



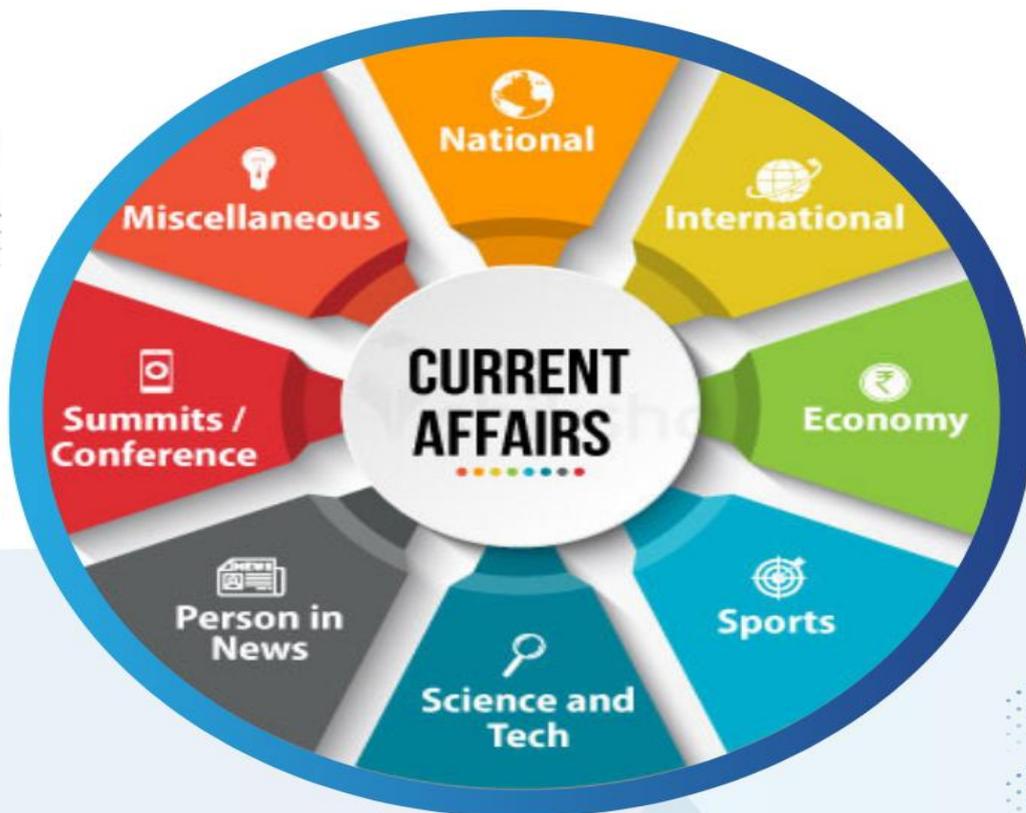
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & **STUDY CENTRE**

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 15/01/2026 (THURSDAY)



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1. Kuki-Zo Demand for Union Territory: Ethnic Crisis in Manipur

The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) has formally reiterated its demand for a separate Union Territory (UT) with a legislature for the Kuki-Zo tribes under the Indian Constitution. This demand stems from the prolonged ethnic conflict in Manipur, where the council alleges a total breakdown of trust with the state administration, citing its inability or unwillingness to protect tribal interests during the violence that began in May 2023.

- **Separation of Administration:** The KZC argues that peaceful co-existence with the Meitei community is no longer viable, asserting that state machinery was "complicit" in atrocities, necessitating a distinct political identity and administrative setup directly under the Union government.
- **Casualties and Displacement:** According to the KZC memorandum, the conflict has resulted in over 250 Kuki-Zo deaths, the destruction of 7,000 houses, the desecration of 360 places of worship, and the displacement of approximately 40,000 people from the Imphal Valley.
- **The Buffer Zone Conflict:** A critical point of contention is the "buffer zones"—the narrow strips of land separating the Meitei-dominated valley from the Kuki-dominated hills. The KZC has warned against the resettlement of Meitei Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in these areas to prevent further escalation.
- **Allegations of State Failure:** The council highlights a "constitutional breakdown," claiming the state has failed to perform its basic duty of protecting life and property, thereby justifying the demand for a Union Territory under the "Separate Administration" slogan.
- **Geopolitical Sensitivity:** Manipur shares a porous border with Myanmar; the KZC emphasizes that resolving internal ethnic strife is essential for national security and the stability of India's "Act East" policy.

Key Definitions

- **Buffer Zone:** In the context of the Manipur conflict, these are sensitive areas between the valley and the hills patrolled by Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to prevent armed groups from either side from crossing over.
- **Separate Administration:** A political demand by Kuki-Zo groups for a governance structure independent of the Manipur State government, ranging from an Autonomous District Council with enhanced powers to a full Union Territory.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 3 of the Constitution:** Grants Parliament the power to form a new State or Union Territory, or increase/diminish the area of any State. This is the primary legal route for the KZC's demand.
- **Article 239A:** Provides for the creation of local Legislatures or Council of Ministers for certain Union Territories (like Puducherry), which the KZC is specifically seeking to ensure democratic representation.
- **Sixth Schedule:** Though currently not fully applicable to the hill areas of Manipur in the same way as in Meghalaya or Mizoram, it provides for Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) to protect tribal culture and land.
- **Article 371C:** A special provision for Manipur that mandates a "Hill Areas Committee" consisting of members elected from the hill areas to monitor the administration of those regions.



Additional Keypoints

- **Asymmetric Federalism:** The demand highlights the challenges of Indian federalism in managing diverse ethnic aspirations within a single state boundary.
- **Internal Security:** The presence of various insurgent groups and the influx of refugees from Myanmar (due to the military coup there) adds a layer of complexity to the ethnic demographic debate in Manipur.
- **The Role of Central Forces:** Over 60,000 central personnel remain deployed in the state to maintain a fragile peace along the ethnic fault lines.

Conclusion

The reiteration of the Union Territory demand by the Kuki-Zo Council signifies a hardening of ethnic identities and a deepening of the administrative chasm in Manipur. While the Union government seeks a mediated peace, the KZC insists that only a formal political separation can ensure the long-term security and developmental interests of the tribal population. This situation presents a significant challenge to India's internal security framework and its ability to balance competing sub-nationalist identities.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States; issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Parliament and State Legislatures (Article 3).
- **GS Paper III:** Internal Security; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security; Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
- **Prelims:** Articles 3, 239, 371C, and the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

2. Expansion of Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs) in Delhi: Strengthening Primary Healthcare

The Delhi government has significantly scaled up its primary healthcare network by inaugurating 81 new Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs), bringing the total functional count to 319. This initiative is part of a larger roadmap to establish 1,100 such centers to provide free, high-quality medical services at the doorstep of citizens. By shifting the focus toward decentralized care, these centers aim to decongest tertiary hospitals and ensure early intervention for common ailments.

- **Integrated Healthcare Model:** AAMs function as the first point of contact in the healthcare hierarchy, offering a broader range of services than traditional clinics, including screening for non-communicable diseases and specialized maternal care.
- **Decongestion of Tertiary Care:** By addressing routine health issues, OPD appointments, and basic diagnostics at the community level, AAMs reduce the patient load on major multi-specialty hospitals like Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital.
- **Digital Integration:** The initiative leverages technology by allowing residents to access OPD appointments and medical records via mobile phones, fostering transparency and reducing waiting times for patients.
- **Inclusion and Economic Support:** To enhance accessibility for the underprivileged, the income threshold for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category has been doubled from ₹2.5 lakh to ₹5 lakh per annum.



- **Comprehensive Service Suite:** Beyond basic consultations, these centers provide free essential medicines, pre- and post-natal care, routine immunizations, and preventive health counseling to ensure holistic community wellness.

Key Definitions

- **Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM):** Formally known as Ayushman Bharat-Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs), these are rebranded community-level facilities designed to deliver Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC).
- **Primary Healthcare:** The first level of contact for individuals, families, and communities with the national health system, bringing healthcare as close as possible to where people live and work.
- **Tertiary Healthcare:** Specialized consultative healthcare, usually for inpatients and on referral from primary or secondary health professionals, involving advanced medical investigation and treatment.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the "Right to Life" includes the "Right to Health," making it a fundamental obligation of the State to provide accessible medical facilities.
- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Directs the State to regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- **Schedule 7 (State List):** "Public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries" fall under Entry 6 of the State List, giving state governments the primary mandate to develop health infrastructure.
- **Ayushman Bharat Mission:** A flagship central scheme that aims to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC), consisting of two pillars: Health and Wellness Centres (now AAMs) and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

Additional Keypoints

- **Shift from Sick-care to Wellness:** The transition from "clinics" to "Arogya Mandirs" signifies a paradigm shift from just treating illness to promoting overall wellness and preventive screenings.
- **Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Focus:** Unlike previous localized clinic models, AAMs place a heavy emphasis on pre- and post-natal care, which is crucial for reducing Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR).
- **Infrastructure Upgradation:** The government is simultaneously focusing on vertical integration, such as upgrading secondary hospitals into super-specialty units to create a seamless referral chain.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of Ayushman Arogya Mandirs in the national capital represents a crucial step toward achieving the "Health for All" goal. By integrating digital solutions and expanding the EWS safety net, the government is addressing the twin challenges of affordability and accessibility. However, the long-term success of this model will depend on the consistent supply of essential medicines, the retention of skilled healthcare professionals, and the effective integration of these primary units with secondary and tertiary healthcare tiers.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Governance; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.



- **GS Paper III:** Role of technology in healthcare (Digital Health); Infrastructure development.
- **Prelims:** Ayushman Bharat Mission components, Constitutional Articles (21, 47), and Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

3. India's Minerals Diplomacy: Securing the Green Transition

India's shift toward clean energy is inextricably linked to the secure supply of critical minerals and rare earth elements (REEs). As China tightens export controls, India is executing a multi-layered strategy to diversify trade, promote responsible production, and build domestic capacity. This "minerals diplomacy" spans across bilateral partnerships and multilateral alliances to ensure that the "Act East" and "Net Zero 2070" goals remain on track.

- **Two-Pronged Strategy:** India is balancing domestic exploration (National Critical Minerals Mission) with aggressive overseas asset acquisition through entities like Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL).
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Australia is a primary upstream partner for Lithium and Cobalt, while Japan serves as a model for "resilience" through advanced recycling, stockpiling, and joint processing.
- **Diversified Geography:** India is expanding its footprint in Africa (Namibia, Zambia) for copper and cobalt, and the "new frontier" of Latin America (Argentina, Chile) for the "Lithium Triangle" resources.
- **Focus on the Midstream:** A major strategic shift involves partnering with West Asia (UAE, Saudi Arabia) for mineral refining and processing to break the dependency on Chinese smelting hubs.
- **Technological Collaboration:** Engagements with the US (TRUST Initiative) and the EU center on downstream technology, battery recycling, and aligning with high Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards.
- **National Security & Resilience:** Beyond energy, these minerals are vital for defense and electronics, making supply chain diversification a matter of sovereign economic security.

Key Definitions

- **Critical Minerals:** Mineral commodities essential to the economy and national security that have a high risk of supply disruption (e.g., Lithium, Cobalt, Nickel).
- **Rare Earth Elements (REEs):** A set of 17 metallic elements (including Neodymium and Dysprosium) crucial for high-tech applications like EV motors, wind turbines, and permanent magnets.
- **Friend-shoring:** A trade strategy where a country sources raw materials and manufactured goods from values-aligned "friendly" nations to reduce geopolitical risks.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Seventh Schedule:** Mining regulation is divided between Entry 54 (Union List) for central regulation in the public interest and Entry 23 (State List) for state-level management.
- **MMDR Amendment Act, 2023:** A landmark reform that delisted six critical minerals from the "atomic minerals" category, allowing private sector participation in exploration and mining.



- **Article 297:** Provides that all lands, minerals, and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters or the continental shelf of India vest in the Union.
- **National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM):** A ₹34,300 crore framework (2025–2031) designed to incentivize recycling, identify 1,200 deposits by 2030, and build dedicated processing parks.

Additional Keypoints

- **The "Processing" Chokepoint:** India recognizes that mining ore is insufficient; the real vulnerability lies in refining capacity, where China currently holds a near-monopoly.
- **Circular Economy:** The government aims for 5% recycled content in new non-ferrous products by FY28 to reduce primary extraction pressure.
- **KABIL's Role:** The joint venture between NALCO, HCL, and MECL is the lead agency for acquiring strategic mineral assets in resource-rich nations like Argentina and Australia.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

India's minerals diplomacy is a sophisticated exercise in balancing strategic autonomy with global interdependence. By weaving a web of partnerships from the "Lithium Triangle" to the Australian outback, New Delhi is attempting to insulate its economy from weaponized supply chains. Success will depend on how quickly India can translate bilateral MoUs into operational mines and domestic refineries while adhering to the rising global demand for ESG-compliant mining.

UPSC Relevance: * **GS Paper II:** Bilateral and regional groupings involving India (Quad, MSP); Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests.

- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Energy); Science and Technology; Internal Security (Resource security).
- **Prelims:** Locations of major mineral reserves, MMDR Act provisions, and the list of 30 critical minerals identified by the Ministry of Mines.

4. Building a National Mentoring Movement: Bridging India's Learning-to-Livelihood Gap

India is at a demographic crossroads with over 40 million youth in higher education and 10 million entering the job market annually. While policy interventions in skilling and internships are expanding, a "human gap" persists—characterized by lack of confidence, limited networks, and the challenges of first-generation learners. Mentoring is emerging as a critical structural intervention to bridge this divide, personalizing the transition from education to employment.

- **Humanizing the Transition:** Unlike traditional skilling, mentoring addresses the psychological and social barriers—such as fear and uncertainty—that often hinder youth from underserved backgrounds and first-generation learners.
- **Cultivating Human-Centric Skills:** As AI reshapes entry-level roles, employers increasingly value adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving. Mentoring provides a safe space to nurture these soft skills through personalized guidance.
- **Empowering Young Women:** While women enter higher education at par with men, their labor force participation remains below 40%. Mentoring helps expand their professional networks and challenges restrictive social norms.



- **Correcting Network Inequality:** Data shows a significant "network gap," with men's network strength being 8.3 percentile points higher than women's. Mentoring democratizes access to professional connections, making job seekers four times more likely to secure roles.
- **Scaling through Technology:** Platforms like the National Career Service (NCS) and "Mera Yuva Bharat" (MY Bharat) are now integrating digital mentoring hubs to connect industry professionals with students across tier 2 and tier 3 cities.
- **Institutionalizing Guidance:** The shift from mentoring as an "optional extra" to a structural component of the education system is being led by states like Karnataka and Telangana, aiming for a national architecture of quality and inclusion.

Key Definitions

- **Human-Centric Skills:** Also known as "soft skills," these include interpersonal abilities like empathy, communication, and adaptability that are less susceptible to automation by AI.
- **Network Strength:** The measure of a person's professional connections and their ability to leverage these links for information, referrals, and career advancement.
- **First-Generation Learner:** Students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education, often lacking inherited professional networks or career guidance at home.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21 (Right to Livelihood):** The Supreme Court has interpreted the Right to Life to include the right to earn a livelihood; mentoring ensures this right is accessible to all, regardless of social background.
- **Article 15 (Special Provisions for Women/SC/ST):** Mentoring acts as a tool for "substantive equality" by providing targeted support to historically disadvantaged groups in the competitive labor market.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** Emphasizes holistic development and the integration of vocational and academic streams, identifying mentorship as a key enabler for student success.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, companies can leverage CSR funds to build mentoring infrastructure and mobilize employee volunteers for youth development.

Additional Keypoints

- **Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat):** Launched in 2023, this autonomous platform serves as a "phygital" (physical + digital) space for youth engagement, featuring a dedicated Mentorship Hub.
- **Role of Non-Profits:** Organizations like 'Mentor Together' provide the curriculum and safeguarding standards necessary to ensure mentoring is safe, effective, and evidence-based.
- **Strategic Volunteering:** Corporate initiatives, such as the LinkedIn Coaches Program, have supported over one million students, demonstrating how private-sector employees can act as "Mentors of Change."

Conclusion

A national mentoring movement is no longer a luxury but a necessity for India's economic future. By moving beyond physical infrastructure to focus on human capability, India can unlock the true potential of



its demographic dividend. When professionals commit to mentoring even one young person, they contribute to a massive collective action that transforms aspirations into tangible career pathways.

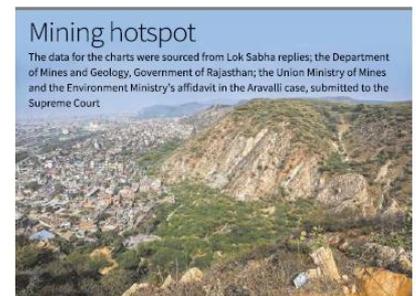
UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education and Human Resources; Government policies and interventions.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and employment; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **Essay & Ethics (GS IV):** Mentorship as a tool for social justice, empathy in leadership, and bridging the inequality of opportunity.

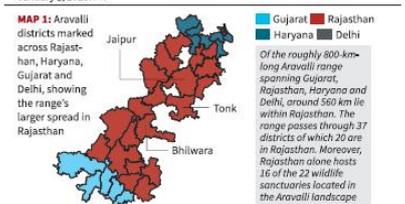
5. Crisis in the Aravallis: Illegal Mining and the Legal Tussle over Definitions

The Aravalli Range, one of the world's oldest geological formations, has become the epicenter of a severe environmental and legal crisis in Rajasthan. Despite hosting only 45% of the state's legal mining leases and contributing 40% of its mineral output, the Aravalli districts account for over 56% of illegal mining cases and a staggering 77% of related FIRs. This disproportionate "lawlessness" has triggered a landmark Supreme Court intervention regarding the definition of what constitutes an "Aravalli hill," a technicality that determines the scope of environmental protection and mining bans.

- **Epicenter of Illegal Mining:** Rajasthan contains nearly 560 km of the 800-km Aravalli range. Recent data reveals that between 2020 and 2023, 15,772 cases of illegal mining were registered in these districts, signaling a systemic failure in enforcing existing mining regulations.
- **The "100-Metre" Definition Controversy:** In November 2025, the Supreme Court accepted a new definition: a landform is an "Aravalli hill" only if it rises at least 100 metres above the local relief. Experts warn this could delist up to 90% of the hills from protection, as the range consists largely of low ridges and hillocks.
- **Judicial Abeyance and Freeze:** Following intense protests and concerns from the Forest Survey of India (FSI), the Court stayed its own 100-metre ruling in December 2025. It has imposed a freeze on all new mining leases until a "Management Plan for Sustainable Mining" (MPSM) is finalized by the ICFRE.
- **Ecological Shield at Risk:** The Aravallis act as a critical barrier against the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert. Continued illegal mining creates "gaps" in this barrier, accelerating desertification and worsening air pollution (dust storms) in the Delhi-NCR region.
- **Water and Biodiversity Crisis:** The range is a vital groundwater recharge zone for arid Rajasthan and Haryana. Mining destroys the natural hydrogeology, leading to falling water tables and the destruction of wildlife corridors connecting 22 sanctuaries, including Sariska and Ranthambore.



At stake: The Aravalli hills seen from the Sun Temple at Galta Ji in Jaipur on January 3, 2026, PTI





- **Administrative Complicity:** The high volume of FIRs despite fewer legal leases suggests that "elements of the machinery" may be failing to prevent atrocities or are actively complicit in allowing mining to move into "buffer zones" and protected ridges.

Key Definitions

- **Local Relief:** The vertical difference in elevation between the highest point (peak) and the lowest surrounding contour line of a landform.
- **Buffer Zone:** A sensitive strip of land, often 500 metres wide, separating protected hill areas from mining or construction zones to maintain ecological integrity.
- **MPSM (Management Plan for Sustainable Mining):** A scientific framework, modeled after the Saranda forest plan, used to demarcate "inviolable" (no-go) zones and "permissible" mining areas based on carrying capacity.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A:** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g):** Imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **MMDR Amendment Act, 2023:** While it allows for the mining of "critical and strategic" minerals, it remains subject to forest conservation laws and Supreme Court mandates in eco-sensitive zones like the Aravallis.
- **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** Provides the legal backing for the 1992 Aravalli Notification, which restricts certain activities in specified areas of Gurgaon (Haryana) and Alwar (Rajasthan).

Additional Keypoints

- **The FSI Criterion:** Prior to the 100-metre rule, the FSI used a "3-degree slope" criterion, which was more inclusive and ensured that even low-lying ridges were protected from being razed.
- **Mineral Wealth vs. Lawlessness:** The Aravallis are rich in major minerals like copper, lead, and zinc (critical for energy transition), creating a constant tug-of-war between industrial demand and ecological preservation.
- **Desertification Barrier:** The range prevents the "creeping" of the desert into fertile plains of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh; any breach in the ridge acts as a funnel for dust storms.

Conclusion

The crisis in the Aravallis highlights the fragile balance between mineral-based economic growth and environmental survival. The disproportionate rate of illegal mining in Rajasthan's Aravalli districts underscores that technical definitions alone cannot protect the landscape without robust field enforcement. The upcoming Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM) represents the last hope for standardizing protections across state borders while preventing the irreversible destruction of India's oldest mountain shield.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geographical features and their location; changes in critical geographical features and the effects of such changes (Aravallis and desertification).



- **GS Paper II:** Judicial activism vs. executive role; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Internal security challenges (Mining Mafia).
- **Prelims:** Aravalli range geography, Articles 48A/51A(g), and the role of ICFRE/FSI in environmental mapping.

6. Malayalam Language Bill, 2025: Linguistic Federalism and Minority Rights

The Kerala Legislative Assembly recently passed the Malayalam Language Bill, 2025, aimed at establishing Malayalam as the sole official language of the state across all functional domains. While the state views this as a step toward linguistic enrichment and administrative ease, it has sparked a federal friction with Karnataka. The neighboring state argues that the bill's mandates—particularly in education—threaten the constitutional safeguards provided to Kannada-speaking linguistic minorities in border regions like Kasaragod.

- **Official Status and Mandate:** The Bill seeks to replace the current dual-language system (English and Malayalam) by mandating Malayalam in government correspondence, legislation, judiciary, and commerce.
- **Educational Shift:** It proposes making Malayalam the compulsory first language in all government and aided schools up to Class 10, which is the primary point of contention for linguistic minorities.
- **Judicial and Digital Transition:** The Bill outlines a phased plan to translate court judgments and proceedings into Malayalam and tasks the IT department with developing open-source software to support the language in the digital realm.
- **Linguistic Minority Safeguards:** To address constitutional concerns, the Bill includes a 'non-obstante' clause (Clause 7), purportedly allowing Tamil and Kannada speakers in specific pockets to use their mother tongues for official correspondence.
- **Historical Context and Redressal:** A similar 2015 Bill was previously denied Presidential assent due to conflicts with the Official Languages Act, 1963; the 2025 version claims to have rectified these legal defects.
- **Inter-State Friction:** The Karnataka government has labeled the Bill "unconstitutional," citing a decline in Kannada-medium schools in Kasaragod (from 197 to 192) and fearing the total erosion of Kannada culture in Kerala's border tracts.

Key Definitions

- **Linguistic Minority:** A group of people whose mother tongue is different from that of the majority in a state or a part of a state. In Kerala, this includes Kannada and Tamil speakers.
- **Non-obstante Clause:** A provision in a statute (often beginning with "Notwithstanding anything contained...") that allows the specific clause to prevail over any other conflicting provisions in the same or other laws.
- **Assent:** The formal agreement by the Governor (Article 200) or the President (Article 201) to a Bill passed by the legislature, which is necessary for the Bill to become an Act.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 345:** Empowers the Legislature of a State to adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the language to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that State.
- **Article 347:** Relates to special provisions for a language spoken by a section of the population of a State, allowing the President to direct its official recognition if requested.
- **Article 350A:** Mandates that every state and local authority provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
- **Article 350B:** Provides for the appointment of a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for them under the Constitution.
- **Official Languages Act, 1963:** A central legislation that provides for the languages which may be used for the official purposes of the Union and for transaction of business in Parliament.

Additional Keypoints

- **The Kasaragod Factor:** Known as "Saptha Bhasha Sangama Bhoomi" (the land of seven languages), Kasaragod is the focal point of this dispute due to its significant Kannada-speaking population.
- **Three-Language Formula:** Critics argue that making Malayalam the "compulsory first language" might bypass the National Education Policy's recommendation of allowing choice in the medium of instruction.
- **Administrative Reorganization:** The Bill proposes the creation of a 'Malayalam Language Development Directorate,' signaling a shift from a purely administrative focus to an active promotional one.

Conclusion

The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025, reflects the tension between a state's right to promote its cultural identity and its constitutional obligation to protect linguistic diversity. While the Kerala government maintains that the Bill includes sufficient caveats for minorities, the apprehensions of the Karnataka government highlight the fragility of linguistic harmony in border districts. The ultimate fate of the Bill rests on whether it strikes a balance that satisfies the "reasonable restrictions" on language policy while upholding the safeguards in Articles 350A and 350B.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, and significant provisions (Articles 345-350); Federal structure and inter-state issues; Protection of interests of minorities.
- **GS Paper I:** Regionalism and Linguistic Diversity in India.
- **Prelims:** Powers of the Governor regarding Bills (Article 200), role of the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities, and Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.



7. Futuristic Space and Marine Biotechnology: India's Next Frontiers

Futuristic biotechnology in the marine and space domains represents a paradigm shift from traditional resource extraction to high-value biomanufacturing. By leveraging extreme environments—the deep ocean with its crushing pressures and outer space with its microgravity and radiation—scientists are developing novel bioactive compounds, resilient materials, and sustainable life-support systems. For India, these sectors are no longer "optional" but are core pillars of the national strategy to achieve a \$300 billion bioeconomy by 2030 and a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047.

- **Frontier Research Focus:** Unlike traditional biology, these fields study life in "extremophile" conditions. Marine biotech harnesses organisms from the deep sea (adapted to high salinity and low light) for industrial enzymes and pharmaceuticals, while space biotech uses microgravity to study rapid microbial growth and human tissue regeneration.
- **Blue Economy Potential:** With a coastline of over 7,500 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) exceeding 2 million sq. km, India's marine biomass remains largely untapped. Scaling seaweed cultivation from the current 70,000 tonnes can reduce import dependence on additives like agar and alginate while providing sustainable biofuels and bioplastics.
- **Space Sustainability & Health:** Space biotechnology is the "backbone" of human spaceflight. ISRO's research into edible microalgae (like Spirulina) and closed-loop life-support systems is critical for the Gaganyaan mission and future Indian space stations, ensuring food security and waste recycling for astronauts.
- **Policy Catalyst – BioE3:** The Government's "BioE3" Policy (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment) explicitly identifies "Futuristic Marine and Space Research" as one of its six thematic sectors, aiming to integrate digital tools (Bio-AI) with biological engineering.
- **Institutional Synergy:** Collaborative efforts between ISRO, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and ICAR-CMFRI are bridging the gap between basic research and commercial application, with the Deep Ocean Mission serving as a vehicle for deep-sea bioprospecting.
- **Global Strategic Positioning:** As nations like the US and China dominate space and marine hubs, India's "early mover" status in integrated biomanufacturing—linking cultivation to extraction—will determine its future leadership in global high-tech supply chains.

Key Definitions

- **Bioprospecting:** The systematic search for and development of new sources of chemical compounds, genes, microorganisms, and other valuable products from nature.
- **Microgravity:** The condition in which people or objects appear to be weightless; it allows researchers to study biological processes (like protein crystallization) without the interference of Earth's gravity.
- **Extremophiles:** Organisms that thrive in physically or geochemically extreme conditions that are detrimental to most life on Earth (e.g., hydrothermal vents).

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A(h):** Part of Fundamental Duties, it mandates citizens to develop "scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform," supporting high-end research.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea):** Governs India's rights in its EEZ and the "Area" (deep seabed), crucial for international compliance in marine bioprospecting.



- **Indian Space Policy 2023:** A framework that opens the space sector to private players, facilitating non-government entities (NGEs) to engage in space-based biotech ventures.
- **MMDR Act (Amended):** While primarily for minerals, its regulations impact how researchers access deep-sea sites for biological sampling alongside mineral exploration.

Additional Keypoints

- **Deep Ocean Mission (DOM):** A ₹4,077 crore project that includes an "Advanced Marine Station for Ocean Biology" to translate research into industrial applications.
- **ISRO-DBT Partnership:** Currently conducting microgravity experiments aboard the International Space Station (ISS) to study "superfoods" for long-duration missions.
- **Private Sector Entry:** Startups like Sea6 Energy are pioneering "Sea-Combine" harvesters, proving that marine biomanufacturing can be a profitable, large-scale industry.

Conclusion

The convergence of marine and space biotechnology offers India a unique opportunity to lead the fourth industrial revolution. By utilizing the "extreme laboratories" of the deep sea and the cosmos, India can solve terrestrial problems—such as resource scarcity and chronic diseases—while securing its strategic interests. A unified national roadmap that encourages private participation and inter-ministerial coordination will be essential to transform these nascent frontiers into robust economic engines.

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.
- **GS Paper III:** Economy—Blue Economy, Bioeconomy, and their contribution to GDP and employment.
- **GS Paper I:** Geography—Salient features of world's physical geography (ocean resources).
- **Prelims:** BioE3 Policy themes, Deep Ocean Mission components, and functions of ISRO/CMFRI.

8. Passive Euthanasia and the Right to Die with Dignity: Supreme Court Deliberations

The Supreme Court of India is set to deliver a final order on a plea for passive euthanasia concerning a 31-year-old man, Harish Rana, who has been in a Permanent Vegetative State (PVS) for over 13 years. This case brings to the forefront the harrowing intersection of medical futility, the emotional burden on caregivers, and the legal framework governing the withdrawal of life support. Following the landmark Common Cause judgment (2018), the judiciary now balances the sanctity of life with the individual's right to be free from prolonged, meaningless suffering when medical recovery is deemed impossible by expert boards.

- **The Permanent Vegetative State (PVS):** Harish Rana has suffered 100% quadriplegic disability since 2013. Medical boards have confirmed that while he can be kept alive via tubes for years, there is "no sign or hope" of recovery or a normal life, rendering further medical intervention futile.

<p>Living in pain</p> <p>Harish Rana, 31, has been bedridden for 13 years</p> <p>He had sustained severe head injuries and 100% quadriplegic disability after a fall from the fourth floor of his paying guest accommodation</p>	<p>According to them [relatives], if the medical treatment is not making any difference, then there is no point in continuing with such medical treatment and making Harish suffer for no good reason</p> <p>SUPREME COURT</p> 
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- **Parental Consent and Moral Responsibility:** The parents, citing their aging status and the son's lack of agency, have appealed for the withdrawal of life support. They argue that as his proxies, it is their moral duty to prevent his further suffering since he cannot speak for himself.
- **Expert Medical Consensus:** Both primary and secondary boards of doctors have recommended the discontinuation of treatment, suggesting that "nature should be allowed to take its own course," a key principle in legalizing passive euthanasia.
- **Judicial Direct Interaction:** In a notable procedural move, the Bench personally interacted with the family to assess the "pain in their hearts" and the sincerity of their appeal, ensuring that the decision is not made under duress or external pressure.
- **The Concept of Medical Futility:** The case highlights the legal shift where "prolonging life" is distinguished from "prolonging the process of dying," especially when treatment offers no qualitative improvement to the patient.
- **Procedural Safeguards:** The involvement of the Additional Solicitor-General and multiple medical boards underscores the rigorous "double-check" mechanism mandated by the Supreme Court to prevent potential misuse of euthanasia laws.

Key Definitions

- **Passive Euthanasia:** The act of withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining medical treatment (like ventilators or feeding tubes) to allow a terminally ill patient to die naturally.
- **Active Euthanasia:** The intentional act of causing the death of a patient by administering lethal substances (Illegal in India).
- **Permanent Vegetative State (PVS):** A condition where a patient is awake but shows no signs of awareness of themselves or their environment, often requiring artificial nutrition and hydration to survive.
- **Living Will (Advance Medical Directive):** A legal document in which a person specifies what actions should be taken for their health if they are no longer able to make decisions for themselves due to illness or incapacity.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life. In the **Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018)** case, the Supreme Court ruled that the "Right to Life" includes the "Right to Die with Dignity," providing the legal bedrock for passive euthanasia.
- **Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011):** The starting point where the SC first allowed passive euthanasia under "exceptional circumstances" and laid down strict guidelines for the High Courts to follow.
- **2023 Amendment to Guidelines:** The SC simplified the 2018 guidelines, removing the necessity of a Judicial Magistrate's presence and allowing a "Primary Medical Board" and a "Secondary Medical Board" (constituted by the hospital) to certify the condition.
- **Doctrine of Parens Patriae:** The legal doctrine where the court acts as the "ultimate guardian" of those who cannot care for themselves, used by the judiciary to decide in the "best interest" of the patient.



Additional Keypoints

- **Caregiver Burden:** The aging parents' concern about "who will care for him after us" highlights the socio-economic reality of long-term disability care in India and its impact on the decision for euthanasia.
- **Nature taking its course:** The transition from "treatment" to "palliative care" or "nature's course" is a crucial distinction that differentiates legal passive euthanasia from criminal homicide.
- **The Role of the State:** The Centre's support for the medical boards' findings indicates an evolving administrative stance toward end-of-life care and the reduction of judicial delays in such sensitive matters.

Conclusion

The Harish Rana case serves as a poignant reminder that the law must remain compassionate and evolving. While the sanctity of life is paramount, the judiciary recognizes that forcing a person to exist in a state of 100% disability without consciousness, solely through artificial means, may infringe upon the dignity of the individual. By following the established protocols of medical board consensus and family consent, the Supreme Court aims to provide a "dignified exit" while maintaining safeguards against the devaluation of human life.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Judiciary; Important Supreme Court Judgments; Fundamental Rights (Article 21); Issues related to health and ethics.
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface; Moral and Ethical dilemmas in end-of-life care; Compassion and empathy toward vulnerable sections.
- **Essay:** Topics related to "Right to Life vs. Right to Die," "Ethics in Modern Medicine," or "Dignity in Death."
- **Prelims:** Landmark judgments (Aruna Shanbaug, Common Cause) and the distinction between active/passive euthanasia.

9. UGC's New Equity Regulations 2026: Combating Caste Discrimination in HEIs

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has notified the **Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Regulations, 2026**. These rules significantly strengthen the 2012 framework by expanding the definition of discrimination and mandating institutional accountability. Triggered by a Supreme Court directive following the tragic suicides of students like Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, the 2026 regulations aim to transform campuses into inclusive spaces where systemic bias—whether explicit or implicit—is met with time-bound redressal and punitive consequences.

- **Mandatory Inclusion of OBCs:** Correcting a critical gap in the initial 2025 draft, the final rules explicitly include Other Backward Classes (OBCs) alongside SCs and STs within the ambit of "caste-based discrimination" protection and representation.



- **Institutional Framework:** Every HEI must establish an **Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC)** and an **Equity Committee**. These bodies are tasked with social inclusion, academic/financial guidance, and inquiring into discrimination complaints.
- **Time-Bound Redressal:** The regulations impose strict operational timelines: the Equity Committee must meet within **24 hours** of a reported incident, complete its inquiry within **15 working days**, and the head of the institution must initiate action within **seven days**.

Strong measures

The UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, were notified on Tuesday

■ Discrimination has been defined as "any unfair, differential, or biased treatment or any such act against any stakeholder, whether explicit or implicit, on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, gender, place of birth, disability, or any of them"

■ Caste-based discrimination means "discrimination only on the basis of caste or tribe against the members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes"



■ The new rules specify punishments, which can range from being debarred from offering degrees or programmes, for non-compliance

- **Provisions for Vigilance:** Institutions are required to form '**Equity Squads**' for maintaining vigil and preventing bias on campus, alongside a **24/7 Equity Helpline** to support distressed students and staff.
- **Broadened Scope of Discrimination:** Discrimination is now defined as any treatment that nullifies or impairs equality in education on grounds of religion, race, caste, gender, place of birth, or disability, specifically including acts that are "incompatible with human dignity."
- **Punitive Measures for Non-Compliance:** Institutions failing to implement these rules face severe penalties, including debarment from UGC schemes, restriction from offering degree programs, and potential removal from the UGC's list of recognized institutions.

Key Definitions

- **Equity:** Defined as a level playing field for all stakeholders regarding the enjoyment of their legitimate rights within an institution.
- **Caste-Based Discrimination:** Unfair, differential, or biased treatment—explicit or implicit—targeting individuals solely due to their belonging to SC, ST, or OBC categories.
- **Equity Squads:** Small bodies within HEIs mandated to maintain active vigil, similar to anti-ragging squads, to prevent discriminatory conduct before it escalates.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth; the 2026 rules provide the administrative teeth to enforce this in academia.
- **Article 17:** Abolition of Untouchability; the regulations address modern, systemic forms of caste exclusion that mirror untouchability in intellectual spaces.
- **Article 21:** The Right to Life and Personal Dignity; the Supreme Court interprets this to include a "discrimination-free environment" for students.
- **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989:** The UGC rules specify that if an incident involves a criminal offense under this Act, the matter must be immediately referred to the police.
- **Article 340:** Relates to the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of Backward Classes (OBCs), supporting the inclusion of OBCs in the 2026 equity framework.



Additional Keypoints

- **Diversity in Leadership:** The Equity Committee must be chaired by the head of the institution and include mandatory representation from SCs, STs, OBCs, women, and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).
- **Ombudsperson Appeal:** Complainants dissatisfied with an institution's decision have the right to appeal to an Ombudsperson within **30 days**.
- **National Oversight:** The UGC will constitute a national-level monitoring committee with representatives from professional councils and civil society to oversee progress across all Indian HEIs.

Conclusion

The 2026 Equity Regulations mark a watershed moment in Indian higher education governance. By shifting the focus from "voluntary cells" to "mandatory committees" with fixed timelines and severe penalties, the UGC has acknowledged that campus discrimination is a systemic failure requiring structural solutions. The inclusion of OBCs and the removal of "false complaint" penalties—which often deterred victims—demonstrate a commitment to substantive rather than merely formal equality.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (UGC); Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.
- **GS Paper I:** Social Empowerment; Casteism and its impact on the Indian social fabric.
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface; Values of equity, justice, and human dignity in public institutions.
- **Prelims:** Constitutional Articles (15, 17, 21, 340) and specific mandates of the UGC Promotion of Equity Regulations, 2026.

10. NGT Suo Motu Intervention: Sewage Contamination in Drinking Water

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has initiated suo motu proceedings against Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh following reports of widespread drinking water contamination. The crisis, characterized by the mixing of sewage with potable water due to aging infrastructure, has led to fatalities in Indore and mass illness in Greater Noida and Bhopal. The Tribunal's intervention underscores a critical failure in municipal engineering and a violation of the fundamental right to clean water, highlighting the urgent need for a shift from reactive repairs to systemic infrastructure overhauls.

- **Infrastructure Breakdown:** The contamination is primarily attributed to decades-old, corroded pipelines often laid through open sewage drains, leading to the seepage of pathogens into the drinking water supply.
- **Public Health Crisis:** Reports confirmed the presence of E. coli bacteria in Bhopal and severe outbreaks of water-borne diseases (vomiting, diarrhea) in cities like Jaipur, Udaipur, and Greater Noida, echoing the recent tragedy in Indore where six lives were lost.
- **Suo Motu Cognizance:** Utilizing its special powers, the NGT issued notices to State governments and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), citing "grave health risks" and environmental law violations.



- **Regulatory Violations:** The Tribunal observed prima facie violations of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, emphasizing the state's failure to maintain water quality standards.
- **Geographic Spread:** The issue is not localized; it spans across major urban centers in Northern and Central India, indicating a systemic neglect of urban utility mapping and maintenance.
- **Accountability Framework:** The NGT has demanded affidavits from state agencies to explain the lack of preventive measures and to outline long-term solutions for separating sewage and water networks.

Key Definitions

- **Suo Motu:** A Latin term meaning "on its own motion," referring to a court or tribunal taking up a case on its own initiative without a formal petition from an aggrieved party.
- **E. coli (Escherichia coli):** A bacterium found in the environment and intestines of humans/animals. Its presence in drinking water is a definitive indicator of recent fecal contamination.
- **Potable Water:** Water that is safe to drink or use for food preparation, free from harmful microorganisms and toxic chemicals.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Supreme Court has expanded the Right to Life to include the "Right to Clean Water" and a healthy environment as an integral part of human dignity.
- **Article 48A:** A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) mandating the State to endeavor to protect and improve the environment.
- **The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974:** This act provides for the prevention and control of water pollution and the maintaining or restoring of wholesomeness of water.
- **National Green Tribunal Act, 2010:** Established the NGT for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests.
- **Doctrine of Public Trust:** A legal principle establishing that certain resources (like water) are preserved for public use, and the state is the trustee required to protect them.

Additional Keypoints

- **Urban Utility Conflict:** The practice of laying water pipelines through or adjacent to sewage drains is a common but hazardous planning flaw in rapidly urbanizing Indian cities.
- **Cross-Contamination:** Pressure drops in water lines can create a vacuum effect, actively sucking in surrounding sewage water through cracks or corroded joints.
- **Role of CPCB:** The Central Pollution Control Board is now tasked with verifying water quality data across these states to provide a scientific basis for the NGT's final directives.

Conclusion

The NGT's notice to three states is a critical reminder that water security is not just about quantity but the uncompromising quality of supply. The "Indore-like tragedy" serves as a warning of the lethal consequences of neglecting urban subterranean infrastructure. While immediate repairs and medical aid are necessary, the long-term solution lies in the complete physical separation of water and sewage conduits, regular microbial auditing, and the modernization of municipal distribution networks under missions like AMRUT 2.0.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and quasi-judicial bodies (NGT); Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental pollution and degradation; Disaster management (Urban health disasters).
- **GS Paper IV:** Professional Ethics (Civil engineering and municipal accountability); Compassion for the citizens' right to basic amenities.
- **Prelims:** Powers of NGT, Water Act 1974, and constitutional provisions like Article 21 and 48A.

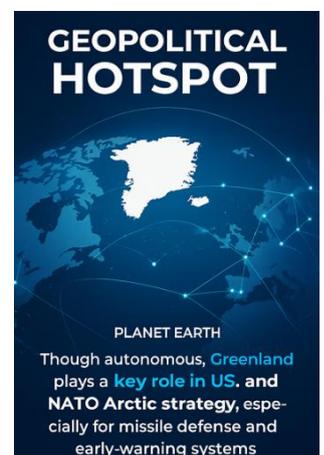
11. Geopolitics of Greenland: Strategic Interests and NATO Dynamics

The renewed interest of the United States in Greenland under the Trump administration highlights a significant shift toward "Arctic Geopolitics." Greenland, a self-governing territory of Denmark, has transitioned from a remote frozen island to a high-stakes strategic asset due to its location, mineral wealth, and the melting of Arctic ice. The U.S. push for control, linked to national security and the "Golden Dome" missile defense project, poses a complex challenge to transatlantic relations and the traditional norms of sovereignty within the NATO alliance.

- **Strategic Location:** Situated between North America and Europe, Greenland is the linchpin for the "GIUK gap" (Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom), essential for monitoring naval movements and hosting early-warning radar systems like the Thule Air Base.
- **The "Golden Dome" Initiative:** The U.S. views Greenland as a critical platform for a multi-layered missile defense system designed to intercept trans-polar ballistic threats, making it a cornerstone of American continental defense.
- **Resource Security & Rare Earths:** Greenland holds approximately 38 million tonnes of rare earth elements (REEs). Securing these is vital for the U.S. to break the current Chinese monopoly on minerals necessary for high-tech defense and green energy sectors.
- **Countering Russia and China:** The U.S. justification for annexation stems from a "vulnerability gap," fearing that if Washington does not project power, Moscow or Beijing will establish a permanent foothold in the Arctic via infrastructure investments.
- **Strain on NATO Cohesion:** Denmark, a founding NATO member, considers Greenland's sovereignty non-negotiable. The U.S. demand challenges the "collective security" principle, as it pressures a smaller ally to cede territory for the perceived benefit of the alliance leader.
- **Self-Determination vs. Annexation:** Despite the U.S. interest, Greenlandic leadership has reiterated its preference for the Danish union, emphasizing that the island is "open for business but not for sale," invoking the right to self-governance.

Key Definitions

- **Self-Governing Territory:** A region with its own government but not fully independent; Greenland manages its internal affairs (health, education, resources) while Denmark retains control over foreign policy and defense.





- **Rare Earth Elements (REEs):** A set of 17 chemical elements used in high-tech devices, including smartphones, electric vehicles, and missile guidance systems.
- **The Golden Dome:** A conceptual multi-layered U.S. missile defense shield aimed at protecting the American mainland from sophisticated aerial and space-based threats.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **The Greenland Self-Government Act (2009):** A Danish law that recognizes the people of Greenland as a separate people under international law and grants them the right to self-determination and eventual independence.
- **Article 5 (NATO Treaty):** The principle of collective defense, where an attack against one member is an attack against all; the U.S. pressure on Denmark over Greenland creates an internal diplomatic crisis within this framework.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea):** Governs the maritime rights and continental shelf claims in the Arctic, where Greenland's territory grants Denmark significant influence over Arctic waterways.
- **1951 Defense Treaty:** The existing legal agreement between the U.S. and Denmark that allows American military presence in Greenland (primarily at Pituffik Space Base).

Additional Keypoints

- **China's "Polar Silk Road":** Beijing's interest in Arctic shipping routes and mining in Greenland has accelerated the U.S. sense of urgency in securing the island.
- **Climate Change Impact:** As Arctic ice melts, new shipping lanes (Northwest Passage) and accessible oil/gas reserves are making Greenland a central hub of global trade and resource competition.
- **Thule Air Base (Pituffik):** The northernmost U.S. military base, featuring sensors that provide 24/7 surveillance of the northern polar region to detect incoming ICBMs.

Conclusion

The U.S. rhetoric regarding Greenland underscores a return to "Realpolitik" where geographic and resource security take precedence over traditional diplomatic niceties. While the U.S. sees Greenland as a vital shield for its "Golden Dome" and a counterweight to China's mineral dominance, the move risks alienating European allies. For Greenland, the situation presents a dilemma: the opportunity for massive economic investment versus the risk of losing its hard-won autonomy to a superpower.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests (NATO, Arctic Council); Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper I:** Salient features of world's physical geography (Arctic region and melting ice); Distribution of key natural resources (Rare Earths).
- **Prelims:** Location of Greenland, members of the Arctic Council, GIUK Gap, and the significance of Rare Earth Elements.