



“ We help you reach for the star ”

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

# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

**DATE: 22/12/2025 (MONDAY)**



 **9972258970 & 9740702455**

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



## **Table of Contents**

1. India-Bangladesh Relations: Protection of Minorities and Diplomatic Friction .....	2
2. Viksit Bharat-G RAM G Mission: Overhaul of Rural Employment Architecture .....	3
3. Swachh Survekshan 2025-26: Decadal Milestone in Urban Sanitation .....	4
4. India-Africa Economic Relations: Recalibrating for a Multipolar Era .....	5
5. Tackling Air Pollution: Strategic Lessons from the Beijing Model .....	7
6. India-Oman CEPA: Strengthening the West Asian Strategic Corridor.....	8
7. VB-G RAM G Act, 2025: Reimagining Rural Employment for Viksit Bharat.....	10
8. Defence and Space-Tech: The New Frontier for India's Elite Engineering Talent .....	11
9. The Aland Voter Fraud Case: Digital Vulnerabilities and Electoral Integrity .....	13
10. Aravalli Definition Standardized: Strengthening Conservation Over Mining .....	14



## 1. India-Bangladesh Relations: Protection of Minorities and Diplomatic Friction

- **Targeted Violence Against Minorities:** India has officially condemned the "horrendous" lynching of Dipu Chandra Das, a 25-year-old Hindu youth in Mymensingh, whose body was allegedly set on fire by a mob. This incident highlights the deteriorating security situation for minority communities in Bangladesh amidst ongoing political volatility.
- **Diplomatic Stance and Communication:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has expressed "strong concern" to Dhaka authorities, urging that perpetrators of such "barbaric" acts be brought to justice while maintaining a close watch on the evolving internal situation of the neighboring country.
- **Countering Misinformation:** New Delhi has dismissed reports in Dhaka media regarding alleged threats to Bangladeshi diplomats in India as "misleading propaganda," clarifying that small-scale protests (20-25 individuals) at the High Commission were peaceful demonstrations against the Mymensingh killing.
- **Interim Government Response:** The Foreign Affairs Adviser of Bangladesh's interim government, Touhid Hossein, downplayed the incident by stating such events occur across South Asia, though he confirmed that several suspects in the killing have already been arrested.
- **Impact on Consular Services:** Due to the unstable security environment, India has announced the indefinite closure of the Indian Visa Application Centres (IVAC) in Chittagong and the main centre in Dhaka, significantly impacting people-to-people ties and cross-border movement.
- **Key Demographic Statistics:** In Bangladesh, the Hindu population has seen a historical decline from roughly 22% in 1951 to approximately 7.95% (2022 Census). Recent reports by the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council suggest over 2000 attacks on minorities have occurred since the political transition in August 2024.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Indian Constitution):** Promotion of international peace and security; underscores India's duty to maintain just and honorable relations with nations.
- **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961):** Mandates that the "receiving State" (India or Bangladesh) has a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of a diplomatic mission against any intrusion or damage.
- **The Nehru-Liaquat Pact (1950):** A bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan (then including East Bengal/Bangladesh) specifically aimed at protecting the rights and security of minority communities in both countries.

### Key Definitions

- **Non-Interference vs. Humanitarian Concern:** While "Non-interference" is a core principle of India's foreign policy (Panchsheel), "Humanitarian Concern" allows a state to express grievances regarding the violation of human rights and safety of ethnic/religious kin in a neighboring state.
- **Interim Government:** A provisional government set up to manage a country's transition during a period of political instability or following the collapse of a previous administration until fresh elections are held.

**Conclusion:** The escalating violence against minorities in Bangladesh poses a significant challenge to the "Neighbourhood First" policy. While India seeks to maintain functional ties with the interim administration, the safety of the Hindu minority remains a "red line" that influences bilateral diplomatic warmth and



consular operations. **UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** India and its Neighborhood-Relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

- **GS Paper I:** Communalism and Social Empowerment (Regional perspective).
- **International Relations:** Role of Diaspora and trans-border ethnic ties in foreign policy.

## 2. Viksit Bharat-G RAM G Mission: Overhaul of Rural Employment Architecture

- **Replacement of MGNREGA:** President Droupadi Murmu has granted assent to the **Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025**. This landmark legislation repeals and replaces the two-decade-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.
- **Enhanced Employment Guarantee:** The Act increases the statutory guarantee of wage employment from **100 days to 125 days** per financial year for rural households whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work, aiming to provide greater income security and predictability.
- **Shift in Funding Paradigm:** Transitioning from the previous model where the Centre bore 100% of unskilled wage costs, the new Act operates as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)** with a **60:40 cost-sharing ratio** for most states. Northeastern and Himalayan states follow a **90:10** ratio, while Union Territories without legislatures remain **100%** centrally funded.
- **Outcome-Oriented Focus Areas:** The mission shifts the focus from merely "creating works" to "delivering outcomes" across four strategic verticals: **Water Security** (e.g., Mission Amrit Sarovar), **Core Rural Infrastructure**, **Livelihood-related Infrastructure**, and **Extreme Weather Mitigation**.
- **Agricultural Alignment (The 60-Day Pause):** To address perennial farm labor shortages, the Act empowers states to notify an "agricultural pause" aggregating up to **60 days** during peak sowing and harvesting seasons, during which works under the mission will be suspended to ensure labor availability for the primary sector.
- **Technological and Institutional Governance:** The Act mandates the creation of the **Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack**, integrating bottom-up **Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans** with the **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan**. It features AI-enabled fraud detection, biometric authentication, and weekly public disclosures to enhance transparency.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 39 (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Mandates the State to direct its policy towards securing that the citizens have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- **Article 41:** Right to work, to education, and to public assistance in certain cases within the limits of economic capacity and development.
- **Seventh Schedule:** "Social security and social insurance; employment and unemployment" falls under the **Concurrent List (Entry 23)**, allowing both Centre and States to legislate and share fiscal responsibilities.
- **Unemployment Allowance:** Retained from the previous law; if employment is not provided within **15 days** of demand, the State government is legally obligated to pay an unemployment allowance.



## Key Definitions

- **Normative Allocation:** A top-down budgetary mechanism where the Centre determines state-wise fund limits based on objective parameters (e.g., poverty levels, previous performance) rather than the previous open-ended demand-driven "Labour Budget."
- **Unskilled Manual Work:** Any physical work that can be performed without any special training or skills, which forms the basis of the wage guarantee.
- **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS):** Schemes implemented by State governments but funded largely by the Central Government with a defined sharing ratio.

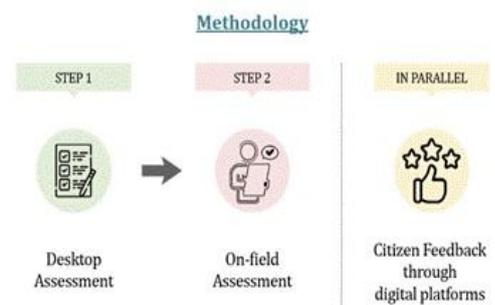
**Conclusion:** The VB-G RAM G Act represents a strategic pivot from a "safety net" rights-based approach to a "mission-mode" development framework. While the 25% increase in workdays is a significant benefit, the shift to a 60:40 funding split and budget-capped normative allocations places higher fiscal responsibility and accountability on State governments, testing the principles of cooperative federalism.

**UPSC Relevance: \* GS Paper II:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues relating to the development and management of the Social Sector; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure (Funding Ratios).

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and employment; Rural infrastructure and Government Budgeting.
- **Essay/Ethics:** Discussion on "Right to Work" vs. "Outcome-based Development."

## 3. Swachh Survekshan 2025-26: Decadal Milestone in Urban Sanitation

- **Launch of the 10th Edition:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has released the toolkit for the 10th edition of Swachh Survekshan (SS), the world's largest urban cleanliness survey. Since its inception in 2016 with 73 cities, the survey has expanded exponentially to cover approximately 4,900 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in its latest iterations.
- **Theme for 2025-26:** The official theme is "*Swacchata Ki Nayi Peהל- Badhayein Haath, Karein Safai Saath*". This emphasizes collective responsibility and a fresh impetus toward behavioral change (Swabhav Swachhata, Sanskaar Swachhata), moving from government-led initiatives to a genuine *Jan Andolan* (People's Movement).
- **Enhanced Citizen Engagement:** The 2025-26 framework significantly increases the weightage of "Citizen Validation." For the first time, feedback will be collected round-the-year via digital platforms like the Vote For My City App, MyGov, and Swachhata App. This shift ensures that city rankings reflect the lived reality of residents rather than a one-time assessment.
- **Geographical Expansion:** While previous editions focused on Ganga towns, the new survey broadens its scope to include all "River Towns" across India. Additionally, a specialized assessment matrix has been introduced for "Coastal Areas" to address the unique challenges of marine litter and coastal waste management.
- **Institutionalizing Mentorship (Swachh Shehar Jodi):** A new award category recognizes the "Swachh Shehar Jodi" (SSJ) initiative. Launched in September 2025, this mentorship framework pairs 72 "Mentor" cities with 200 "Mentee" cities to facilitate the transfer of technical expertise, best practices in waste processing, and peer-to-peer learning.





- **Digital and Rigorous Monitoring:** The assessment is powered by a fully digital, transparent protocol featuring over 3,000 GPS-enabled field assessors. A national oversight team and dedicated single-points-of-contact for each State/UT have been established to institutionalize grievance redressal and ensure the integrity of the data collected during the 45-day on-ground survey.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 243W (12th Schedule):** Added via the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, this entrusts Urban Local Bodies with functions including "Public health, sanitation conservancy, and solid waste management."
- **Article 21:** The Supreme Court has interpreted the Right to Life to include the right to a clean and healthy environment, which forms the legal basis for state-led sanitation missions.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental Duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016:** Provides the statutory framework for waste segregation, processing, and disposal that cities are evaluated against during the survey.

### Key Definitions

- **Swachh Survekshan (SS):** An annual survey of cleanliness, hygiene, and sanitation in villages, cities, and towns across India, launched as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- **GFC (Garbage Free Cities) Star Rating:** A protocol-based holistic evaluation of a city's solid waste management system, ranging from 1-star to 7-star ratings.
- **ODF, ODF+, ODF++:** Levels of "Open Defecation Free" status; ODF focuses on access to toilets, ODF+ includes functionality and maintenance, and ODF++ incorporates safe fecal sludge and septage management.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

Swachh Survekshan has evolved from a simple ranking exercise into a sophisticated management tool that promotes "Competitive Federalism" among cities. By integrating river and coastal towns and formalizing mentorship, the 10th edition addresses critical gaps in the circular economy and urban ecology. For the UPSC Civil Services Exam, this topic is highly relevant under:

- **GS Paper II:** Governance, Government Policies and Interventions, and issues arising out of their implementation.
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental Pollution and Degradation; Infrastructure (Urban Development).
- **Essay Paper:** Themes related to community participation (*Jan Bhagidari*), urban transformation, and the philosophy of cleanliness.

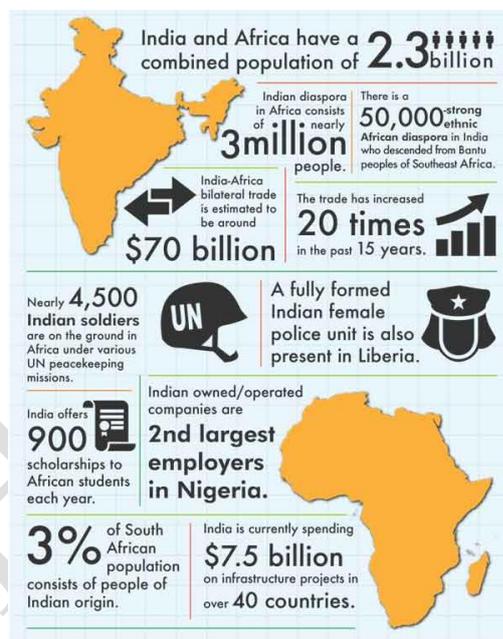
## 4. India-Africa Economic Relations: Recalibrating for a Multipolar Era

- **Strategic Diplomatic Momentum:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2025 five-nation tour (including Namibia, Ghana, and Ethiopia) underscores India's renewed focus on Africa. A historic milestone in this engagement was the induction of the **African Union (AU)** as a permanent member of the **G20** during India's 2023 presidency, signaling India's role as the voice of the Global South.
- **Economic Scale and Trade Targets:** India is currently Africa's **fourth-largest trading partner**, with bilateral trade crossing the **\$100 billion mark** in FY25. India has set an ambitious target to double this figure to **\$200 billion by 2030**. Key exports include petroleum products,



pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, and textiles, while imports remain concentrated in crude oil, gold, and critical minerals.

- **The Five-Pillar Strategy:** To achieve its 2030 targets, India is adopting a comprehensive strategy: 1) Negotiating **Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs)**; 2) Transitioning from low-value commodity trade to **value-added manufacturing** (Joint Ventures); 3) Scaling up **Lines of Credit (LoC)** and trade finance for MSMEs; 4) Reducing logistics costs through **maritime corridors**; and 5) Leveraging **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** (e.g., UPI, India Stack) to boost services trade.
- **Resource Security and PSUs:** Africa holds over **30% of global mineral reserves**. Under the **National Critical Mineral Mission (2025)**, Indian Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) like **KABIL** (a JV of NALCO, HCL, and MECL) and Coal India are taking the lead in mining collaborations (Lithium, Cobalt, Copper) to secure supply chains for India's green energy and EV transition, counterbalancing China's dominant presence.
- **Leveraging the AfCFTA:** Deepening engagement with the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**—the world's largest free trade area by number of participating countries—offers Indian firms a unified market of 1.3 billion people. This allows Indian manufacturers to use Africa as a production hub to access Western markets via preferential tariff regimes like the U.S. **AGOA** (African Growth and Opportunity Act).
- **Developmental Partnership Model:** Unlike purely transactional models, India's approach emphasizes **capacity building** and **human capital**. India has provided over **\$12 billion in concessional loans** and 50,000 scholarships, focusing on "co-creating a shared future" through projects in healthcare, agriculture, and digital connectivity (e.g., e-VBAB project).



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** Promotion of international peace and security and maintaining just and honorable relations between nations.
- **The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023:** Empowers the Central Government to auction critical minerals and facilitates overseas acquisition by Indian entities.
- **National Critical Mineral Mission (2025):** A policy framework aimed at achieving self-reliance in 30 identified critical minerals through domestic exploration and foreign sourcing.
- **Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme:** India's non-reciprocal legal framework that grants tariff-free market access to 34 African Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

### Key Definitions

- **Lines of Credit (LoC):** A development assistance tool where the Indian government provides concessional loans to foreign governments to fund infrastructure and development projects executed by Indian companies.
- **Global South:** A term used to describe developing and emerging economies, primarily located in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, which share common historical and developmental challenges.



- **Critical Minerals:** Metallic or non-metallic elements (e.g., Lithium, Cobalt) that have high economic importance and high supply risk, essential for modern technologies like semiconductors and green energy.

**Conclusion:** India's relationship with Africa has transitioned from "Project Partnership" to "Co-creating a Shared Future." As global supply chains decouple, Africa's demographic dividend and mineral wealth make it indispensable to India's aspiration of becoming a \$5 trillion economy. The success of this partnership depends on moving beyond "resource extraction" toward "sustainable industrialization" that benefits both regions.

**UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global 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.

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to mobilization of resources; Infrastructure (Connectivity/Maritime Corridors).
- **Current Affairs:** Diplomatic visits, G20 outcomes, and resource diplomacy.

## 5. Tackling Air Pollution: Strategic Lessons from the Beijing Model

- **Diverging Trajectories:** Over the past decade, Beijing and Delhi have shown contrasting results in air quality management. Beijing reduced its annual  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  levels by over **50% (from 102  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in 2013 to 31  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in 2024)**. In contrast, Delhi remains a global symbol of smog, highlighting a shift from reactive to systemic policy implementation.
- **The Airshed Approach:** A cornerstone of Beijing's success was regional coordination with neighboring **Tianjin and Hebei provinces**. By treating the region as a single "airshed," they regulated transboundary pollution. In India, while the **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** exists, its directives often lack the authoritative inter-state bite needed to curb cross-border issues like stubble burning.
- **Top-Down vs. Fragmented Governance:** China utilized an "**Environmental Vertical Reform**," creating a clear hierarchy where local officials are strictly accountable for environmental targets. India's governance is fragmented across the Union government, State governments, and Municipal bodies, leading to slower decision-making and diffused accountability.
- **Continuous vs. Episodic Strategy:** Beijing's strategy relied on long-term missions like the **Blue Sky Protection Campaign**. India's approach, primarily via the **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)**, is largely reactive—activated only during pollution peaks—rather than being embedded in a year-round industrial and energy transition.
- **Structural Energy and Transport Shift:** Beijing achieved results by shutting down coal-fired boilers, relocating heavy industries to functional zones with full utilities, and enforcing stringent **China VI standards** alongside massive electric mobility expansion. India faces the "Growth vs. Environment" dilemma, with understaffed pollution control boards and an unorganized sector that complicates enforcement.
- **Technological Integration:** Beijing built one of the world's densest real-time monitoring networks. India is expanding its network under the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**, but it requires





more standardized, high-resolution data and AI-driven "Source Apportionment" to move from general bans to targeted interventions.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Supreme Court (e.g., in *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*) has interpreted the "Right to Life" to include the right to a clean and healthy environment.
- **Article 48A & 51A(g):** Directive Principles and Fundamental Duties mandating the State and citizens to protect and improve the environment.
- **The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:** Established the CPCB/SPCBs; Section 21 mandates "Consent to Operate" for industries.
- **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** An "umbrella" legislation that allows the Centre to coordinate activities of various authorities and establish bodies like CAQM.
- **CAQM Act, 2021:** A statutory framework for the National Capital Region (NCR) to provide for better coordination and research, with powers to override other state laws on pollution.

### Key Definitions

- **Airshed:** A geographical area where local topography and meteorology limit the dispersion of pollutants, meaning the air quality is shared across political boundaries.
- **SPM<sub>2.5</sub>:** Fine particulate matter with a diameter of less than **2.5 micrometers**, capable of entering the bloodstream and causing severe respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.
- **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** An emergency plan in Delhi-NCR that triggers specific restrictive measures (like construction bans) based on different levels of Air Quality Index (AQI) severity.

**Conclusion:** Beijing's "Air Miracle" demonstrates that pollution is a governance challenge rather than an inevitable byproduct of development. For India, the transition must involve moving from "seasonal emergency" mode to a "year-round mission" mode. Adopting an airshed-based coordination model and empowering statutory bodies with more resources and punitive clarity are essential to ensuring that the Right to Clean Air becomes a reality.

**UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** Governance; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

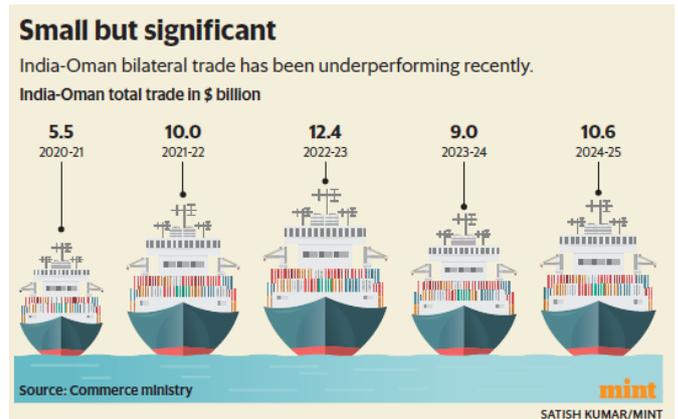
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental Pollution and Degradation; Conservation; Science and Technology.
- **Case Study:** Comparison of Delhi and Beijing models for International Relations or Ethics (Environmental Ethics).

## 6. India-Oman CEPA: Strengthening the West Asian Strategic Corridor

- **Comprehensive Economic Integration:** India and Oman have signed a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, marking a historic milestone as Oman's first such deal since 2006. The agreement offers unprecedented market access, with Oman providing zero-duty access to **98.08% of its tariff lines**, covering over **99% of India's exports** by value.
- **Boost to Labor-Intensive Sectors:** The deal is a major win for Indian MSMEs and artisans. Major sectors like **Gems & Jewellery, Textiles, Leather, Footwear, and Engineering goods**—which previously faced duties up to 5% or more—will now enjoy immediate tariff elimination, enhancing their competitiveness against global rivals.



- **Strategic Energy and Resource Security:** Oman remains a critical partner for India's energy needs, supplying crude oil and fertilizers. The CEPA formalizes this link, ensuring stable supply chains for **chemical inputs like ammonia and methanol**, which are essential for India's industrial and agricultural growth.
- **Services and Professional Mobility:** For the first time, Oman has offered wide-ranging commitments under **Mode 4 (Movement of Natural Persons)**. This includes doubling the quota for **Intra-Corporate Transferees** (from 20% to 50%) and extending the stay for **Contractual Service Suppliers** to up to two years, facilitating easier access for Indian IT, healthcare, and education professionals.
- **Safeguarding Domestic Interests:** India has strategically excluded sensitive sectors to protect domestic farmers and industries. **Dairy, tea, coffee, rubber, tobacco, gold, and silver bullion** are placed on the exclusion list, meaning no duty concessions are granted for these Omani imports.
- **Gateway to the GCC and Africa:** Beyond bilateral trade (which rose to **\$10.6 billion in FY25**), the deal serves as a "Strategic Anchor." With India-GCC talks stalled, individual deals with the **UAE and now Oman** create a blueprint for a broader Gulf trade architecture and provide Indian firms a logistics hub to access East Africa and Central Asia.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** 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 13, Union List**).
- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country.
- **Customs Act, 1962:** Provides the legal framework for the notification of preferential rates of duty and "Rules of Origin" necessary to prevent third-country goods from misusing the trade deal.

### Key Definitions

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** A deep trade agreement that covers not just goods (tariffs) but also services, investment, intellectual property, and regulatory cooperation.
- **Tariff-Rate Quota (TRQ):** A mechanism where a specific quantity of imports (e.g., 2,000 tonnes of dates) is allowed at a lower duty, while imports exceeding that limit are taxed at the normal (higher) rate.
- **Mode 4 (GATS):** Refers to the "movement of natural persons," specifically the temporary entry and stay of professionals (doctors, engineers, IT experts) for the purpose of providing services.

**Conclusion:** The India-Oman CEPA is less about a sudden trade spike and more about **strategic consolidation**. At a time of rising protectionism in the West, this deal secures a reliable market in the "Extended Neighbourhood." It leverages Oman's unique geography—bypassing the Persian Gulf chokepoints—to safeguard India's maritime and energy interests while empowering the Indian diaspora and professional class.

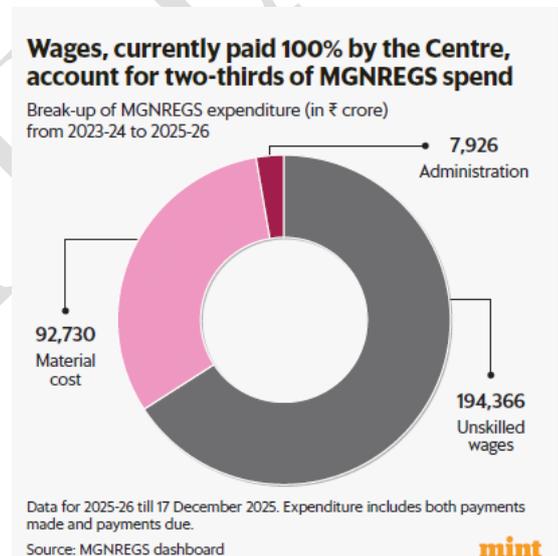


**UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; West Asia geopolitics.

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (External Sector); Energy Security; Mobilization of resources.
- **Prelims:** Terms like CEPA vs. FTA, TRQ, and Rules of Origin.

## 7. VB-G RAM G Act, 2025: Reimagining Rural Employment for Viksit Bharat

- **Replacement of MGNREGA:** The **Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025**, has officially replaced the two-decade-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005. This marks a transition from a "safety-net" approach to a mission-mode framework aligned with the **Viksit Bharat @2047** vision.
- **Expansion of Employment Guarantee:** The Act increases the statutory guarantee of wage employment from 100 days to **125 days** per financial year for rural households whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work. This 25% increase aims to provide deeper income stability and reduce distress migration.
- **Strategic 60-Day "Agricultural Pause":** To balance the rural labor market, the Act introduces a mandatory suspension of public works for up to **60 days** during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. This ensures that the scheme does not compete with agriculture for labor, addressing a long-standing grievance of the farming community.
- **Revised Fiscal Architecture:** The scheme transitions to a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)** model with a **60:40 cost-sharing ratio** for most states. Previously, the Centre bore 100% of unskilled wage costs; now, states must contribute 40% (except for North-Eastern/Himalayan states at 90:10 and UTs at 100% Central funding).
- **Focus on Outcome-Oriented Assets:** Shifting from "creating works" to "delivering outcomes," projects are restricted to four thematic verticals: **Water Security, Core Rural Infrastructure, Livelihood-related Infrastructure, and Extreme Weather Mitigation**. Works will be integrated with the **National Rural Infrastructure Stack** and **PM Gati Shakti**.
- **Enhanced Accountability & Technology:** The Act mandates **AI-based fraud detection, GPS-enabled monitoring, and biometric authentication** to curb leakages. It also raises the administrative expenditure ceiling from **6% to 9%** to strengthen technical capacity and oversight at the Panchayat level.



## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 39 (DPSP):** Directs the State to ensure that citizens have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Mandates the State, within its economic capacity, to provide the "Right to Work" and public assistance in cases of unemployment.



- **Article 243G (11th Schedule):** Empowers Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to prepare plans for economic development and social justice; the Act reinforces this by making **Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans** the basis for all works.
- **Unemployment Allowance:** Retained as a statutory right; if employment is not provided within **15 days** of demand, the state government is legally bound to pay an allowance, with the financial liability resting solely on the state.

### Key Definitions

- **Normative Allocation:** A supply-driven budgeting mechanism where the Centre determines state-wise fund limits based on objective parameters (poverty, performance) rather than the previous demand-driven "Labour Budget."
- **Unskilled Manual Work:** Physical labor that does not require any specialized training, which forms the core of the 125-day employment guarantee.
- **Special Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Cards:** Distinctly colored cards issued to vulnerable groups (PVTGs, single women, persons with disabilities, and transgenders) to ensure priority and social inclusion.

**Conclusion:** The VB-G RAM G Act represents a strategic pivot toward "Productive Employment." While the 125-day guarantee is a progressive step for labor, the shift to a 60:40 funding model and the "agricultural pause" signify a greater emphasis on fiscal discipline and rural labor market equilibrium. The success of this transition will depend on the states' fiscal capacity to meet their increased 40% share and the technological readiness of rural infrastructure.

**UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues relating to the development and management of the Social Sector; Federalism (fiscal burden on states).

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and employment; Infrastructure (Rural Development).
- **Current Affairs:** Landmark 2025 legislation and the evolution of the "Right to Work" in India.

## 8. Defence and Space-Tech: The New Frontier for India's Elite Engineering Talent

- **Shift in Campus Recruitment Trends:** Defence and aerospace firms are now directly competing with tech giants (Big Tech) and High-Frequency Trading (HFT) firms for talent at India's premier institutes like the IITs, IISc, and IIST. This marks a departure from traditional placements dominated by software and finance, reflecting a rising "national priority" in career choices.
- **Rise of Private Space-Tech Startups:** The emergence of "New Space" startups like **Skyroot Aerospace** (Hyderabad-based) and others has created high-end engineering roles in rocket propulsion, satellite intelligence, and orbital mechanics. Skyroot, for instance, received 3,500 applicants for just 65 roles in its 2025-26 drive, indicating high demand for world-class engineering opportunities within India.
- **Catalyst of "Atmanirbhar Bharat":** Aggressive government policies promoting local manufacturing have buoyed private sector confidence. For the first time, India's top-tier candidates have reliable, private-sector career paths in advanced manufacturing and product design that were previously restricted to the public sector (ISRO/DRDO).
- **Strategic Commercial Milestones:** Private firms are moving from testing to commercial operations. Skyroot Aerospace is on track for India's first privately-built **orbital rocket launch (Vikram-1)** by



early 2026. Such milestones demonstrate the transition of the Indian space sector into a full-scale commercial launch service provider.

- **Global Competitiveness & Compensation:** While HFTs offer some of the highest packages, defence and aerospace firms are attracting talent through "mission-driven" roles. This is critical for India to secure its place in the global commercial space race, which is estimated to reach **\$44 billion by 2033** for the Indian ecosystem alone.
- **Bridging the R&D Gap:** Private firms are investing heavily in R&D to compete for billion-dollar global business opportunities. This influx of IIT-trained "propulsion engineers" and "systems integrators" is vital to overcoming traditional delays in indigenous technology development and prototype-to-production transitions.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A(h):** Fundamental Duty to develop scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- **Article 246 (Union List - Entry 1, 2, 7):** Grants Parliament exclusive power over Defence of India, Naval/Military/Air Forces, and Industries declared by Parliament to be necessary for the purpose of defence or the prosecution of war.
- **Indian Space Policy – 2023:** An overarching framework that transitioned the space sector from a government monopoly to an ecosystem where **Non-Government Entities (NGEs)** can carry out end-to-end space activities.
- **Draft Civil Drone (Promotion and Regulation) Bill, 2025:** A proposed statute to revamp UAS (Unmanned Aircraft Systems) regulation, moving from delegated rules to a standalone act to boost the domestic drone industry.
- **FDI Policy (Defence):** Liberalized to allow **74% via the Automatic Route** and up to **100% via the Government Route** for modern technology, encouraging global aerospace majors to set up shop in India.

### Key Definitions

- **High-Frequency Trading (HFT) Firms:** Financial firms that use sophisticated algorithms and high-speed data feeds to execute a large number of orders in fractions of a second; often the highest payers at IIT placements.
- **IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre):** A single-window, autonomous nodal agency under the Department of Space to promote and authorize private sector space activities.
- **Orbital Launch Vehicle:** A rocket capable of placing a payload into a stable orbit around Earth, as opposed to sub-orbital rockets that merely reach space and fall back.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat (Defence):** A strategic initiative to reduce import dependency (currently around 35-40%) and make India a global hub for defence manufacturing.



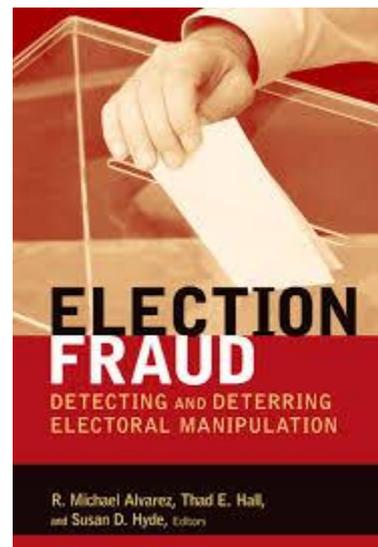
**Conclusion:** The entry of private defence and space-tech firms into the IIT talent war is a "brain gain" for India's strategic sectors. By providing world-class engineering challenges and competitive career paths, these firms are ensuring that the nation's best minds contribute to indigenous security and the global space economy. This synergy between top-tier education and high-tech private industry is essential for India to transition from a technology consumer to a global technology leader.

**UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education and Human Resources.

- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Awareness in the fields of Space; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
- **Essay:** The role of private enterprise in national security and scientific advancement.

## 9. The Aland Voter Fraud Case: Digital Vulnerabilities and Electoral Integrity

- **Unprecedented Judicial Action:** For the first time in a documented "vote chori" (vote theft) case, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has filed a chargesheet against a former MLA (Subhash Guttedar) and his son. The case involves a criminal conspiracy to disenfranchise 5,994 genuine voters in the Aland assembly constituency through forged digital applications.
- **Modus Operandi of Forgery:** The accused reportedly hired a private firm to file forged **Form 7s** (seeking name deletion) for voters suspected of supporting political rivals. The fraud was uncovered when a Booth Level Officer (BLO) discovered a forged application seeking to delete her own brother's name under the false pretext of him having "shifted out."
- **Exploitation of Digital Loopholes:** The fraudsters exploited six specific vulnerabilities in the National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP), including the lack of OTPs for subsequent logins, the ability to file unlimited applications from a single ID, and the absence of alerts to the affected voters whose names were being deleted.
- **The OTP Bypass Network:** Investigators tracked the fraud to a sophisticated cyber-network involving a website ([otpbazar.online](http://otpbazar.online)) and a U.S.-based parent site ([sms-activate.io](http://sms-activate.io)). These platforms sold access to random mobile numbers and their intercepted OTPs, allowing the accused to create untraceable accounts on Election Commission (EC) portals.
- **Evidence of "Vote Chori":** An audit by the Returning Officer (RO) revealed that out of 6,018 Form 7 applications filed between December 2022 and February 2023, only 24 were genuine. The remaining 5,994 were forged, representing a massive coordinated attempt to manipulate the electoral roll.
- **Election Commission Reforms:** Following the public outcry and investigation findings in late 2025, the EC introduced a mandatory **e-sign feature** requiring Aadhaar-linked mobile verification for any online application regarding electoral rolls to prevent future bulk forgeries.



## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 324:** Vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission; includes the constitutional mandate to maintain accurate electoral rolls.



- **Article 326:** Guarantees Universal Adult Suffrage; any attempt to wrongfully delete names is a direct violation of this fundamental constitutional right.
- **Section 31 of the RPA, 1950:** Prescribes punishment for making false declarations in connection with the preparation or revision of electoral rolls.
- **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951:** Contains provisions regarding "Corrupt Practices" (Section 123) and electoral offenses.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Relevant for charges related to identity theft, hacking, and the use of forged digital credentials (OTPs).

### Key Definitions

- **Form 7:** The specific statutory form used under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, for objecting to the inclusion of a name or seeking the deletion of an existing entry in the electoral roll.
- **Returning Officer (RO):** An officer designated by the EC for each constituency, responsible for overseeing the election process and the integrity of the electoral rolls.
- **Airshed of Data (IPDR):** In a digital context, the Internet Protocol Detail Record (IPDR) provides a footprint of devices used to access a network, used here by the SIT to "reverse engineer" the origin of forged forms.
- **Booth Level Officer (BLO):** A local government or semi-government official who acts as the EC's representative at the grassroots for field verification of voter data.

**Conclusion:** The Aland case serves as a cautionary tale on the intersection of "New-Age Cybercrime" and "Old-School Political Malpractice." It highlights that while digital portals increase accessibility, they also create "surface areas" for systemic fraud if not backed by rigorous verification. The move toward Aadhaar-linked e-signing is a necessary evolution to safeguard the sanctity of the "one person, one vote" principle.

**UPSC Relevance:** \* **GS Paper II:** Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies (Election Commission).

- **GS Paper III:** Challenges to internal security through communication networks; Role of media and social networking sites in network challenges; Cyber security.
- **Ethics:** Integrity in public life and the ethical implications of disenfranchisement.

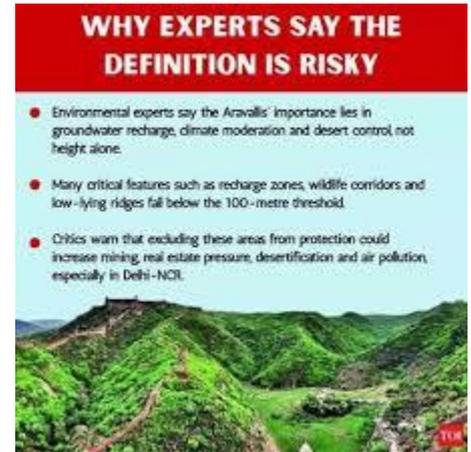
### 10. Aravalli Definition Standardized: Strengthening Conservation Over Mining

- **Standardization of Definition:** The Union Environment Ministry has clarified that the definition of the Aravalli hills and range has been standardized across states (Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat) following Supreme Court (SC) directions. This move aims to remove legal ambiguities that previously allowed inconsistent protection levels across different state borders.
- **Expansion of Protected Area:** According to the Ministry, the SC-approved framework will bring more than **90% of the Aravalli region** under a "protected" category. This is intended to prevent the misuse of land and curb illegal encroachments that have historically plagued the eco-sensitive mountain range.
- **Freeze on New Mining Leases:** The Centre has dismissed reports of allowing large-scale mining, citing a Supreme Court-ordered freeze. No new mining leases will be granted in the Aravalli region



until a comprehensive, long-term **Aravalli Management Plan** is finalized and approved by the apex court.

- **The "100-metre" Criterion:** In response to controversies regarding specific elevation measurements, the government clarified that the standardization is a protective measure. It ensures that any area traditionally or geographically identified as part of the Aravalli system is recognized uniformly to prevent fragmented exploitation.
- **Ecological Significance:** As the world's oldest fold mountain range, the Aravallis act as a "green lung" for the National Capital Region (NCR) and a natural barrier against the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert. The new definition prioritizes these ecosystem services over industrial or real estate development.
- **Management Framework:** The SC-approved framework mandates states to identify and demarcate Aravalli areas based on scientific and historical data, ensuring that "Gair Mumkin Pahar" (uncultivable hill land) and related land categories receive statutory protection.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.<sup>1</sup>
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental Duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests<sup>2</sup>, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Provides the central government with the power to take all measures necessary to protect the environment and coordinate state actions.
- **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023:** Recent changes in the act make the definition of "forest-like" areas (like parts of the Aravallis) critical for determining where non-forestry activities can occur.
- **Public Trust Doctrine:** A legal principle derived from SC judgments (e.g., *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*) stating that certain resources like mountains and forests are preserved for public use and the state is a trustee.

### Key Definitions

- **Airshed & Desertification Barrier:** In environmental geography, the Aravallis act as a barrier that prevents the spread of the desert toward the fertile plains of the Ganga and Yamuna.
- **Gair Mumkin Pahar:** A land revenue term used in Northern India to denote "uncultivable hilly land"; the SC has frequently ruled that such land in the Aravalli region must be treated as "forest" for protection purposes.
- **Fold Mountains:** Mountains formed by the folding of the Earth's crust; while the Aravallis are now "relic" mountains due to erosion, they were originally high fold mountains.

**Conclusion:** The standardization of the Aravalli definition is a vital step toward "Eco-Governance." By replacing fragmented state-level interpretations with a Supreme Court-backed uniform definition, the government is closing legal loopholes that favored mining and real estate. However, the true success of this



measure lies in the timely finalization of the Aravalli Management Plan and the strict on-ground enforcement of the mining freeze.

**UPSC Relevance:** \* GS Paper I: Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features and the flora and fauna and the effects of such changes. \* GS Paper II: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Government policies and interventions. \* GS Paper III: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

---

VIDHVATH IAS