



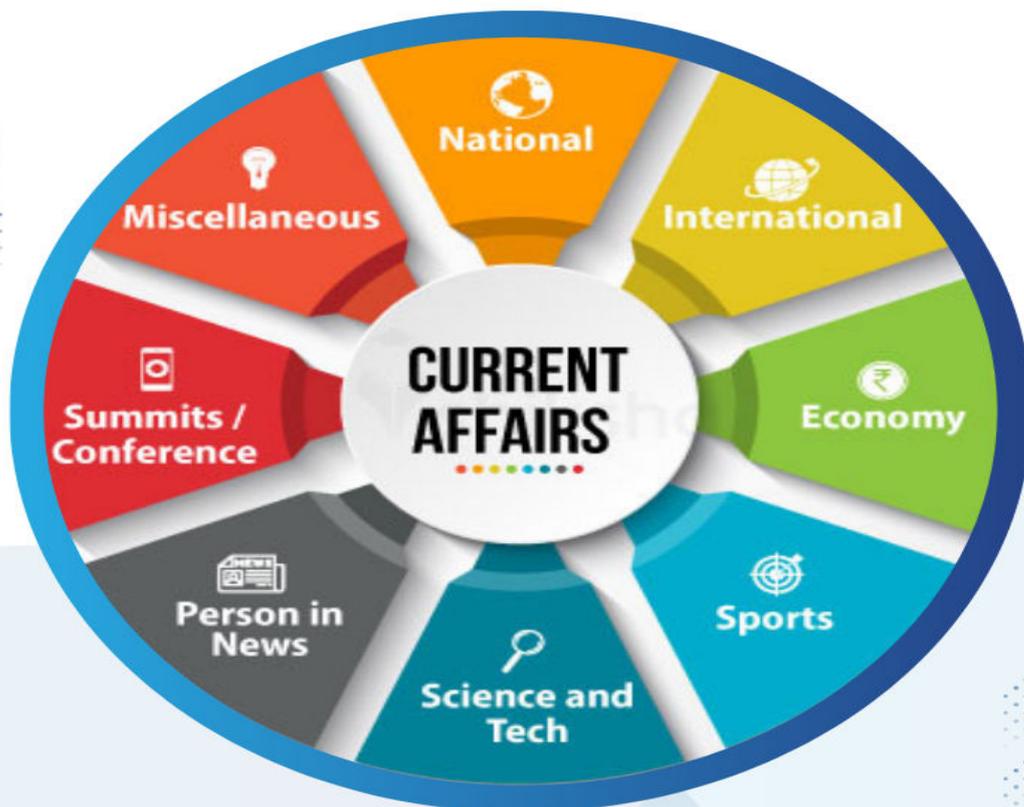
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**VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY**  
&  
**STUDY CENTRE**

# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

**DATE: 18/12/2025 (THURSDAY)**



 **9972258970 & 9740702455**

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



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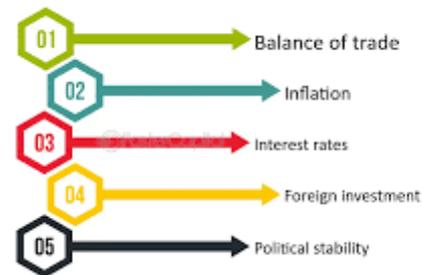
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## 1. Rupee Depreciation and Strategies for Stabilization

- **Capital Flow Dynamics:** The rupee's stability is heavily dependent on **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**, which is considered "sticky" or long-term capital. While gross inflows remain healthy, a rise in repatriation and outward investment has slowed net FDI, necessitating a shift toward attracting durable capital rather than volatile **Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)**.
- **Nominal GDP as a Proxy for Returns:** Nominal GDP growth serves as a benchmark for investor returns. A slowdown from 12% in FY24 to approximately 8% in FY25 has compressed returns in dollar terms, making Indian assets less attractive and contributing to currency weakness.
- **Trade Sentiment and Global Policy:** Uncertainty regarding **US trade policy and tariffs** has created a sentiment-driven drag on the rupee. While a potential trade deal by March 2026 offers hope, the interim lack of clarity is expected to sustain currency volatility.
- **RBI's Intervention Strategy:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) intervenes to prevent extreme volatility rather than defending a specific numerical level. This "managed float" approach allows the currency to align with market fundamentals while preventing speculative attacks.
- **External Sector Fundamentals:** Despite the slide, India's **Balance of Payments (BoP)** remains stable. High gold import costs are currently offset by lower crude oil prices, robust services exports, and steady inward remittances.
- **Corporate Earnings and Equity Inflows:** Since India is primarily an "equity story" for global investors, expensive valuations and stagnant corporate earnings have triggered outflows. A rebound in earnings and more reasonable valuations are essential to attract the FPI necessary to support the rupee.

Factors that Influence Rupee Depreciation



### Key Definitions

- **Nominal GDP:** The market value of all finished goods and services produced within a country, evaluated at current market prices without adjusting for inflation.
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):** A measurement of a country's trade where the value of the goods and services it imports exceeds the value of the products it exports.
- **Sterilization:** The process by which the RBI neutralizes the effect of its forex interventions on the domestic money supply to prevent inflation.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **RBI Act, 1934:** Grants the Reserve Bank of India the legal mandate to manage the exchange rate and maintain monetary stability.
- **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999:** The primary legal framework regulating foreign exchange transactions, external trade, and payments in India.
- **Article 246:** Under the Seventh Schedule (Union List), the Parliament has exclusive power to make laws regarding "Foreign exchange" (Entry 36).

### Important Key Points for Stabilization



- **Productivity Reforms:** Improving the ease of doing business to lift corporate profitability and attract long-term FDI.
- **Export Diversification:** Reducing reliance on volatile commodities by boosting high-value services and manufacturing exports to bridge the CAD.
- **Forex Reserve Management:** Utilizing the \$700+ billion reserve cushion judiciously to provide confidence to global markets.

## Conclusion

The rupee's recent touch of the 91.06 mark reflects global macro-economic pressures and domestic growth moderation rather than structural failure. Arresting the slide requires a dual approach: tactical RBI intervention to curb volatility and strategic structural reforms to revive nominal GDP growth and FDI attractiveness.

## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Concepts of Appreciation/Depreciation, BoP components, FDI vs FPI, and RBI's role in the Forex market.
- **Mains (GS III):** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and growth; Impact of global trade wars on Indian currency.

## 2. Passage of the SHANTI Bill, 2025: Privatization of Nuclear Energy

- **Core Objective:** The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025, seeks to incentivize private sector participation (both domestic and foreign) in nuclear power production to meet India's net-zero targets.
- **Liability Clause Amendment:** A critical and controversial feature of the Bill is the removal of the "Right of Recourse" clause from the 2010 Act, which previously held equipment suppliers liable for failures; the new Bill shifts primary liability away from suppliers to encourage global investment.
- **Ending State Monopoly:** The Bill marks a historic shift from the 1962 Act, which restricted nuclear energy production to the Central Government and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), now allowing private "conglomerates" to own and operate plants.
- **Strategic Timing & Transparency:** Opposition members have raised concerns regarding the timing of the Bill, alleging it aligns with interests shown by large private industrial houses, and have demanded the Bill be referred to a Standing Committee for deeper scrutiny.
- **Government Justification:** The Centre maintains that the Bill is company-neutral and essential for scaling up nuclear capacity rapidly, arguing that existing liability laws were a "bottleneck" preventing international technology transfers and private capital infusion.
- **Regulatory Oversight:** Despite privatization, the Bill emphasizes that the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) will maintain stringent safety protocols and oversight over all private entities entering the field.

## Key Definitions

- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage:** A legal framework that determines who pays for damages in the event of a nuclear accident.
- **Right of Recourse:** The legal right of a plant operator to sue the equipment supplier if an accident is caused by faulty or defective hardware.



- **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** Advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit, often cited as the primary entry point for private players.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Atomic Energy Act, 1962:** The parent legislation that established the Union's monopoly over nuclear minerals and power generation.
- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), 2010:** The law being amended by the SHANTI Bill; specifically Section 17, which dealt with supplier liability.
- **Seventh Schedule (List I):** Entry 6 of the Union List gives the Parliament exclusive power over "Atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production."
- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make laws for implementing international treaties, relevant to India's commitments under the Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC).

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Energy Security:** Nuclear energy provides base-load power, which is essential to complement intermittent renewable sources like solar and wind.
- **Global Precedent:** Most major nuclear-power-producing nations (like the US and France) have integrated private players into their supply chains and operations.
- **Technology Transfer:** Easing liability rules is expected to fast-track deals with global firms like Westinghouse (USA) and EDF (France).

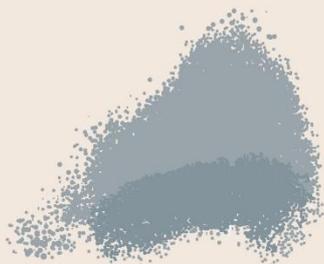
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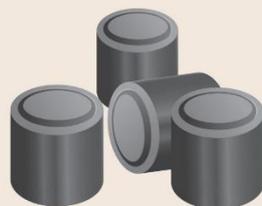
**Uranium Ore**



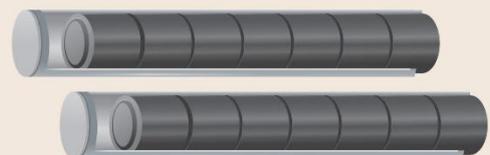
**Yellowcake**



**Enriched Uranium**



**Pellets of Enriched Uranium**



**Nuclear Reactor Fuel Rods**



## Conclusion

The SHANTI Bill, 2025, represents a paradigm shift in India's energy policy, balancing the need for rapid decarbonization with the complexities of nuclear safety and corporate accountability. While privatization could unlock much-needed capital and technology, the dilution of supplier liability remains a point of intense national debate regarding long-term public safety.

## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Features of the SHANTI Bill, CLNDA 2010, the role of AERB, and India's three-stage nuclear program.
- **Mains (GS III):** Infrastructure (Energy), Science and Technology (Indigenization of technology), and the debate between Ease of Doing Business vs. Public Safety/Accountability.

## 3. Crisis in India's Tourism Sector: Trends and Challenges

- **Failure to Reach Pre-Pandemic Levels:** Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in 2025 are projected to reach approximately 8.7-8.8 million, significantly lower than the 10.9 million recorded in 2019. This represents a 12% decline in the first nine months of 2025 compared to the previous year, signaling a stagnation in India's global tourism appeal.
- **Funding and Promotional Gaps:** A critical "underutilization" of funds has plagued the sector; the Tourism Ministry spent only about one-third of its ₹2,400-2,500 crore allocation in FY24-25. Most notably, international publicity spending crashed from ₹300-450 crore (FY17-20) to a mere ₹3.07 crore this fiscal year.
- **Geopolitical and Security Headwinds:** Instability in Bangladesh—historically India's largest source market accounting for over 20% of FTAs—has led to a sharp drop in visitors. Additionally, security concerns following the Pahalgam attack in Kashmir and flight disruptions have further deterred international travelers.
- **Loss of Competitive Edge:** India is losing ground to South-East Asian peers like Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These nations offer lower costs, easier visa regimes, and aggressive celebrity-led marketing, whereas India is perceived as a "high-cost" destination with inadequate infrastructure.
- **Concentration Risk:** India's tourism base is highly concentrated, with the US, UK, and Bangladesh accounting for nearly 45% of total arrivals. The recent decline highlights the urgent need to diversify source markets, including the potential resumption of tourist visas for Chinese nationals.
- **Economic Impact:** The slowdown affects India's "invisible exports" and foreign exchange earnings. While services exports and remittances remain strong, the tourism sector—a major employment generator—is failing to capitalize on the post-pandemic global travel boom.



## Key Definitions

- **Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA):** The number of foreign nationals arriving in a country for various purposes including leisure, business, or medical treatment, staying for at least 24 hours.



- **Invisible Exports:** Earnings from services provided to foreigners (like tourism, banking, and insurance) which appear in the Current Account of the Balance of Payments.
- **Source Market:** The country of origin from which tourists travel to a destination.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Seventh Schedule (List II & List III):** "Tourism" as a specific entry is not in the Constitution; however, State List Entry 33 (Theaters and dramatic performances; cinemas) and Entry 7 (Inns and inn-keepers) give states power. The Union manages international aspects under Entry 10 (Foreign affairs) and Entry 11 (Diplomatic, consular and trade representation).
- **Article 49:** Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) mandating the State to protect monuments and places of national importance, which are central to heritage tourism.
- **Visa Manual (MHA):** Regulates the legal entry of foreigners via various categories like E-Tourist Visa (e-TV).

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Incredible India 2.0:** Experts suggest a revival of large-scale global branding campaigns similar to the original 2002 initiative to regain mindshare.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** The "last-mile connectivity" to iconic sites remains a bottleneck compared to the seamless experiences offered by competitors like Vietnam.
- **Medical Value Travel (MVT):** While general tourism lags, India remains a hub for medical tourism, which requires targeted policy support to offset losses in the leisure segment.

### Conclusion

The 2025 slowdown in Indian tourism is a wake-up call regarding the fragility of a concentrated source market and the dangers of reduced international outreach. To reclaim its position, India must balance competitive pricing with robust safety narratives and aggressive digital marketing, ensuring that the "Incredible India" brand does not fade in an increasingly competitive Asian landscape.

### UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding FTA trends, source countries, and the role of the Ministry of Tourism in fund allocation.
- **Mains (GS III):** Economics of the tertiary sector, employment generation potential of tourism, and the impact of regional instability (Bangladesh) on India's service sector earnings.

## 4. Judicial Reform in Insolvency: Select Committee Recommendations on IBC

- **Fixed Timeline for Appeals:** The Lok Sabha Select Committee, chaired by MP Baijayant Panda, has recommended a statutory 90-day (three-month) deadline for the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) to dispose of appeals, addressing the current lack of a defined timeframe that causes significant delays in debt resolution.
- **Streamlining Admissions:** While the IBC (Amendment) Bill, 2025, already proposed a 14-day window for the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) to admit bankruptcy petitions, the committee emphasizes that speed at the first stage is rendered moot if cases languish indefinitely at the appellate stage.



- **Conflict of Interest in Liquidation:** The panel recommended a strict "separation of roles" by barring Resolution Professionals (RPs) from becoming Official Liquidators of the same company; this aims to prevent "perverse incentives" where an RP might favor liquidation (earning a percentage of sale proceeds) over a turnaround (earning a fixed salary).
- **Protecting Asset Value:** The committee highlighted that "undue appellate delays" lead to asset value erosion, discouraging potential bidders and undermining the primary objective of the IBC—which is the "maximization of value" of the debtor's assets.
- **Creditor Supremacy vs. Ethical Guardrails:** While the original Bill allowed 2/3rd of creditors to retain an RP as a liquidator, the panel's recommendation seeks to prioritize ethical independence over creditor choice to ensure a neutral liquidation process if a resolution fails.
- **Scope of Appeals:** The proposed 3-month timeline would cover critical legal challenges, including the rejection of financial claims, challenges to the approval of resolution plans, and disputes during the liquidation phase.



### Key Definitions

- **Insolvency:** A state where an individual or organization is unable to meet its financial obligations/debts.
- **Resolution Professional (RP):** An individual licensed by the IBBI to manage the affairs of the corporate debtor during the resolution process.
- **Liquidation:** The process of winding up a company by selling its assets to pay off creditors when a viable resolution plan cannot be found.
- **Moratorium:** A legal period during the IBC process where no judicial proceedings for recovery or enforcement of security interest can be initiated against the debtor.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016:** The umbrella legislation for time-bound insolvency resolution in India.
- **Article 323B:** Empowers the Parliament to establish tribunals for specific matters, including "Insolvency and Tax," which forms the constitutional basis for NCLT and NCLAT.
- **Section 61 of IBC:** Currently provides the right to appeal to NCLAT but does not prescribe a mandatory completion period for the tribunal's final judgment.
- **Seventh Schedule (List III):** Entry 9 of the Concurrent List deals with "Bankruptcy and Insolvency," giving both Center and States powers, though the Union law prevails.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Economic Impact:** Faster resolution improves the "Ease of Doing Business" ranking and helps in cleaning up the "Twin Balance Sheet" problem of banks and corporates.
- **Adjudicating Authority Structure:** NCLT acts as the Adjudicating Authority (AA) for companies, while the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) handles individuals and partnerships.



- **Supreme Court Oversight:** NCLAT decisions can only be challenged in the Supreme Court on questions of law, making the 3-month NCLAT window a critical finality for most operational disputes.

## Conclusion

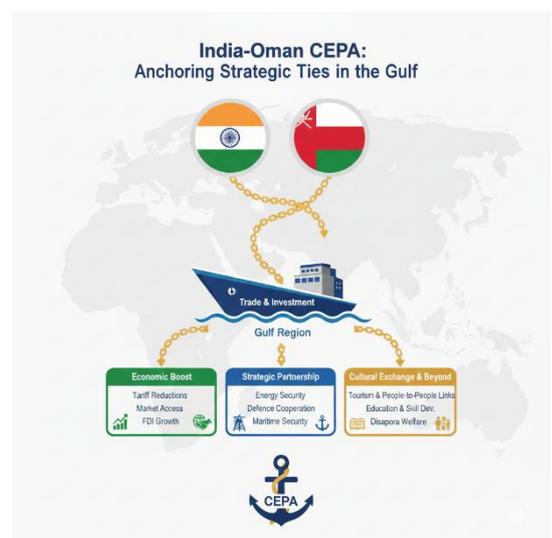
The Select Committee's recommendations represent a vital evolution of the IBC from "process-oriented" to "result-oriented." By imposing a 90-day cap on NCLAT and removing the incentive for liquidation over resolution, the proposed amendments aim to restore the Code's original intent: preserving companies as going concerns while ensuring timely exits for failed businesses.

## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Powers of NCLT/NCLAT, roles of Resolution Professionals, and the statutory timelines under IBC.
- **Mains (GS III):** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development; Government budgeting and the impact of the IBC on the banking sector's Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

## 5. India-Oman CEPA: Anchoring Strategic Ties in the Gulf

- **Comprehensive Trade Framework:** The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in December 2025, covers goods, services, and investment. It aims to eliminate or significantly reduce tariffs on over 98% of Indian exports, which previously faced duties ranging from 5% to 100%.
- **Strategic Energy Security:** While Oman's market size is relatively small (GDP ~\$115 billion), it is a critical source of crude oil, LNG, and urea. The pact secures these supply chains and invites Omani participation in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- **Maritime and Security Gateway:** Oman serves as a "maritime neighbour" and a pivot for India's "Look West" policy. The deal complements India's access to the Duqm Port, which provides the Indian Navy with strategic basing and logistics facilities in the Western Indian Ocean.
- **Investment and Joint Ventures:** Bilateral trade surpassed \$10.5 billion in FY 2024-25. The CEPA provides a legal framework to protect and grow the existing 6,000+ joint ventures and \$7.5 billion in Indian investments, particularly in Oman's Sohar and Salalah Free Zones.
- **Digital and Regulatory Integration:** Following the UAE template, the pact facilitates the linkage of digital payment systems (UPI/RuPay) and seeks "fast-track" regulatory approvals for Indian pharmaceutical products, reducing non-tariff barriers.
- **Geopolitical Significance:** This is Oman's first FTA in nearly 20 years and India's sixth trade pact under the current administration. It signals a move toward a broader India-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) agreement and counters growing regional influence from other global powers.





## Key Definitions

- **CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement):** A type of free trade pact that is more comprehensive than a regular FTA as it covers negotiation on trade in services, investment, and other areas of economic partnership.
- **Rules of Origin:** Criteria used to determine the national source of a product. In the Oman CEPA, these prevent "circumvention" where goods from third countries are routed through Oman to gain duty-free access to India.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** Huge stockpiles of crude oil maintained by countries to guard against potential supply disruptions.

## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** Specifies that the executive power of the Union extends to matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws, including "Entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries."
- **Entry 10 & 14 (Union List):** Gives the Central Government exclusive jurisdiction over Foreign Affairs and the implementation of treaties, agreements, and conventions with foreign countries.
- **Customs Act, 1962:** Provides the legal framework for the implementation of the preferential tariff rates agreed upon under the CEPA.

## Additional Important Keypoints

- **Export Basket:** Major Indian exports include petroleum products (naphtha, petrol), rice, machinery, and iron and steel.
- **IMEC Corridor:** Oman is a potential partner in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which aims to integrate rail and shipping links.
- **Green Energy Synergy:** Both nations are collaborating on Green Hydrogen and Ammonia production, aligning India's manufacturing prowess with Oman's renewable energy potential.

## Conclusion

The India-Oman CEPA is a strategic masterstroke that transcends simple trade volumes. By anchoring India's presence in a stable, neutral partner like Oman, New Delhi is securing its energy interests and maritime reach while providing a template for future engagements with the wider GCC region.

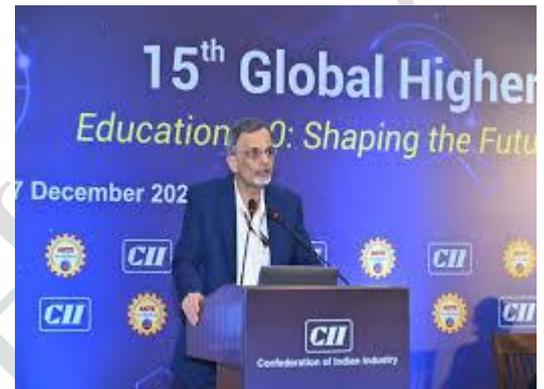
## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Specifics of CEPA vs. FTA, major export/import commodities, and geographical locations like the Port of Duqm and the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Mains (GS II):** India and its neighborhood relations; Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India.
- **Mains (GS III):** Energy security, effects of liberalization on external trade, and infrastructure connectivity (IMEC).



## 6. State-Led Reforms in Higher Education: Transforming the Demographic Dividend

- **Shift from Control to Stewardship:** The Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) emphasized that state governments must transition from a "high-control" regulatory approach to a "stewardship" model, acting as facilitators rather than gatekeepers to foster institutional creativity and innovation.
- **Outcome-Based Regulation:** A critical shift is required from input-heavy monitoring (infrastructure, teacher-student ratios) to outcome-oriented metrics (employability, research output, and student learning outcomes), ensuring that higher education remains relevant to the evolving market.
- **Addressing Faculty Shortages:** To combat persistent vacancies, the CEA advocated for "Professors of Practice" and other flexible mechanisms to integrate industry experts into academia, bridging the skill gap and enriching the learning experience with practical knowledge.
- **Differentiated Financing:** States are encouraged to adopt performance-linked and role-based funding models. Instead of a one-size-fits-all allocation, financing should reward institutions that demonstrate excellence in specific domains like research, vocational training, or social impact.
- **Industry-Academia Synergy:** For higher education to be a "growth accelerator," the CEA called for deeper industry integration in curriculum co-design, credit-bearing internships, and shared research infrastructure to align degrees with the 20-year demographic workforce trajectory.
- **Inflection Point for Global Leadership:** India is at a unique crossroads due to shifting global education hubs and technological breakthroughs like AI-enabled pedagogy; the CEA stressed that state-led execution of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is vital to becoming a global destination for learners.



### Key Definitions

- **Demographic Dividend:** The economic growth potential that results from shifts in a population's age structure, specifically when the share of the working-age population is larger than the non-working-age share.
- **Stewardship Model:** A governance approach where the state provides a supportive framework, sets long-term visions, and ensures accountability without micro-managing institutional operations.
- **Professor of Practice:** A non-tenure track faculty position designed to bring experienced professionals from the industry into the classroom to share real-world expertise.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** Education is a subject in the **Concurrent List (Entry 25)**, meaning both the Union and States can legislate. However, the CEA's call highlights that the operational burden of nearly 90% of institutions lies with the States.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** The overarching policy framework that envisions a multidisciplinary, flexible, and globalized higher education system.
- **Vikasit Bharat Vidya Adhikshan Bill, 2025:** A proposed legislation aiming to create a unified, single-window regulatory body for higher education, potentially replacing the UGC and AICTE.



- **Article 282:** Often used by the Union to provide "grants for public purposes," which the CEA suggests could be better utilized through performance-based "differentiated financing."

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Digital Transformation:** The use of the National Credit Framework and digital tools like **APAR ID** (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) to create verifiable, paperless, and lifelong academic credentials.
- **Global Center of Gravity:** As traditional destinations (US/UK) face fiscal and political constraints, the CEA noted that India has an opportunity to emerge as a new hub for research and innovation.
- **Entrepreneurial Public Administration:** The recommendation for states to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset in managing public universities to improve efficiency and responsiveness.

### Conclusion

The CEA's call for state-led reforms signals a pivot from policy formulation to grassroots execution. By embracing stewardship, leveraging technology, and addressing the faculty crisis, states can ensure that India's demographic transition becomes a "growth accelerator" rather than a "social strain." Success will ultimately depend on **Cooperative Federalism**, where the Center provides the vision and States provide the on-ground execution.

### UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Provisions of NEP 2020, APAR ID, Seventh Schedule entries related to education, and the role of the CEA.
- **Mains (GS II):** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education; Issues of federalism in education governance.
- **Mains (GS III):** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and employment; transforming demographic dividend into economic growth.

## 7. Commercialization of India's Private Space Sector: 2026-2027 Outlook

- **Revenue Inflexion Point:** After five years of policy liberalization, India's top space startups—Digantara, Skyroot, and Agnikul Cosmos—are transitioning from technology demonstration to commercial scaling. Significant revenue generation is projected to begin by FY27, with companies like Digantara targeting \$30 million annually, primarily driven by government-sector demand.
- **Capital Maturity and Investor Confidence:** Recent large-scale funding rounds (e.g., Digantara's \$50 million Series-B) signify a shift in investor sentiment. Investors now view Indian space-tech as a viable "deep-tech" bet capable of delivering high returns, moving past the perception that the sector is starved for capital beyond early stages.
- **Commercial Launch Milestones:** 2026 is set to be a landmark year for Indian private launch services. Skyroot Aerospace and Agnikul Cosmos are scheduled for their first commercial rocket launches. Skyroot anticipates generating approximately \$6 million in revenue per launch of its 3D-printed rockets, attracting paying international and domestic satellite customers.





- **Strategic Shift to Sovereign Tech:** Startups are increasingly focusing on "sovereign" and "dual-use" technologies. Digantara, for instance, is utilizing new funds to build manufacturing lines for satellite hardware and optical communications, with a strategic focus on providing solutions for India's defense sector.
- **Government as a Catalyst:** The Centre's ₹1 trillion Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) fund and the dedicated ₹1,000 crore venture capital fund for space are viewed as critical stabilizers. These initiatives provide "patient capital" for high-risk, high-impact projects that take years to mature.
- **Global Market Ambitions:** India aims to increase its share of the \$440 billion global space economy from the current 2% to nearly 8-10% by 2033. The success of these "New Space" entities is vital for transforming India from a low-cost launch provider into a comprehensive service-led space power.

### Key Definitions

- **Deep-Tech:** Startups based on substantial scientific advances and high-tech engineering innovation, requiring long gestation periods and significant R&D.
- **NGEs (Non-Governmental Entities):** Private sector players, including startups, MSMEs, and large corporations, permitted to engage in end-to-end space activities.
- **Space Domain Awareness (SDA):** The study and monitoring of satellites and debris orbiting the Earth, crucial for space traffic management and defense.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Indian Space Policy, 2023:** The primary framework that transitioned ISRO from a "doer" to a "facilitator," allowing NGEs to perform end-to-end space activities including launching rockets and operating ground stations.
- **FDI Policy 2024 (Space Sector):** Liberalized norms allowing 100% FDI in satellite manufacturing, 74% in satellite operations/data products, and 49% in launch vehicles and spaceports under the automatic route.
- **Entry 6, Union List (Seventh Schedule):** Grants the Parliament exclusive jurisdiction over "Atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production," which historically bundled space activities under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).
- **IN-SPACE (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre):** An autonomous nodal agency within the Department of Space that acts as a single-window regulator and facilitator for private space players.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Indigenous Innovation:** Startups are leveraging advanced manufacturing like 3D printing (Agnikul's semi-cryogenic engines) to reduce costs and launch turnaround times.
- **Space Sustainability:** Companies like Digantara are addressing the global problem of space debris through specialized tracking services, aligning with international norms on space sustainability.
- **ISRO's Rationalization:** ISRO is focusing on advanced research, interplanetary missions (Mangalyaan, Gaganyaan), and transferring "mature" technologies (like PSLV) to the private sector via NSIL (NewSpace India Limited).



## Conclusion

The projected revenue surge in 2026-2027 marks the transition of India's space sector from a "state-led monopoly" to a "vibrant commercial ecosystem." While capital is now flowing, the long-term success of these ventures will depend on the successful execution of commercial launches and the continued availability of patient capital to sustain high-risk deep-tech innovation.

## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Provisions of the Indian Space Policy 2023, FDI limits in various sub-sectors of space, and the roles of IN-SPACe vs. NSIL.
- **Mains (GS III):** Science and Technology - Awareness in the field of Space; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology; Effects of liberalization on the economy.

## 8. US Naval Blockade on Venezuela: Strategic Escalation and Global Impact

- **Direct Military Intervention:** President Trump has ordered a "total and complete blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers entering or leaving Venezuela. This marks a significant escalation from economic sanctions to active naval interdiction, utilizing a massive US armada including the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and stealth F-35A fighters to halt maritime traffic.
- **Objective of Economic Strangulation:** The blockade aims to cripple the Maduro administration's primary revenue stream—oil exports, which account for over 90% of Venezuela's export income. The US demands the "immediate return" of assets nationalized during the Hugo Chávez era, characterizing the current regime's control over oil fields as "theft."
- **Targeting the 'Shadow Fleet':** The US is specifically targeting "sanctioned tankers" that Venezuela uses to evade previous restrictions. These vessels often employ deceptive practices like "digital spoofing" (transmitting false locations) or flying "flags of convenience" (e.g., Iran, Russia, or Cook Islands) to deliver crude to markets like China.
- **Geopolitical Leverage and Energy Security:** By designating the Maduro government as a "foreign terrorist organization," the US administration is providing a domestic legal basis for military action. While Chevron currently retains a special license to operate, the blockade has already caused a sharp "U-turn" by global tankers, gridlocking more than 10 million barrels of oil.
- **Regional Military Buildup:** The deployment is the largest in the history of South America, with assets staged in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. This "Maximum Pressure" campaign is coupled with threats of land strikes, aimed at forcing a transition of power in Caracas.
- **Global Oil Market Volatility:** News of the blockade triggered an immediate surge in oil prices (WTI rising ~1.75% to \$56.92). While Venezuela represents only ~1% of global supply, the geopolitical uncertainty and potential for a wider Caribbean conflict have introduced a "risk premium" into global energy markets.

## Key Definitions

- **Naval Blockade:** A belligerent act where a country uses its navy to prevent vessels of all nations from entering or leaving specified ports or coastal areas of an enemy.
- **Shadow Fleet:** A network of aging, often uninsured tankers with opaque ownership that operate outside mainstream shipping regulations to transport sanctioned oil.
- **Right of Recourse:** In a maritime context, the legal right of a party to seek compensation for losses; here, the US claims recourse for nationalized assets.



- **San Remo Manual:** An internationally recognized manual (1994) providing the legal framework for naval warfare and blockades, emphasizing that they must not be used to starve a civilian population.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **UN Charter (Article 42):** Allows the Security Council to authorize "demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces" to restore peace. Unilateral blockades without UN authorization are often viewed as "acts of aggression" under international law.
- **UN Charter (Article 51):** Recognizes the inherent right of "self-defence" if an armed attack occurs; the US is currently justifying its actions under national security and counter-terrorism mandates rather than direct self-defense.
- **US War Powers Resolution (1973):** A federal law intended to check the U.S. president's power to commit the United States to an armed conflict without the consent of the U.S. Congress.
- **Monroe Doctrine (1823):** A foundational US foreign policy principle stating that any intervention by external powers in the politics of the Americas is a potentially hostile act against the US.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Humanitarian Concerns:** Economists warn that a total blockade could lead to severe food and medicine shortages for Venezuela's 28 million people, as the country is heavily dependent on imports funded by oil.
- **Historical Precedent:** The last comparable US blockade was the 1962 "Cuban Missile Crisis" (termed a "quarantine" to avoid the legal definition of an act of war).
- **Chevron Exemption:** The exclusion of Chevron suggests the US is balancing its pressure campaign with the need to protect specific American corporate interests still present in the region.

### Conclusion

The naval blockade of Venezuela represents a paradigm shift from "economic warfare" to "kinetic maritime interdiction." While it serves the US strategic goal of isolating the Maduro regime, it tests the limits of international law and the UN Charter. The success of this move will depend on whether it triggers an internal collapse of the Venezuelan government or leads to a prolonged humanitarian crisis and regional instability.

### UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Concepts of Naval Blockade, UN Charter Articles (39-51), and geography of the Caribbean (Strait of Florida, Panama Canal access).
- **Mains (GS II):** India's interests in the region (energy security); Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **Mains (GS III):** Energy security and the impact of global geopolitical conflicts on domestic fuel prices and the Current Account Deficit (CAD).

## 9. Global Migration and the Redefining of Citizenship: Challenges and Reforms

- **Erosion of Territorial Citizenship:** Traditional citizenship is anchored to a fixed residence within a delimited territory. Large-scale migration—both international and internal—disrupts this "territory-citizenship" overlap, creating a "conceptual drift" that challenges governance, electoral integrity, and social cohesion globally.



- **Electoral Integrity vs. Migration:** Rapid urbanization and frequent migration lead to "repeated entries" in electoral rolls. In India, the Election Commission (ECI) has initiated a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls, starting with Bihar, to clean duplicate registrations and adapt voter lists to a highly mobile population.
- **NRI Voting Rights and Participatory Deficit:** Under the **Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2010**, NRIs can enroll as "Overseas Electors." However, the requirement for physical presence in their home constituency to vote creates a barrier. Ongoing legal petitions in the Supreme Court advocate for **remote voting** (e.g., Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System) to bridge this gap.
- **The "Labor Class without Rights":** A global trend is emerging where developed nations and the GCC countries utilize migrant labor while denying them a pathway to political identity. India's goal to "export human resources" risks creating a vulnerable class of "temporary workers" abroad who lack political agency in host nations.
- **Internal Migration and Delimitation:** Migration is remaking India's political map. As people move from "sending states" (Bihar, UP) to "receiving states" (Maharashtra, Kerala), the upcoming **Census 2027** and subsequent **Delimitation** will redistribute Lok Sabha representation, shifting the political center of gravity across state borders.
- **Nativism and Legislative Shifts:** The rise of "nativist populism" globally (e.g., moves to end birthright citizenship in the US) is reflected in India through amendments to the **Citizenship Act**, which now bars children born to illegal immigrants from acquiring citizenship by birth. Similarly, relaxed domicile rules in Jammu and Kashmir (2020) aim at socio-economic integration but face criticism regarding demographic changes.

### Key Definitions

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** A door-to-door enumeration process by the ECI to ensure a clean, accurate, and updated electoral roll, particularly in areas with high migration.
- **Overseas Indian (NRI vs. PIO):** NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) are Indian citizens residing abroad; PIOs (Persons of Indian Origin) are foreign citizens of Indian ancestry.
- **Birthright Citizenship (Jus Soli):** The legal right to citizenship for all individuals born in a country's territory, regardless of parental citizenship.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Articles 5-11 (Part II):** Deals with citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution. **Article 11** empowers Parliament to regulate the right of citizenship by law (Citizenship Act, 1955).
- **Article 324 & 326:** Article 324 grants the ECI power over the preparation of electoral rolls; Article 326 guarantees **Universal Adult Suffrage**.
- **Representation of the People Act (1950 & 1951):** Regulates the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections. The 2010 Amendment specifically added **Section 20A** for overseas electors.
- **J&K Reorganisation (Adaptation of State Laws) Order, 2020:** Redefined "domicile" in J&K, allowing those residing for 15 years or studying for 7 years to apply for local government jobs and property rights.



### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Remote Voting (RVM):** The ECI has proposed **Remote Electronic Voting Machines (RVMs)** that can handle up to 72 constituencies, aimed specifically at domestic migrants.
- **Feminization of Migration:** Two-thirds of internal migrants in India are women, primarily due to marriage, though their economic participation is often overlooked in migration policies.
- **Cultural Diffusion:** Migration is a historical driver of cultural and linguistic evolution (e.g., the spread of Vedic practices or the modern global celebration of Deepavali).

### Conclusion

The narrative of "We, the moving people" underscores that migration is no longer a peripheral issue but a core determinant of 21st-century sovereignty. For India, the challenge lies in balancing the administrative need for "clean voter lists" with the constitutional imperative of ensuring that mobility does not lead to disenfranchisement.

### UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Articles 5-11, features of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), ECI's powers, and the definition of "ordinarily resident."
- **Mains (GS II):** Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments; Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Governance and Social Justice (Migrant welfare).
- **Mains (GS III):** Indian Economy (Demographic Dividend, labor mobility) and Internal Security (Demographic changes in border/sensitive areas).

## 10. Democratisation vs. Exploitation: The New Wave of Indian Student Migration

- **Massive Scale and Middle-Class Shift:** Student migration from India has transitioned from an elite pursuit to a mass middle-class phenomenon. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) data shows that over 13.3 lakh students were enrolled abroad in 2024, a figure projected to reach 13.8 lakh in 2025. This surge is driven by self-financed education, often funded through high-interest loans and the mortgaging of family assets.
- **The "Reverse Remittance" Trap:** While labor migrants send money home, students often facilitate "reverse remittances," where Indian households effectively subsidise foreign economies. For instance, outward education remittances from Kerala alone touched ₹43,378 crore in 2023, nearly 20% of the state's inward labor remittances, leading to significant domestic capital flight.
- **Brain Waste and Deskilling:** A critical concern is the channelling of students into "lower-tier" institutions or vocational colleges via unregulated recruitment agencies. This often results in "deskilling," where graduates take up low-wage, unskilled jobs (e.g., in the care or gig economy) due to a lack of skilled-work sponsorship, particularly in countries like the UK.
- **Host Economy Dependencies:** Indian students are vital economic pillars for host nations. In Canada, they represent roughly 45% of international enrolments, contributing significantly to a





sector that added \$30.9 billion to the Canadian GDP in 2022. Similarly, Indian students in the US contribute an estimated \$7 billion–\$8 billion annually to tuition and local housing markets.

- **Structural Push Factors:** The outflow is fueled by more than just "quality" concerns; it is a structural escape from "third-world identity" and a quest for Permanent Residency (PR). Students frequently bypass cheaper offshore campuses (like those in Dubai) because they do not offer the pathway to residency and social mobility found in OECD countries.
- **Policy and Bilateral Gaps:** The current trend highlights the unregulated expansion of the foreign education industry. There is a pressing need for stronger regulation of education agents, standardized pre-departure counselling, and robust bilateral frameworks to ensure institutional accountability and protect students from exploitation.

### Key Definitions

- **Reverse Remittance:** The flow of financial resources from a developing "sender" country to a developed "host" country to sustain a migrant's education or living expenses.
- **Brain Waste:** A phenomenon where highly educated or skilled individuals are forced to work in low-skilled jobs that do not utilize their professional training.
- **OECD Countries:** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; a group of 38 mostly high-income countries often perceived as the ultimate destination for "prestige" and "residency."

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(g):** The right to practice any profession or carry on any occupation, trade, or business, which includes the freedom of students to seek education and employment abroad.
- **Emigration Act, 1983:** Currently governs the recruitment of Indian workers for overseas employment. However, it lacks specific teeth to regulate "education agents" who often operate in a legal grey zone.
- **Emigration Management Bill (Proposed):** Aimed at replacing the 1983 Act, this bill seeks to establish a comprehensive framework for the welfare of all migrants, including students, and regulate recruitment agencies more strictly.
- **Passport Act, 1967:** Regulates the issuance of travel documents; the "Student" category is one of the most scrutinized for visa compliance.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **OECD Labour Gap:** Students have become a source of "cheap labor" for OECD countries, filling vacancies in sectors like healthcare and logistics while paying premium international tuition fees.
- **The "Kerala Model" Shift:** Traditionally a hub for Gulf-bound blue-collar labor, Kerala is now seeing a massive pivot toward student migration, with numbers doubling in just five years (2.5 lakh in 2023).
- **Parliamentary Committee Oversight:** The **Committee on the Welfare of Indian Diaspora (2022)** has formally recognized students as a primary diaspora category, recommending a centralized database and better grievance redressal mechanisms like the **MADAD portal**.



## Conclusion

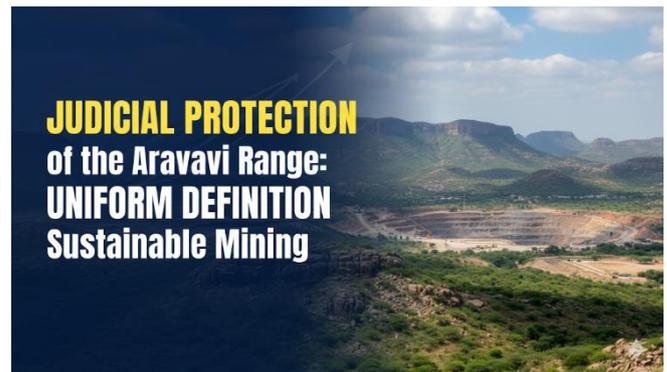
India's student migration is at a crossroads where middle-class aspirations meet systemic exploitation. While it opens doors to global exposure, the lack of regulatory oversight turns many "dreams" into debt traps. To harness this trend, India must improve domestic education-employment linkages while ensuring that its citizens abroad are protected by strong bilateral labor and education treaties.

## UPSC Relevance

- **Mains (GS II):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Diaspora; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education and Human Resources.
- **Mains (GS III):** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; "Brain Drain" vs. "Brain Gain."
- **Ethics (GS IV):** Ethical issues in international relations and the exploitation of vulnerable student migrants by unregulated recruitment intermediaries.

## 11. Judicial Protection of the Aravalli Range: Uniform Definition and Sustainable Mining

- **Uniform Legal Definition:** On November 20, 2025, the Supreme Court (SC) accepted a standard definition of the Aravalli range: any landform with an elevation of **100 metres or more** from local relief. This resolves decades of ambiguity where different states (Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat) used inconsistent criteria, leading to regulatory loopholes and illegal extraction.
- **Pause on Fresh Mining:** The Court ordered an immediate moratorium on the grant of all **new mining leases** and renewals across the range. This pause will remain in effect until a comprehensive **Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM)** is finalized, ensuring that future extraction does not compromise ecological integrity.
- **Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM):** The SC directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) to prepare a scientific plan via the **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)**. This plan will identify "inviolable" areas (off-limits to mining), mapping wildlife corridors, sensitive habitats, and key aquifer recharge zones.
- **Aravalli 'Green Wall' Project:** Launched in June 2025, this initiative aims to create a **5-km wide green buffer** across 29 districts in four states. Inspired by Africa's Great Green Wall, it seeks to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 and act as a carbon sink for the National Capital Region (NCR).
- **Calibrated Regulatory Approach:** Rejecting a total ban, the Court noted that absolute prohibitions often backfire by empowering "**sand mafias**" and illegal syndicates. Instead, it opted for a regulated model where existing legal mines continue under strict monitoring while the ecological "carrying capacity" is scientifically assessed.



**JUDICIAL PROTECTION**  
of the Aravalli Range:  
**UNIFORM DEFINITION**  
Sustainable Mining



- **Commitment to International Norms:** The judgment emphasizes India's obligations under the **UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**. The Aravallis act as a critical "ecological shield" preventing the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert into the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains.

### Key Definitions

- **Local Relief:** The difference in elevation between the highest and lowest points in a specific, limited area.
- **Ecological Carrying Capacity:** The maximum level of resource extraction or human activity an ecosystem can sustain without undergoing permanent degradation.
- **Amicus Curiae:** A "friend of the court"—a neutral lawyer appointed by the court to assist in a case by offering information or insight.
- **Aravalli Green Wall:** An afforestation project aimed at creating a continuous ecological corridor to combat land degradation and dust storms.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A:** Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) mandating the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental Duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Forest Conservation Act, 1980:** Restricted non-forest use of forest land; the SC has repeatedly ruled that Aravalli hills must be treated as "protected" under this Act regardless of their ownership status.
- **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** Provides the framework for the **1992 Aravalli Notification**, which initially restricted certain activities in the Gurgaon and Alwar districts.
- **Precautionary Principle & Polluter Pays Principle:** Core environmental jurisprudence used by the SC to justify the pause on mining and mandate restoration plans.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Age and Origin:** The Aravallis are India's oldest fold mountains, nearly two billion years old (Proterozoic era), pre-dating the Himalayas.
- **Hydrological Role:** They serve as the source for rivers like the **Luni, Sakhi, Banas, Sabarmati, and Chambal**, and are vital for replenishing the groundwater of the NCR.
- **Mineral Wealth:** While strategically rich in copper, zinc, lead, and gold, the range has suffered from excessive stone and sand quarrying to feed the urban construction boom.
- **UNCCD Target:** India aims to achieve **Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)** by 2030, with the Aravalli restoration being a flagship component of this goal.

### Conclusion

The Supreme Court's November 2025 order marks a paradigm shift from fragmented state-level management to a unified, science-based federal approach for the Aravallis. By defining the hills based on elevation and mandating a sustainable mining plan, the judiciary has balanced the need for strategic minerals with the urgent necessity of preventing the desertification of North India. The success of this order will depend on the ground-level execution of the MPSM and the Aravalli Green Wall Project.



## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Geography of Aravallis (highest peak Guru Shikhar, river origins); UNCCD commitments; Green Wall Project specifics; and Part IV/IVA of the Constitution.
- **Mains (GS I):** Distribution of key natural resources (minerals); Important geophysical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features and the effects of such changes.
- **Mains (GS III):** Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Role of the judiciary in environmental governance.

## 12. Thailand-Cambodia Border Conflict: Colonial Legacies and 21st Century Warfare

- **Renewed Hostilities and Airstrikes:** On December 8, 2025, Thailand launched targeted airstrikes into Cambodia following deadly skirmishes that shattered a fragile U.S.-brokered truce. The escalation included the use of F-16 fighter jets and heavy artillery, resulting in the death of over 15 Thai soldiers and numerous Cambodian casualties, alongside the displacement of over 600,000 civilians.
- **Failure of the Trump-Brokered Peace:** Despite President Trump's announcement on December 12 that both nations had agreed to "cease all shooting," the conflict persists. The October "Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord," initiated under U.S. pressure and threats of 36% trade tariffs, collapsed after Thailand accused Cambodia of planting new landmines and violating territorial sovereignty.
- **The Preah Vihear Flashpoint:** The 11th-century Hindu temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, remains the symbolic heart of the dispute. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ) awarded the temple to Cambodia in 1962 and reaffirmed sovereignty over the surrounding "promontory" in 2013, Thailand continues to contest the demarcation of the adjacent 4.6 square km of scrubland.
- **Colonial Cartographic Legacy:** The dispute originates from the 1904 and 1907 Franco-Siamese treaties. French cartographers drew a map that deviated from the natural watershed line of the **Dangrek Mountains** to include Preah Vihear in Cambodia (then a French protectorate). Thailand (formerly Siam) argues the watershed line should be the true legal boundary.
- **Militarization and Strategic Goals:** In the 2025 wave of fighting, Thailand has shifted toward a policy of "deter and destroy," aiming to significantly degrade Cambodia's military capability. Cambodia has retaliated using Chinese-made rocket launchers (PHL-03), while both sides have reportedly utilized advanced drones and electronic warfare assets.
- **Mediation Deadlock:** Regional efforts by **ASEAN** (currently involving Malaysia and Indonesia) have struggled due to Thailand's traditional preference for bilateral negotiations and its resistance to third-party observers. The conflict highlights the limitations of the "ASEAN Way" of non-interference in resolving deep-seated territorial grievances.

## Key Definitions

- **Preah Vihear Temple:** An ancient Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, built during the Khmer Empire, situated atop a 525-meter cliff in the Dangrek Mountains.
- **Watershed Principle:** A legal concept in border demarcation where the boundary follows the highest ridge that separates the flow of water into different river basins.
- **Emerald Triangle:** The forested highland border region where the boundaries of Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos converge.



## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **International Court of Justice (ICJ) Rulings (1962 & 2013):** Binding legal decisions under international law. The 2013 ruling clarified that "vicinity" of the temple includes the entire promontory, necessitating Thai military withdrawal.
- **UN Charter (Article 33):** Mandates that parties to any dispute shall first seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972):** Both nations are signatories and are obligated to cooperate in the protection of the site and refrain from deliberate measures that might damage it.

## Additional Important Keypoints

- **Nationalism as a Driver:** Domestic political instability in Thailand often leads to "nationalist outbidding," where political factions use the temple issue to prove their patriotic credentials, complicating diplomatic de-escalation.
- **Humanitarian Impact:** The use of imprecise rocket fire and cluster munitions in 2025 has led to significant civilian infrastructure damage, including hospitals and schools in border provinces like Sisaket (Thailand) and Preah Vihear (Cambodia).

## Conclusion

The 2025 Thailand-Cambodia conflict underscores how "cartographic aggression" from the colonial era can manifest as modern warfare. While international mediation has provided temporary respites, a permanent solution requires a definitive joint boundary survey. For the region, the conflict is a test of whether economic interdependence and ASEAN's regional framework can overcome historical trauma and nationalist sentiment.

## UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Geography of the Dangrek Mountains, Mekong River, and Preah Vihear temple; ICJ's role and location; ASEAN member states.
- **Mains (GS II):** India and its neighborhood—relations; Regional groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **Mapping:** Locating flashpoints like the Emerald Triangle, Surin, and Sisaket provinces.