-II (Polity and Governance)**, covering **Judicial Review**, the concept of **Precedent**, and the scope of **Fundamental Rights (Article 21)**. It is equally important for **GS-III (Environment)**, focusing on the **EIA process**, **environmental principles**, and the **legal framework for conservation and pollution control**.

6. Rethinking Urban Metrics: Resilience, Climate Extremes, and Liveability

- **Flaws in Current Urban Indices:** Traditional indices like the **Global Liveability Index** or **City Prosperity Index** (UN-Habitat) focus heavily on productivity, 'grey' infrastructure (e.g., airports, metro lines), healthcare, and culture. They fail to adequately measure a city's ability to withstand and recover from **extreme climate shocks** (cyclones, cloudbursts), a dimension addressed by the **City Resilience Index (CRI)**. This often leads to a misleading assessment of "**developed**" **urban life** that doesn't account for 21st-century climate realities.
- **Exclusion of High-Risk Areas:** Major global indices typically focus only on **capital regions and global hubs** (e.g., Delhi, Mumbai), overlooking **secondary cities** (like Hat Yai, Cebu) and peri-urban settlements. These overlooked areas, which absorb much of the real risk of rapid urbanization and climate change impacts (e.g., landslides on unstable slopes, floodplains), are excluded from the systems by which "**modern**" **urban life** is assessed.
- **Resilience vs. Amenities:** Floods in Asia (Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines) revealed that infrastructure, often designed for weaker storms, was quickly overwhelmed by heavy rainfall (e.g., >300 mm in 24 hours). Liveability scores record the **presence of amenities** (hospitals, parks) but are largely **silent on the robustness of critical systems** like drainage networks, hillside stability, and safe, climate-resilient alternatives to informal housing.



- **The Inequity of Averages and Investment Bias:** Using **city-wide averages** in indices misprices risk and shifts the burden to the most vulnerable. While rising land values in flood-prone areas may boost a city's prosperity score, the **peri-urban settlers** and residents in informal housing are the first to suffer when extreme weather hits. This high score attracts further investment to prioritize visible projects (e.g., promenades) over less visible but crucial work like **desilting canals and enforcing building codes**, thereby deepening risk exposure.
- **Constitutional and Legal Context (India):** The constitutional backing for urban governance in India is the **74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992**, which added **Part IX A** and the **Twelfth Schedule**. It mandates the establishment of **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** to perform functions like urban planning (including town planning), regulation of land use, and provision of public health/water supply—all vital for climate resilience. However, the true spirit of **decentralization** is hindered by a lack of financial, administrative, and technical autonomy of ULBs, complicating the implementation of climate-resilient planning.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

The divergence between high "liveability" rankings and low on-ground **climate resilience** reveals a structural flaw in global and national urban planning paradigms. The focus on economic metrics and superficial modernity (e.g., 'grey' infrastructure) often overshadows the critical need for **robust environmental infrastructure** and **equitable risk management**. For UPSC, this topic is highly relevant for **GS-II (Governance and Social Justice)**, addressing **urban governance**, the **74th CAA**, and the need for **decentralized, climate-sensitive planning**. It is crucial for **GS-III (Environment and Disaster Management)**, focusing on **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**, **Climate Change Adaptation**, and ensuring that urban growth aligns with **environmental sustainability** and **inclusive development** goals.

7. India's Critical Minerals Strategy: Focusing on Processing and Refining

- **The Missing Link: Processing and Refining:** The core challenge for India in critical minerals is the **midstream segment** of the value chain—**processing and refining**. India predominantly exports raw ores and imports high-purity refined materials (like lithium, cobalt, and nickel) essential for clean energy, electronics, and defense. This dependence exposes domestic supply chains to geopolitical shocks, especially from countries like China, which controls over **90% of global rare earths refining**.
- **Definition: Critical Minerals:** These are mineral resources essential for a country's **economic development and national security**, where the supply chain is vulnerable to disruption due to scarcity or concentration of extraction/processing in a few geographical locations. They are vital inputs for **green technologies** (EVs, solar panels, wind turbines) and high-tech industries.
- **Government Initiatives: REPM Scheme and NCMM:** The Union Cabinet has launched a **₹7,280 crore Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Sintered Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM)**, targeting **6,000 MTPA** of integrated capacity. This scheme, along with the broader **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)** (outlay of **₹34,300 crore**), aims to achieve self-reliance across the entire value chain from exploration to recycling, with a key focus on domestic processing and technology.



- **Five-Point Strategy for Processing Capacity:** To overcome the refining gap, India must focus on: 1) Converting **Centres of Excellence** under NCMM into innovation engines for applied research on high-purity processing; 2) **Unlocking secondary resources** (e.g., recovering rare earths from coal fly ash, cobalt from zinc residues) through pilot projects; 3) **Training and upskilling** a new generation of process metallurgists; 4) **De-risking investment** through government demand assurance (stockpiling, mandatory domestic sourcing); and 5) **Linking mineral diplomacy** to processing capacity by inviting foreign co-investment in Critical Mineral Processing Parks.



- **Legal & Policy Framework:** The government has amended the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) of 1957** and included 24 critical minerals in the First Schedule, giving the Centre exclusive auctioning rights. This is aimed at boosting domestic exploration, but policies like the REPM scheme and the proposed recycling scheme are necessary to address the value-addition deficit. The new **G-20 Framework on Critical Minerals** also emphasizes value creation through refining.

Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

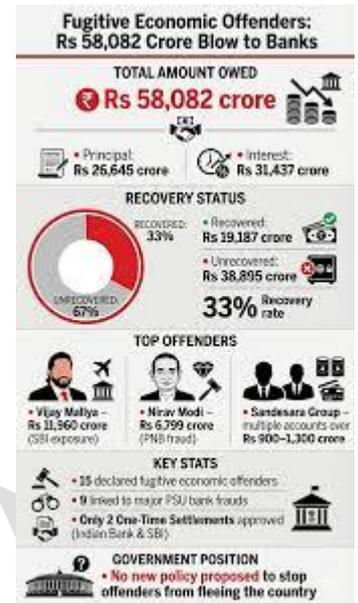
India's renewed push, led by the **₹7,280 crore Rare Earth Magnet Scheme**, represents a strategic shift from merely focusing on mining (digging) to mastering **processing and value addition** (refining) in the critical minerals sector. This is a matter of **economic security, energy transition, and strategic autonomy**. For the UPSC, the topic is highly relevant for **GS-III (Economy and Science & Technology)**, covering **Industrial Policy, supply chain resilience, 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, R&D in materials science, and India's clean energy transition goals** (Net Zero by 2070). It also overlaps with **GS-II (IR)** regarding **geopolitics of resources and mineral diplomacy**.

8. Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEOs): Magnitude of Bank Frauds and Recovery

- **Magnitude of Default and Recovery Status:** As of October 31, 2025, **15 individuals** have been declared **Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEOs)** under the FEO Act, 2018. The nine FEOs involved in large-scale financial fraud owe public sector banks over **₹58,000 crore** (principal + interest). The total amount recovered stands at over **₹19,000 crore**, accounting for approximately **33%** of the total dues. The significant interest component (over ₹31,000 crore) highlights the ballooning liability over time.
- **Definition: Fugitive Economic Offender (FEO):** An individual against whom an **arrest warrant** has been issued for a **scheduled economic offence** involving **₹100 crore or more**, who has either **left India** to avoid criminal prosecution or **refuses to return** to face prosecution. This legal definition is enshrined in the **Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 (FEOA)**.
- **Key FEO Cases and Banking Exposure:** High-profile FEOs like **Vijay Mallya** (Kingfisher Airlines), the **Sandesara family** (Sterling Group), and **Nirav Modi** (PNB scam) account for a major portion of the debt. **State Bank of India (SBI)** bore the largest exposure, followed by **Punjab National Bank (PNB)** and **Bank of India**. SBI achieved the highest recovery rate (around 52%), largely due to effective liquidation in Mallya's accounts, while recovery rates for others like Nirav Modi remain in the single digits.



- **Legal Framework: Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 (FEOA):** The FEOA was enacted to deter high-value economic offenders from evading the process of law. Its key provisions include:
 - **Non-conviction-based Confiscation:** The Special Court (under PMLA) can order the **confiscation of all properties** of an FEO (including benami and overseas assets) and vest them in the Central Government, even before a conviction.
 - **Disbarment from Civil Claims:** FEOs and associated companies can be **barred from filing or defending civil claims** in Indian courts.
- **Strategic Relevance and Challenges:** The FEOA is crucial for improving the financial health of public sector banks by addressing the **Non-Performing Asset (NPA)** crisis caused by large-scale willful defaults. However, challenges persist, including the slow pace of **extradition proceedings** (often complicated by bilateral treaties and foreign legal systems) and legal challenges concerning the **confiscation of assets** where third-party rights are involved (like secured creditors).



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

The data on FEOs and recovery highlights the ongoing challenge of high-value financial crime and its direct impact on India's banking sector health and the overall economy. The **FEOA, 2018**, represents a significant legislative step towards **strengthening accountability** and establishing a **deterrent** against white-collar crime. For UPSC, this is critically important for **GS-II (Governance and Policy)**, covering **judicial action** and **government interventions** to curb financial crime. It is also central to **GS-III (Economy and Internal Security)**, addressing the **NPA crisis**, the need for **banking sector reforms**, and the mechanism of **asset recovery** and **tackling money laundering**.

9. Volcanic Ash and Aviation Safety: The Hayli Gubbi Eruption

- **Nature and Impact of Volcanic Ash on Aircraft Engines:** Volcanic ash is composed of **fine, abrasive particles** of pulverized rock, minerals, and **volcanic glass**. When ingested into a high-temperature jet engine (which operates at temperatures up to $1,600^{\circ}\text{C}$), the **silicate components melt** (their melting point is lower, around $1,100^{\circ}\text{C}$). This molten glass then **re-solidifies** as a glassy deposit on cooler parts, especially the high-pressure turbine blades and cooling holes. This accumulation **chokes airflow**, reduces pressure, and can lead to engine **surge, flame-out, or complete failure**, as seen in past incidents like the 1982 British Airways B747 flight.
- **Hayli Gubbi Eruption and Ash Drift to India:** The **Hayli Gubbi volcano** in northern Ethiopia erupted for the first time in nearly 12,000 years, sending ash plumes up to **14 km (45,000 feet)** high. Transported by upper-level winds, including the jet stream, the ash cloud drifted across the Red Sea, Oman, Yemen, and entered **India's western airspace** (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi-NCR, Punjab, UP) at altitudes typically between **15,000 and 25,000 feet**. The plume carried ash, sulphur dioxide, and tiny particles of glass and rock.
- **DGCA's Regulatory Response and Advisory:** India's aviation regulator, the **Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)**, issued an urgent operational advisory to all Indian airlines. The advisory instructed operators to: **Strictly avoid** affected areas and altitudes; **Adjust flight planning, routing, and fuel considerations** based on advisories (like **ASHTAM** or **SIGMET** warnings from the



Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres - VAACs); Report immediately any suspected ash encounter (engine performance anomalies, cabin smoke/odour); and conduct **post-flight inspections** of engines and airframes.

- **Impact on Flight Operations:** Following the DGCA advisory, Indian carriers like **Air India** and **Akasa Air** cancelled several international flights, particularly those originating from/travelling to the Middle East (e.g., Dubai, Doha, Jeddah), to carry out **precautionary checks** on aircraft that had flown over the affected geographical locations. Airports were also ordered to inspect runways for contamination and **restrict or suspend operations** if ash was detected.
- **Definition: ASHTAM and VAACs:** An ASHTAM (Ash Special Air-Report and Notification) is a special aviation alert issued as a type of NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) to caution pilots about hazardous volcanic conditions. **Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres (VAACs)**, operating under the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)**, are responsible for monitoring and issuing advisories on the movement and concentration of volcanic ash clouds globally.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

Volcanic ash clouds represent a rare but potentially **catastrophic high-altitude hazard** for commercial aviation, necessitating a robust **International Airways Volcano Watch (IAVW)** system. The Hayli Gubbi incident demonstrated the far-reaching impact of volcanic events thousands of kilometers away and highlighted the critical role of the **DGCA, IMD, and VAACs** in ensuring aviation safety through preemptive advisories and coordinated flight management. For UPSC, this is relevant for **GS-I (Geography - Volcanism)** and **GS-III (Science & Technology/Disaster Management)**, covering **transboundary natural hazards, aviation safety protocols (ICAO, DGCA)**, and the **science behind jet engine failure** due to silicate melting.

10. Fiscal Federalism and Conditional Grants: The Samagra Shiksha Dispute

- **Conditional Release of Central Funds:** The Union Education Minister reiterated that the release of the Central share of funds under the **Samagra Shiksha Scheme** is strictly **conditional** upon States fulfilling scheme norms. These conditions include the timely submission of **Utilisation Certificates (UCs)**, audit reports, physical and financial progress reports, and payment of the State's own contribution.
- **Definition: Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS):** Samagra Shiksha is a CSS, meaning it is implemented by the State Governments but largely funded by the Central Government, typically in a **60:40 ratio** (Centre: State) for non-Himalayan States. This cost-sharing structure forms the basis of **Fiscal Federalism** in social sectors, where funds are generally tied to adherence to centrally designed program guidelines.
- **The Alleged Linkage with NEP and PM-SHRI:** The key contention raised by some State MPs is the alleged practice of **linking the release of funds** for the 2018 Samagra Shiksha Scheme to the State's **acceptance and implementation of newer Central policies** like the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** and the **PM-SHRI** school upgrade scheme (launched in 2022). This is perceived as "arm-twisting" or imposition on States.



- **Constitutional Angle: Centre-State Tensions in Education:** Education is placed under the **Concurrent List (Article 246 and Seventh Schedule)** of the Constitution, giving both the Centre and States powers to legislate. The Centre's use of **conditional grants** to push for the implementation of national policies (like NEP 2020) where a State might prefer its own curriculum (like Tamil Nadu's opposition to the Three-Language Formula and **Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas - JNVs**) highlights a perennial tension in **Centre-State relations** and the limits of **Cooperative Federalism**.
- **Supreme Court Intervention and Dialogue:** The Minister referenced a recent Supreme Court observation (in response to a PIL) urging the Union and the Tamil Nadu governments to hold talks regarding the establishment of **JNVs** in the State (Tamil Nadu is the only State yet to adopt JNVs). This points to the judiciary's role in encouraging **dialogue** to resolve disputes arising from federal policy implementation rather than purely prescriptive orders.



Conclusion & UPSC Relevance

The Samagra Shiksha funding controversy epitomizes the friction points in India's **Fiscal and Cooperative Federalism**, where the Centre uses its financial leverage (conditional grants) to ensure policy uniformity and adherence to national goals (NEP 2020). The issue is critical for **GS-II (Polity and Governance)**, covering **Centre-State Financial Relations (Articles 275 and 282)**, **Concurrent List issues**, and the political dynamics of **Centrally Sponsored Schemes**. It is also relevant for **GS-II (Social Justice)**, concerning the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**, and ensuring equitable access to quality education, which is the ultimate goal of the Samagra Shiksha Scheme.