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

## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION**

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## 1. Punjab Assembly Resolution: MGNREGA vs. VB-GRAM (G)

- **Federal Friction over Rural Labor:** The Punjab Assembly has formally passed a resolution opposing the Union Government's replacement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with the **Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)** or VB-GRAM (G).
- **Shift from Demand-Based to Norm-Based:** A primary critique raised in the resolution is the fundamental shift in the scheme's character; while MGNREGA was **demand-driven** (guaranteeing work whenever requested), the new VB-GRAM (G) is **norm-based**, which critics argue limits access to guaranteed employment.
- **Concerns over Legal Entitlements:** The Punjab government contends that the new law dilutes the "right to work" by removing the statutory guarantee of wages and employment, potentially impacting the livelihoods of millions of job card holders, particularly Dalit laborers and women.
- **Financial Burden on States:** The resolution highlights that the new framework imposes an additional financial strain on State governments, moving away from the previous cost-sharing model that was more supportive of regional fiscal health.
- **Procedural Criticism:** Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann emphasized the contrast in legislative process, noting that while MGNREGA resulted from years of deliberation, VB-GRAM (G) was passed by Parliament within hours, bypassing extensive stakeholder consultation.
- **Impact on Social Safety Nets:** The state government views this transition as a "deliberate conspiracy" to dismantle a social safety net that provided a lifeline to the rural poor during economic distress, urging the Centre to restore the scheme to its original form.



### Key Definitions

- **Demand-Driven Scheme:** A system where the government is legally obligated to provide a service (like work) whenever a citizen requests it.
- **Norm-Based Scheme:** A system where benefits are distributed based on fixed criteria, quotas, or pre-defined benchmarks set by the government, rather than individual demand.
- **Right to Work:** An economic and social right that guarantees people the opportunity to be employed or engaged in rewarding an occupation.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to a dignified livelihood; MGNREGA acted as a tool to realize this fundamental right.
- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Directs the State to ensure the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of unemployment or old age within its economic capacity.
- **Seventh Schedule:** "Social Security and Social Insurance; employment and unemployment" falls under the **Concurrent List**, meaning both Centre and States have jurisdiction, though the Centre's shift in policy creates operational friction.



- **MGNREGA Act, 2005:** The original statutory framework that provided a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of unskilled manual work to every rural household.

### Additional Key Points

- **Socio-Economic Impact:** In states like Punjab, where the rural workforce includes a high percentage of Scheduled Castes, the transition to a norm-based system could exacerbate rural poverty and migration.
- **The "Viksit Bharat" Vision:** The Central government's rationale for the new law is to align rural employment with broader developmental goals (Aajeevika/Livelihood), though the "guarantee" aspect remains the point of contention.

### Conclusion

The resolution passed by the Punjab Assembly underscores a deepening rift in Cooperative Federalism. The transition from a rights-based framework (MGNREGA) to a mission-mode framework (VB-GRAM G) represents a paradigm shift in India's social welfare policy. While the Centre aims for "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India), the States argue that removing the legal "guarantee" of work compromises the economic security of the most vulnerable sections of society.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services; Federalism and Centre-State relations.
- **GS Paper III:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and MSP; Employment and inclusive growth.
- **Essay/Ethics:** Right to livelihood as a component of human dignity and the role of the State in social justice.

## 2. U.S. Strategic Realignment and the Emerging Global Order

- **Revival of the Monroe Doctrine:** The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) marks a pivot toward Latin America and the Caribbean, demonstrated by massive naval mobilization near Venezuela to assert regional primacy and deny Chinese influence in the Western Hemisphere.
- **Retreat from European Security:** In a significant departure from post-WWII policy, the U.S. is signaling a reduced commitment to serving as Europe's primary security guarantor, urging European nations to shoulder their own defense burdens.
- **Shift to Offshore Balancing:** The Trump administration is transitioning toward "offshore balancing," focusing on consolidating its immediate neighborhood while preparing for a systemic, long-term confrontation with China as the primary challenger.
- **Russia as the "Swing Great Power":** Amidst the U.S.-China rivalry, a potential Washington-Moscow reset is being explored by U.S. strategists to pull Russia away from China's orbit, positioning Russia as a critical pivot point in the global balance of power.
- **Fluid Multipolarity:** The international system has transitioned from unipolarity to a fluid multipolarity where the U.S., China, and Russia pursue divergent interests, and middle powers like India and Brazil increasingly "hedge" to maintain strategic autonomy.





- **Structural Bipolarity:** Despite the presence of multiple actors, the systemic contest between the reigning power (U.S.) and the rising power (China) lends the current era a "bipolar character" within a broader multipolar framework.

### Key Definitions

- **Monroe Doctrine:** A 19th-century U.S. policy stating that any intervention by external powers in the politics of the Americas is a potentially hostile act against the U.S.
- **Unipolarity vs. Multipolarity:** Unipolarity refers to a global distribution of power where one state exercises most of the influence; multipolarity involves three or more states possessing significant global influence.
- **Offshore Balancing:** A strategic concept where a great power uses regional allies to check the rise of potentially hostile powers, intervening directly only when absolutely necessary.
- **Strategic Hedging:** A foreign policy strategy where a state avoids taking sides in a conflict between great powers to protect its own national interests.

### Constitutional and Legal Context

- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution:** Directs the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations, relevant to India's "hedging" strategy.
- **UN Charter Article 2(4):** Prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, central to the "rules-based order" currently under debate.
- **War Powers Resolution (U.S.):** 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.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Economic Indicators:** China's GDP has reached approximately 66% of the U.S. GDP, a higher ratio than the Soviet Union ever achieved, signaling a more robust systemic challenge.
- **Naval Expansion:** China now possesses the world's largest navy by ship count, utilizing its economic gains to project power in the Indo-Pacific.
- **The "Christian Nationalism" Factor:** Ideological shifts in U.S. foreign policy are increasingly framing alliances through the lens of shared civilization, particularly regarding a potential rapprochement with Russia.

### Conclusion

The global order is undergoing a structural transformation characterized by the end of American unipolarity and the rise of a fragmented multipolar system. The U.S. pivot back to the Monroe Doctrine and its withdrawal from European security reflects a strategic recalibration to focus on China. In this landscape, the "rules-based order" is being contested by revisionist powers (Russia and China), leaving middle powers like India to navigate a volatile environment where Russia acts as a decisive swing factor.

### UPSC Relevance

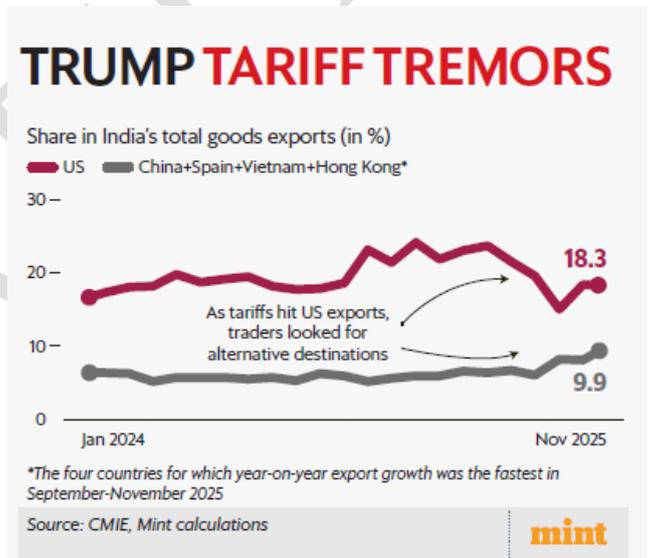
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Bilateral, regional and global groupings.
- **PSIR Optional:** Concepts of Power, Hegemony, and Balance of Power; Realist and Liberal worldviews; Changing International Political Order.



- **Current Affairs:** Strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific and Latin America; Evolution of U.S.-Russia-China trilateral dynamics.

### 3. Analyzing India's Socio-Economic Data: Trends and Challenges 2025

- **Methodological Scrutiny of National Data:** In 2025, India's statistical system, particularly GDP and unemployment figures, faced global scrutiny. Methodological gaps led to an IMF "C" rating for GDP data, prompting a shift toward more credible, high-frequency reporting to capture the nuances of a rapidly evolving economy.
- **Evolution of Labor Market Monitoring:** The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) underwent a structural revamp to provide monthly estimates for both rural and urban areas.<sup>1</sup> While the headline unemployment rate remains a key metric, data reveals that educated youth face disproportionately higher joblessness, signaling a mismatch between skill supply and formal job creation.<sup>2</sup>
- **Quantifying the "Double Burden" on Women:** The 2024–25 Time Use Survey highlighted significant gender disparities, showing that married women spend over 25% of their day on unpaid domestic work compared to just 3% for men.<sup>3</sup> This "sleep deficit" and time-poverty among women peak in their 30s, underscoring the deep-seated gender roles in Indian society.
- **Trade Disruptions and Market Diversification:** U.S. "Liberation Day" tariffs—reaching up to 50% on certain Indian goods—forced a strategic pivot in India's trade policy.<sup>4</sup> Exporters successfully mitigated losses by diversifying into alternative markets like Spain, Vietnam, and China, moving away from over-reliance on the U.S. market.<sup>5</sup>
- **Fiscal Risks of Competitive Populism:** The proliferation of cash transfer schemes for women across 15 states has raised alarms regarding "competitive populism." While these transfers provide a 10–30% income boost for casual laborers, they strain state exchequers and often lead to a reduction in long-term capital expenditure.<sup>6</sup>
- **Air Pollution and the Implementation Gap:** Delhi's persistent "Airpocalypse" highlighted the failure to utilize allocated funds; only 52% of National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) funds were spent by late 2024. In contrast, Beijing's "war on pollution" provides a roadmap for reducing PM2.5 exposure through strict, technology-driven enforcement.



#### Key Definitions

- **Time Use Survey (TUS):** A statistical tool that measures the time individuals spend on various activities, providing insights into participation in paid and unpaid work.<sup>7</sup>
- **Current Weekly Status (CWS):** A labor force measurement where a person is considered employed if they worked for at least one hour during the reference week.<sup>8</sup>
- **Competitive Populism:** A political phenomenon where rival parties attempt to outdo each other with increasingly generous welfare promises, often at the cost of fiscal stability.<sup>9</sup>



## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 282:** Relates to the power of the Union or a State to make grants for any public purpose, often used to fund populist welfare schemes.
- **Article 38 & 39:** Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) that mandate the State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare and minimize inequalities in income and status.
- **FRBM Act, 2003:** The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, which sets targets for the government to reduce fiscal deficits, currently challenged by rising subsidy burdens.

## Additional Key Points

- **Cinema as an Economic Mirror:** Bollywood trends shifted in 2025, with a revival of the romance genre reflecting a move away from hyper-masculine "spectacle" films toward narratives that echo post-liberalization economic realities and the creator economy.
- **Statistical Sovereignty:** The government's move toward monthly data is an attempt to reclaim the narrative on Indian growth, countering external ratings with internal, granular transparency.

## Conclusion

India's developmental trajectory in 2025 is marked by a dual struggle: managing internal socio-economic inequalities and navigating external trade shocks. While the "Nari Shakti" (Women Power) narrative has translated into direct financial support, the lack of structural reforms in the care economy and the fiscal strain of populist measures remain significant hurdles. Sustainable growth will require not just better data, but a shift from short-term transfers to long-term investments in human capital and environmental health.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Social justice and empowerment; Issues relating to poverty and hunger; Governance and the role of the State.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and growth; Environmental pollution and degradation (NCAP).
- **Essay:** Gender equality as a prerequisite for economic development; The ethics of "freebie" politics vs. sustainable welfare.

## 4. India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) 2025: Strategic and Economic Reset

- **Historic Economic Milestone:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Christopher Luxon announced the conclusion of the India-New Zealand FTA on December 22, 2025. This landmark deal, negotiated in a record nine months, aims to double bilateral trade to **\$5 billion** within five years and secure **\$20 billion** in investments for India over the next 15 years.
- **Unprecedented Market Access:** Under the agreement, New Zealand will eliminate tariffs on **100% of Indian exports**, benefiting labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, and pharmaceuticals. In return, India will provide market access on approximately **70% of its tariff lines**, focusing on industrial raw materials like wooden logs and coking coal while protecting sensitive domestic sectors.
- **Services and Skilled Mobility:** The FTA prioritizes India's comparative advantage in services by providing wide access to sectors like IT, education, fintech, and tourism. A significant highlight is the creation of a **Temporary Employment Entry (TEE) Visa**, allowing 5,000 skilled Indian



professionals (including IT engineers, healthcare workers, and traditional AYUSH practitioners) to work in New Zealand for up to three years.

- **Strategic "Dairy Safeguard":** In a major diplomatic win for India, the agreement completely excludes the sensitive **dairy sector**, along with sugar, wheat, rice, and spices, from tariff concessions. This ensures the protection of millions of small-scale Indian dairy farmers while fostering cooperation through New Zealand's advanced agricultural technology in niche areas like kiwifruit and apples.
- **Traditional Medicine Recognition:** For the first time, New Zealand has included a dedicated **annex on health and traditional medicine**, facilitating the global recognition of India's AYUSH systems (Ayurveda, Yoga, etc.) and positioning India as a global hub for medical value travel.
- **Completing the RCEP Arc:** This agreement completes India's bilateral trade coverage of all **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** members except China. It signals India's shift toward high-quality, balanced bilateral pacts as an alternative to large, unstructured trade blocs, reinforcing the "Strategic Autonomy" in trade policy.



### Key Definitions

- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A pact between two or more nations to reduce or eliminate barriers to imports and exports among them, such as tariffs and quotas.
- **Tariff Line:** A specific product defined in a country's customs schedule that is subject to a particular duty rate.
- **Comparative Advantage:** An economy's ability to produce a particular good or service at a lower opportunity cost than its trading partners (e.g., India in IT services).
- **Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** Trade restrictions like quotas, embargoes, or technical standards that discourage imports without using taxes.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Empowers the 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.
- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to all matters on which Parliament has the power to make laws, providing the government the authority to negotiate and conclude international treaties.
- **Article 51 (DPSP):** Directs the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:** The primary legal framework for the regulation of imports and exports in India, providing the statutory basis for implementing FTA provisions.



### Additional Key Points

- **Investment "Clawback" Mechanism:** Following the EFTA model, the \$20 billion investment commitment is binding; if targets are not met, India retains the right to suspend specific trade concessions, ensuring a balanced "complementarity without compromise."
- **Diaspora as a Bridge:** The Indian diaspora makes up nearly 5% of New Zealand's population, acting as a critical cultural and economic link that supports the demand for Indian services and traditional products.
- **Agricultural Productivity Partnership:** Beyond mere trade, New Zealand will establish **Centres of Excellence** in India to share cold-chain and orchard management technologies for high-value crops.

### Conclusion

The India-New Zealand FTA marks a "coming of age" for India's trade diplomacy. By securing zero-duty access for exports while successfully shielding the sensitive dairy industry, India has demonstrated that it can engage with developed economies on high-standard norms without sacrificing domestic interests. As global supply chains realign, this partnership serves as a blueprint for "balanced openness"—integrating India into global value chains (GVCs) while ensuring long-term investment and skilled labor mobility.

### 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 planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and employment; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **International Relations:** Strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region and the evolution of India's "Act East" and "Oceania" outreach.

## 5. PM-YUVA 3.0: Empowering the Next Generation of Indian Authors

- **Nurturing Young Literary Talent:** On December 30, 2025, the Ministry of Education announced the results of **PM-YUVA 3.0** (Young, Upcoming and Versatile Authors), selecting **43 young authors** under the age of 30. This initiative, implemented by the National Book Trust (NBT), aims to create a pool of "ambassadors of Indian literature" capable of projecting India's diverse perspectives on the global stage.
- **Linguistic Diversity and Inclusion:** The selection spans **22 official Indian languages** and English, reflecting a commitment to the "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" vision. Of the chosen authors, 19 are women and 24 are men, showcasing a balanced representation of voices from across the country's linguistic and cultural landscape.
- **Thematic Focus on Nation Building:** The 3.0 edition centered on three pivotal themes: the **Contribution of Indian Diaspora** in nation-building, the **Indian Knowledge System (IKS)**, and the **Makers of Modern India (1950–2025)**. These non-fiction works aim to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary governance.





- **Structured Mentorship and Financial Support:** Selected authors enter a **six-month mentorship** under eminent scholars to refine their manuscripts into published books. Each author receives a monthly scholarship of **₹50,000** during this period, followed by a **10% lifetime royalty** on the sales of their published work.
- **Alignment with NEP 2020:** The scheme is a direct outcome of the **National Education Policy 2020**, which emphasizes creating a learning ecosystem that empowers young minds for leadership roles. By fostering a culture of research and reading, it aims to establish authorship as a mainstream and prestigious profession for the youth.
- **Global Outreach and Publication:** The manuscripts will be published by NBT and potentially translated into multiple languages. Authors will also gain exposure at international platforms, starting with a **National Camp** at the New Delhi World Book Fair in January 2026.

### Key Definitions

- **Indian Knowledge System (IKS):** An innovative cell under the Ministry of Education that promotes interdisciplinary research on all aspects of "Indian Knowledge"—from ancient sciences and linguistics to traditional arts.
- **Non-Fiction Genre:** Writing that is based on facts, real events, and real people, such as biography, history, or philosophy—the exclusive focus of the PM-YUVA scheme.
- **Mentorship:** A professional relationship where an experienced individual (mentor) guides a less experienced person (mentee) to develop specific skills and knowledge.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Eighth Schedule:** Lists the 22 official languages of India; PM-YUVA 3.0 ensures representation across these languages to preserve linguistic heritage.
- **Article 51A (f):** Part of Fundamental Duties, it mandates citizens to "value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture"—a goal directly served by the IKS theme.
- **Article 29(1):** Provides any section of citizens the right to conserve their distinct language, script, or culture, which the scheme supports by encouraging regional language writing.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** The policy framework that envisions making India a "global knowledge superpower" through initiatives like mentorship for creative thinkers.

### Additional Key Points

- **The Diaspora Link:** By documenting the diaspora's role, the scheme highlights India's **Soft Power** and its global "Vishwa Bandhu" (Global Friend) identity.
- **Viksit Bharat Roadmap:** The theme "Makers of Modern India (1950–2025)" helps document the administrative and social reforms that have shaped the path toward a developed India by 2047.
- **Economic Support:** The stipend ensures that financial constraints do not hinder young researchers and writers, treating intellectual labor at par with other professional training.

### Conclusion

PM-YUVA 3.0 is more than a writing competition; it is a social investment in the country's intellectual capital. By encouraging youth to engage with the Indian Knowledge System and the history of modern governance, the government is ensuring that the narrative of India's progress is told with authenticity and



scholarly depth. The success of this scheme will be measured by its ability to translate these young voices into global bestsellers that offer a uniquely Indian worldview.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Indian Culture - salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.
- **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.
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Values - Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values (through the study of "Makers of Modern India").

## 6. Suspension of Sentence and the Public Servant Ambiguity: The Sengar Case

- **Supreme Court Intervention:** On December 29, 2025, a three-judge bench led by CJI Surya Kant stayed the Delhi High Court's decision to suspend the life sentence of Kuldeep Singh Sengar. The apex court noted that the case involves "substantial questions of law" regarding the definition of a public servant and the parameters for granting bail to convicts serving life imprisonment in heinous crimes.
- **Judicial Discretion vs. Heinous Crimes:** The stay reaffirms that while "suspension of sentence" is a discretionary power under Section 389 CrPC (now Section 430 BNSS), it is an exception rather than the rule for serious offenses. In cases of life imprisonment, the convict must demonstrate a "palpable error" in the trial court's judgment that makes acquittal a strong possibility.
- **The "Public Servant" Definition Gap:** The Delhi HC had granted bail primarily on the technical ground that an MLA does not fall under the definition of a "public servant" as per Section 21 of the IPC. Consequently, the HC held that "aggravated penetrative sexual assault" by a public servant under Section 5(c) of the POCSO Act was prima facie inapplicable.
- **Purposive vs. Literal Interpretation:** Legal experts argue for a "purposive interpretation" of the POCSO Act—a special, victim-centric statute. While the IPC definition is narrow, the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) includes MLAs as public servants; the ongoing legal debate focuses on whether special child-protection laws should adopt the broader PCA definition to prevent legislative loopholes.
- **Victim Safety and Systemic Intimidation:** The case highlights the structural barriers faced by survivors. Despite a documented history of witness tampering and the custodial death of the survivor's father, the HC's bail order had minimized these apprehensions, suggesting that institutional protection (CRPF) was sufficient, a premise now under Supreme Court scrutiny.
- **Impact of Prolonged Incarceration:** The HC had cited Sengar's seven-year incarceration as a factor for relief. However, the Supreme Court in *Shivani Tyagi vs. State of UP (2024)* clarified that long incarceration alone cannot justify the suspension of a sentence in heinous crimes like rape or acid attacks.

### 'PUBLIC SERVANT'

➤ Delhi HC had, in its order, said Sengar was convicted under Sec 5 (C) (aggravated penetrative sexual assault by a public servant) of PocsO Act but an elected representative does not fit definition of 'public servant'

➤ A legislator is not included in the list of public servants, Sengar's lawyers argue

➤ SC bench says if convict's proposition is accepted, then a patwari will be considered a public servant but not MPs and MLAs



## Key Definitions

- **Suspension of Sentence:** A judicial order that halts the execution of a punishment pending an appeal, though the finding of "guilt" remains on record.
- **Aggravated Sexual Assault:** A more severe form of sexual offense under POCSO (Section 5) committed by individuals in positions of trust or authority, attracting harsher penalties.
- **Purposive Interpretation:** A method of statutory construction where courts look at the intent and object of the law rather than just the literal text to avoid anomalous results.

## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law; the debate centers on whether treating an MLA differently from a low-ranking public servant for the same crime violates this principle.
- **Section 21, IPC:** Defines "public servant" narrowly; this definition is currently imported into the POCSO Act via Section 2(2).
- **Section 389 CrPC / Section 430 BNSS:** Governs the appellate court's power to suspend sentences. The new BNSS (2023) maintains the core requirement of recording written reasons for such discretion.
- **POCSO Act, 2012:** A special law meant to protect children; its Section 5(c) specifically targets the abuse of authority by public servants.

## Additional Key Points

- **Legal Anomaly:** Currently, a village accountant (Patwari) or a constable is a public servant under POCSO, but an elected legislator is not, creating a "legal vacuum" where the most powerful figures may avoid aggravated charges.
- **Supreme Court Precedents:** In *Independent Thought (2017)* and *Satish vs. AG (2021)*, the SC rejected narrow interpretations of child-protection laws, signaling that the "protective core" of POCSO must be upheld.

**Conclusion** The Sengar case exposes a critical intersection between statutory literalism and social justice. While the Delhi High Court adhered to a strict textual reading of the IPC, the Supreme Court's stay suggests that "institutional power" cannot be ignored in crimes involving the abuse of authority. This legal battle will likely lead to a definitive ruling on whether the term "public servant" should be expanded across all special penal statutes to include elected representatives, thereby closing a loophole that undermines victim protection.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Separation of powers; Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Important statutory and quasi-judicial bodies (POCSO, CBI).
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface; Accountability and ethical governance; Power dynamics and the vulnerability of victims in the criminal justice system.
- **Essay:** The conflict between the "Letter of the Law" and the "Spirit of Justice."



## 7. Indo-Canada Collaboration: Green Marine Mobility and the Smart Sea Project

- **Bilateral Strategic R&D Partnership:** The Technology Development Board (TDB), under the Department of Science & Technology (DST), has partnered with Goa-based Vijai Marine Services and Canada's NRC to develop the "Smart Sea Project." This initiative marks a significant step in the Indo-Canada Collaborative Industrial R&D Programme, focusing on market-ready green technologies.
- **Focus on Electric Propulsion:** The core of the project is the development and demonstration of a 20-passenger electric boat. This vessel aims to replace conventional diesel engines in inland and coastal waterways, directly supporting India's goal of reducing fossil fuel dependency and achieving net-zero emissions in the transport sector.
- **Technological Innovation in Marine Engineering:** The project utilizes advanced Carbon-Fibre Reinforced Plastics (CFRP) and vacuum-infusion construction techniques. This results in high-strength, low-weight hulls that meet Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) standards, significantly improving the energy efficiency and endurance of electric vessels.
- **Sustainable Tourism and Eco-mobility:** By producing low-noise, non-polluting vessels, the project targets "Green Waterways." These boats are specifically designed for sensitive ecological zones, water taxi services, and eco-tourism circuits, ensuring that human mobility does not compromise aquatic biodiversity.
- **Integration of Global Expertise:** While the vessel is designed and built in India, it integrates advanced electric outboard motors and digital console interfaces developed by Canadian partner ACEL Power Inc. This collaboration strengthens domestic capability in advanced mobility while facilitating global technology transfer.
- **Scaling Green Waterways:** The project demonstrates that electric propulsion can match the reliability of diesel systems. It serves as a pilot for larger-scale deployment in feeder services and river-based passenger movement across India's expansive National Waterways network.

### Key Definitions

- **Green Marine Mobility:** The use of sustainable energy sources (like electricity or hydrogen) and eco-friendly materials to move goods and people across water bodies to minimize environmental impact.
- **Carbon-Fibre Reinforced Plastic (CFRP):** An extremely strong and light fiber-reinforced plastic which contains carbon fibers, used in high-performance applications where high strength-to-weight ratio is required.
- **Technology Development Board (TDB):** A statutory body under the DST that provides financial assistance to Indian industrial concerns and other agencies for the development and commercialization of indigenous technology.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Directs the State to endeavor to protect and improve the environment, which is the foundational spirit behind promoting green transportation.
- **Article 51A (g):** Fundamental Duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.



- **Inland Vessels Act, 2021:** The primary legal framework regulating the safety, registration, and operation of inland vessels in India, which now accommodates newer technologies like electric propulsion.
- **Maritime India Vision 2030:** A blueprint by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways aimed at propelling India to the forefront of the global maritime sector, including the promotion of green fuels.

### Additional Key Points

- **Energy Security:** Shifting marine transport to electricity reduces the import bill for petroleum products, contributing to India's energy "Atmanirbharta" (self-reliance).
- **Operational Efficiency:** Electric motors have fewer moving parts than internal combustion engines, leading to lower maintenance costs and higher operational uptime for ferry operators.
- **International Standards:** The project adheres to IRS (Indian Register of Shipping) standards, ensuring that "Made in India" green vessels are globally competitive and safe for public transport.

### Conclusion

The "Smart Sea Project" represents a paradigm shift in India's approach to inland water transport. By combining domestic manufacturing prowess with international R&D, India is not just adopting green technology but creating a scalable industrial platform for the future. As the nation expands its National Waterways, the transition to electric mobility will be crucial in balancing infrastructure development with environmental conservation, ultimately fulfilling the vision of a "Viksit" and sustainable India.

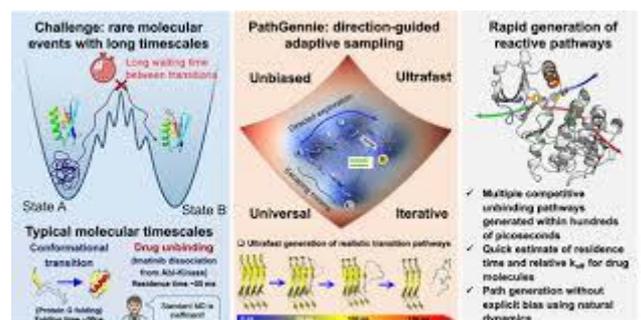
### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; Government policies and interventions for development.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Infrastructure (Waterways).
- **Current Affairs:** Indo-Pacific cooperation, Green Hydrogen Mission, and FAME-II extensions to marine sectors.

## 8. PathGennie: Revolutionizing Computer-Aided Drug Discovery (CADD)

- **Breakthrough in Simulation:** Scientists at the S.N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences, Kolkata (an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology), have developed **PathGennie**, an open-source computational framework that fast-tracks the simulation of "rare molecular events."

- **Addressing Computational Bottlenecks:** Traditional Molecular Dynamics (MD) simulations struggle to capture "rare events"—such as a drug molecule unbinding from a protein—which occur over milliseconds. PathGennie uses a "Direction-Guided Adaptive Sampling" approach to bypass these long waiting times without the need for high-performance supercomputers.





- **Focus on "Residence Time":** In modern pharmacology, a drug's **residence time** (how long it stays attached to its target) is often a better predictor of clinical efficacy than its binding affinity. PathGennie accurately predicts these unbinding pathways and timelines, which is crucial for determining drug dosage and duration of effect.
- **Elimination of Artificial Bias:** Unlike conventional methods that use "bias forces" or high temperatures to force molecular movement (often distorting the results), PathGennie launches swarms of ultrashort, unbiased trajectories. It then selectively extends only those that show progress toward the target—mimicking a "natural selection" process for data.
- **Broad Scientific Utility:** Beyond drug discovery, PathGennie is a versatile tool applicable to chemical reactions, catalytic processes, and phase transitions. It is fully compatible with modern Machine Learning (ML) techniques, allowing for a hybrid AI-physics approach to molecular research.
- **Open Source Accessibility:** By making the software freely available, India has provided a global public good that lowers the entry barrier for researchers worldwide to conduct advanced computer-aided drug design.

### Key Definitions

- **Computer-Aided Drug Discovery (CADD):** The use of computer simulations and modeling to identify, refine, and optimize new drug candidates before they reach laboratory testing.
- **Binding Affinity vs. Residence Time:** While affinity measures how *strongly* a drug binds, residence time measures how *long* it stays bound. Slow dissociation (long residence time) often leads to more durable therapeutic effects.
- **Rare Events:** In molecular science, these are critical transitions (like protein folding) that happen infrequently and are thus difficult to "catch" in real-time simulations.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A (h):** Part of Fundamental Duties, it mandates citizens "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform," which is exemplified by indigenous scientific breakthroughs like PathGennie.
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy 2016:** While PathGennie is open-source, it aligns with India's policy of encouraging indigenous innovation and establishing "Creative India; Innovative India."
- **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940:** Provides the overarching legal framework for drug regulation in India; CADD tools like PathGennie assist in meeting the rigorous safety and efficacy standards required for clinical trials under this Act.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Validation via Imatinib:** PathGennie's accuracy was proven by successfully identifying all known dissociation pathways for the anti-cancer drug **Imatinib (Gleevec)** without any external steering forces.
- **Cost and Time Efficiency:** By reducing the time required for simulations from months to hours, PathGennie significantly lowers the R&D costs of new medications, potentially making life-saving drugs more affordable.



- **Integration with AI:** The framework's ability to use machine-learned "collective variables" means it can evolve alongside AI advancements, keeping Indian research at the cutting edge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0).

## Conclusion

PathGennie represents a major milestone in India's quest for technological self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat) in the pharmaceutical sector. By solving a fundamental problem in computational biophysics—the simulation of rare unbinding events—it provides a faster, more accurate, and unbiased path to discovering new therapies. This tool not only strengthens India's position as the "Pharmacy of the World" but also highlights the critical role of fundamental research institutes in driving global technological shifts.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
- **Current Affairs:** Role of AI and computational biology in modern healthcare; India's contribution to open-source global research.

## 9. India Surpasses Japan: The Ascendance to World's Fourth-Largest Economy

- **Historic Milestone in Global Ranking:** In a landmark year-end economic update for 2025, the Government of India announced that the nation has officially overtaken Japan to become the **world's fourth-largest economy**. With a nominal GDP reaching **\$4.18 trillion**, India now trails only the United States, China, and Germany in the global economic hierarchy.
- **Resilient Growth Trajectory:** Despite a volatile global trade environment, India's real GDP grew by a remarkable **8.2%** in the second quarter (Q2) of FY 2025-26. This performance—a six-quarter high—was catalyzed by a surge in the industrial and services sectors, with Gross Value Added (GVA) expanding by 8.1%.
- **The "Goldilocks" Economic Period:** The government report describes the current macroeconomic environment as a "Goldilocks period"—a rare phase characterized by high growth and benign inflation. Retail inflation fell sharply to **0.71%** in November 2025 (down from 4.26% in January), providing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) headroom to maintain supportive monetary conditions.
- **Positive Labor Market Shifts:** Aligning with the growth story, November 2025 saw the unemployment rate drop to **4.7%**, the lowest since April 2025. This improvement was particularly noted among women in both urban and rural sectors, signaling a more inclusive labor force participation.
- **Strategic Growth Drivers:** The economic buoyancy is attributed to robust domestic demand, front-loading of government capital expenditure, and structural reforms such as the rationalization of Income Tax and the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Softer global crude oil prices have further cushioned the fiscal balance.





- **Future Projections (Vision 2030):** Building on this momentum, India is projected to overtake Germany to become the world's **third-largest economy** within the next 2.5 to 3 years. Official estimates suggest India's GDP could touch **\$7.3 trillion by 2030**, setting the stage for the country to attain high-middle-income status by 2047.

### Key Definitions

- **Goldilocks Period:** An economic state where the economy is not too hot (causing high inflation) and not too cold (leading to recession), but growing at an optimal rate with stable prices.
- **Gross Value Added (GVA):** A measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry, or sector of an economy ( $GVA = GDP + \text{Subsidies on products} - \text{Taxes on products}$ ).
- **Real GDP:** An inflation-adjusted measure that reflects the value of all goods and services produced by an economy in a given year, expressed in base-year prices.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 112 (Annual Financial Statement):** The constitutional mandate for the government to present its estimated receipts and expenditure, which reflects the fiscal strategies driving the current \$4.18 trillion status.
- **Article 246A (GST):** The constitutional provision that enabled the GST regime; the report highlights GST rationalization as a primary catalyst for domestic demand and business ease.
- **FRBM Act, 2003:** The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, which guides the government's path toward fiscal consolidation even as it front-loads capital expenditure.

### Additional Key Points

- **External Sector Resilience:** India's foreign exchange reserves reached **\$686.2 billion** by the end of 2025, sufficient to cover nearly 11 months of imports.
- **Export Diversification:** Despite global headwinds and trade tariffs, merchandise exports surged to **\$38.13 billion** in November 2025, led by engineering goods, electronics, and marine products.
- **Global Endorsements:** International agencies like the IMF, World Bank, and ADB have revised India's growth forecasts upward, confirming its status as the world's fastest-growing major economy.

### Conclusion

India's emergence as the world's fourth-largest economy is not merely a quantitative milestone but a qualitative shift in its global economic standing. The transition from the "Fragile Five" a decade ago to a "Goldilocks" economy today underscores the impact of sustained structural reforms and macroeconomic prudence. While global trade uncertainties and tariff pressures persist, the shift toward a domestic demand-led model, supported by digital infrastructure and fiscal discipline, provides a solid foundation for India's ascent to the top three by 2030.

### UPSC Relevance

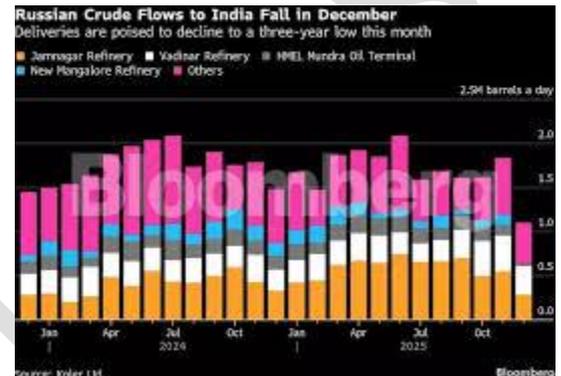
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Government Budgeting.
- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (Impact of global trade and tariffs).



- **Essay Perspective:** "Viksit Bharat 2047: The Economic and Social Transformation of India."

## 10. Strategic Realignment: India's Russian Crude Imports Dip in December

- **Significant Volume Contraction:** India's imports of Russian crude oil are projected to drop to approximately **1.2 million barrels per day (bpd)** in December 2025. This is a sharp decline from the 1.84 million bpd recorded in November, marking the lowest import levels since late 2022.
- **Driven by Targeted Sanctions:** The primary catalyst for this pullback is intensified enforcement by the United States and the European Union. Recent sanctions specifically targeted Russia's top oil exporters, **Rosneft and Lukoil**, along with their majority-owned subsidiaries, making procurement technically and legally complex for major Indian refiners.
- **Temporary vs. Structural Shift:** Analysts from Kpler and other global energy trackers emphasize that this is a "near-term adjustment" rather than a permanent move away from Russian energy. While direct purchases from sanctioned entities have softened, the underlying demand for discounted Russian crude remains structurally embedded in India's energy mix.
- **Diversification of Suppliers:** To bridge the shortfall, Indian refiners—particularly private giants like Reliance Industries and state-owned units—have pivoted toward alternative suppliers in the **Middle East, West Africa, and the United States**. Notably, U.S. crude shipments to India surged by over 80% during 2025.
- **Emergence of New Intermediaries:** Despite the diplomatic and legal pressure, Russian oil continues to reach Indian shores through a growing web of **non-designated intermediaries and opaque trading channels**. As long as secondary sanctions are not strictly enforced, these "workarounds" allow refiners to access discounted supply while maintaining legal compliance.
- **Impact on Refined Exports:** The dip also reflects pressure on India's petroleum product exports to the EU. New EU compliance guidelines (effective January 2026) have made Western buyers cautious about purchasing Indian fuels that can be traced back to Russian-origin crude, prompting refiners to seek "cleaner" barrels for export operations.



### Key Definitions

- **Barrels per Day (bpd):** A standard unit for measuring the rate of oil production or consumption. One barrel equals approximately 159 liters.
- **Secondary Sanctions:** Sanctions imposed by a country (e.g., the U.S.) on third-party entities (e.g., Indian companies) for doing business with a primary sanctioned target (e.g., Russia).
- **Discounted Crude (Urals):** The flagship Russian oil grade that has traded at a significant discount compared to global benchmarks like Brent since 2022, providing India with billions in energy savings.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to international treaties and agreements; India's energy diplomacy and crude procurement are guided by this executive mandate.



- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Empowers the government to regulate the production, supply, and distribution of essential commodities like petroleum to ensure domestic energy security.
- **Petroleum and Natural Gas Rules, 2025:** Recently notified to modernize the regulatory framework, simplify licensing, and attract investment into the upstream and downstream sectors.

### Additional Key Points

- **Strategic Autonomy:** India continues to maintain that its oil purchases are driven by the national interest of providing affordable energy to its 1.4 billion citizens, navigating a "tightrope" between Western relations and energy security.
- **Energy Security Economics:** Transitioning away from Russian oil is seen as costly and risky. Substitution would require rapid scaling from other suppliers at higher freight costs and weaker discounts, potentially triggering domestic inflation.
- **Mission 500:** India's pivot toward U.S. oil is partly aligned with its goal to increase bilateral trade with the U.S. to \$500 billion by 2030, balancing its geopolitical interests.

### Conclusion

The December dip in Russian oil imports illustrates the evolving nature of global energy geopolitics. While sanctions on major Russian exporters have caused a temporary logistical bottleneck, India's reliance on Russian barrels is far from over. The emergence of a "shadow market" and the shift toward non-sanctioned intermediaries suggest that as long as the economic discount exists, Russian crude will remain a vital, albeit more complex, component of India's energy basket.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood- relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Bilateral groupings and agreements involving India.
- **GS Paper III:** Energy security and infrastructure; Indian Economy and issues relating to planning and resource mobilization.
- **Current Affairs:** Strategic autonomy in foreign policy; Impact of G7 price caps and Western sanctions on global trade flows.

## 11. Dhruv NG: A Leap in India's Indigenous Civil Aviation Capability

- **Maiden Flight Milestone:** On December 30, 2025, the **Dhruv New Generation (NG)**, an indigenous multi-role civil helicopter, successfully completed its inaugural flight in Bengaluru. Flagged off by Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu, the flight marks the formal entry of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) into the global civil helicopter market.
- **Technological Specifications:** The Dhruv NG is a **5.5-tonne, light twin-engine** platform designed for diverse terrains. It features a world-class, civil-certified glass cockpit (compliant with AS4 standards) and advanced avionics that provide superior situational awareness, positioning it as a high-performance alternative to imported helicopters.





- **Indigenous Powerplant:** Central to this achievement is the **Shakti 1H1C engine**, which received its type certification from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for indigenous manufacturing. This marks the first time a domestic aero engine has been cleared for civil production, significantly reducing long-term lifecycle costs.
- **Multi-Role Versatility:** The helicopter's highly configurable 7.33 cubic-meter cabin is tailored for several civilian roles, including **VIP transport** (4–6 passengers), **commuter services** (up to 14 passengers), and **Emergency Medical Services (HEMS)** equipped with four stretchers and medical staff.
- **Enhancing Regional Connectivity:** The Dhruv NG is expected to be a game-changer for the **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik)** scheme. With an estimated demand for 1,000–1,500 helicopters in India over the next decade, this indigenous platform aims to provide inclusive and democratic access to air travel across remote districts and islands.
- **Strategic Shift at HAL:** This project signifies HAL's evolution from a defense-centric organization to a balanced aerospace entity. By developing civil variants of proven platforms, HAL is building a robust ecosystem for "Aatmanirbharta" (self-reliance) that caters to both national security and commercial aviation needs.

### Key Definitions

- **Type Certification:** A formal approval issued by a regulatory body (like the DGCA) signifying that an aircraft or engine design meets all applicable airworthiness and safety requirements.
- **Glass Cockpit:** A cockpit where flight data is displayed on electronic (LCD) screens rather than traditional analog gauges, improving safety and reducing pilot workload.
- **Rotary-Wing Capability:** Refers to the technology and manufacturing expertise related to aircraft that use rotating blades to provide lift, such as helicopters.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 297:** Sovereignty over resources and territorial waters; indigenous maritime and offshore helicopter operations (facilitated by Dhruv NG) strengthen control over India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- **Aircraft Act, 1934 & Aircraft Rules, 1937:** The primary legal framework governing the manufacture, possession, and operation of aircraft in India, under which the DGCA exercises its certification powers.
- **National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) 2016:** The policy framework that promotes regional connectivity and domestic manufacturing of aircraft components to make India a global aviation hub.

### Additional Key Points

- **Operational Performance:** The Dhruv NG boasts a top speed of **285 km/h**, a range of **630 km**, and a service ceiling of **6,000 meters**, making it ideal for high-altitude missions in the Himalayas.
- **Safety Features:** It incorporates crashworthy seats, self-sealing fuel tanks, and a proven twin-engine configuration that provides redundancy during critical phases of flight.
- **Maintenance Advantage:** Indigenous production ensures "Power-By-Hour" and integrated logistics support within India, avoiding the long lead times associated with foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).



## Conclusion

The Dhruv NG is more than just a new aircraft; it is a symbol of India's maturing aerospace ecosystem. By bridging the gap between military technology and civilian utility, HAL has demonstrated that "Make in India" can produce globally competitive, high-tech products. As the nation aims for a \$7 trillion economy by 2030, such technological breakthroughs in high-value manufacturing will be essential to sustain industrial growth and strategic autonomy.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **Current Affairs:** Achievements of HAL and India's progress under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan.

## 12. SOAR Initiative: Skilling for AI Readiness and the Skill India Mission

- **Presidential Recognition of AI Skilling:** On January 1, 2026, the President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, will grace the **SOAR (Skilling for AI Readiness)** programme.<sup>1</sup> Organized by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), this event highlights the high-level political priority given to making the Indian workforce future-ready for an AI-enabled global economy.<sup>2</sup>
- **Inclusive Certification:** In a significant symbolic and practical gesture, the President will confer **Artificial Intelligence (AI) certificates** upon a diverse group of learners, including students and Members of Parliament (MPs).<sup>3</sup> This initiative underscores that AI literacy is essential across all levels of society, from young learners to national policymakers.
- **Launch of #SkillTheNation Challenge:** The event marks the debut of the **#SkillTheNation Challenge**, a national awareness campaign designed to mobilize India's youth.<sup>4</sup> The challenge aims to bridge the digital divide by encouraging mass participation in future-ready skilling modules, transitioning from traditional vocational training to "new-age" digital competencies.
- **Strategic Collaboration with Tech Leaders:** Reflecting a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, the MSDE is collaborating with **Google** to conduct an "AI for Beginners" module.<sup>6</sup> This session, led by global experts at Rashtrapati Bhavan, serves as a template for rapid, industry-aligned skill dissemination at scale.
- **Expanding Educational Reach:** The President will virtually inaugurate an **IGNOU Regional Centre at Rairangpur, Odisha**.<sup>8</sup> This centre is strategically positioned to serve as a hub for northern Odisha, focusing on integrating skill-oriented programmes with formal distance education to enhance the employability of the local tribal and rural youth.
- **Integration with IndiaAI Mission:** SOAR is a key pillar of the broader **IndiaAI Mission**, specifically supporting the "FutureSkills" objective.<sup>10</sup> By embedding AI competencies into the Skill India Digital Hub, the government ensures that the workforce can transition from "chalkboards to chipsets," aligning with the vision of **Viksit Bharat @2047**.

## Key Definitions



- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Readiness:** The state of preparedness of a country's infrastructure, workforce, and regulatory framework to effectively adopt and benefit from AI technologies.
- **Skill India Mission:** Launched in 2015, it is a government initiative to train over 40 crore people in India in different skills by 2022 (and continuously expanded thereafter to include digital and AI skills).
- **FutureSkills:** A specific category of skills related to emerging technologies like AI, Blockchain, Cybersecurity, and IoT that are expected to dominate the future job market.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 41 (DPSP):** Directs the State to ensure the right to work and to education within its economic capacity; skilling initiatives like SOAR are a modern fulfillment of this directive.
- **Article 21A:** The Right to Education is enhanced by providing "quality and relevant" education, which in the 21st century necessitates digital and AI literacy.
- **Article 51A (h):** Fundamental Duty to develop the "scientific temper" and the spirit of inquiry, which directly aligns with the goal of making citizens AI-ready.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** The policy framework that advocates for the integration of vocational education with mainstream education and emphasizes coding and AI from the middle-school level.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Targeted Modules:** SOAR incorporates specific 15-hour modules for students (Classes 6-12) and a 45-hour specialized module for educators to ensure the "trainer" is as ready as the "learner."<sup>14</sup>
- **Ethical AI Focus:** A core component of the certification includes training on the **ethical use of AI**, addressing concerns like algorithmic bias, data privacy, and responsible technology application.<sup>15</sup>
- **Economic Self-reliance:** By equipping the youth with high-demand tech skills, SOAR supports the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** vision, reducing dependence on foreign technical expertise for domestic AI development.

### Conclusion

The SOAR programme represents a critical shift in India's developmental strategy, moving beyond traditional labor-intensive skills to high-value intellectual capital.<sup>17</sup> By involving the President and Members of Parliament, the government is signaling that AI readiness is not just a technical requirement but a national mission.<sup>18</sup> As AI begins to reshape the global labor market, India's proactive approach in "skilling the nation" ensures that its demographic dividend becomes a technological asset rather than a liability.

### 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; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **Essay Topic:** "Artificial Intelligence: A Tool for Social Inclusion or a New Digital Divide?"