



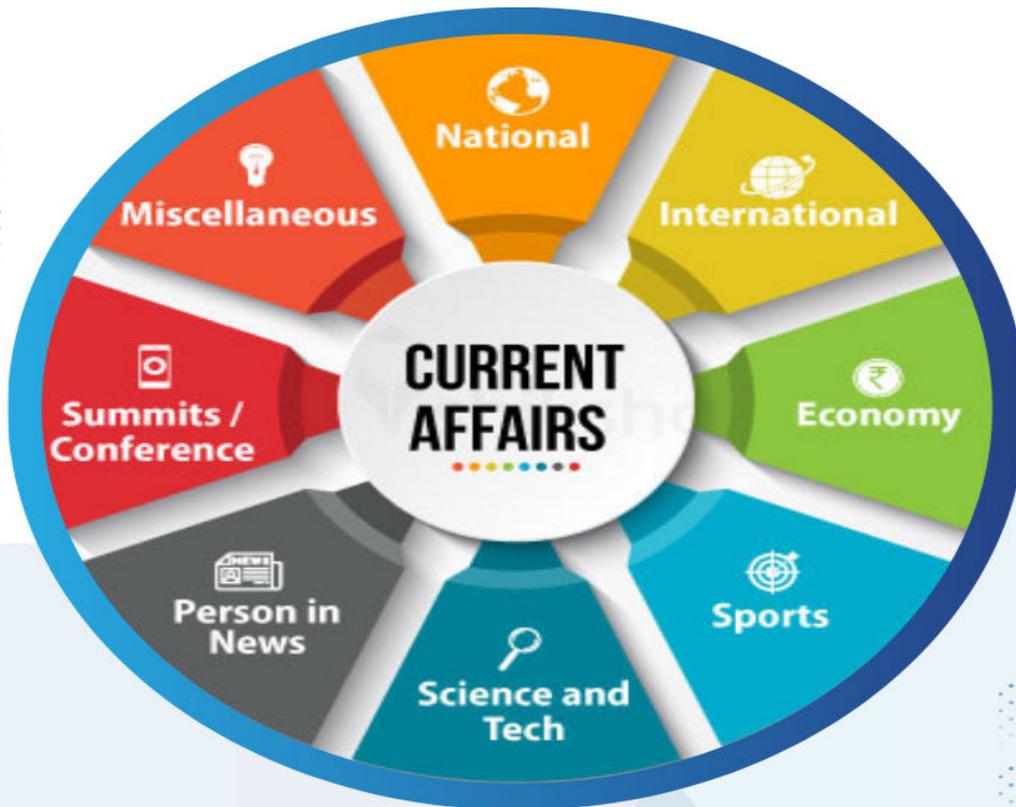
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# **VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY** & **STUDY CENTRE**

## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION**

**DATE: 17/01/2026 (SATURDAY)**



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## 1. Decade of Startup India: A Revolution in Entrepreneurship

The Startup India initiative, launched on January 16, 2016, has completed ten years, marking a transformative shift in India's economic landscape. At an anniversary event in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the unprecedented growth of the ecosystem, noting that nearly **44,000 startups were registered in 2025 alone**—the highest annual spike since the mission's inception. This growth has propelled India to become the **third-largest startup ecosystem globally**, shifting the focus from job-seeking to job-creating.

### Key Highlights of the 10-Year Milestone

- **Record Growth in 2025:** The registration of 44,000 new startups in a single year indicates a maturing ecosystem and increasing ease of doing business.
- **Global Standing:** India maintains its position as the world's third-largest startup hub, trailing only the US and China.
- **Economic Evolution:** The progression from early-stage startups to unicorns (valuation over \$1 billion) and eventually to Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) signifies financial stability and market confidence.
- **Democratization of Innovation:** The mission has expanded beyond Tier-1 cities, fostering entrepreneurship in small towns and rural areas.
- **Employment Generation:** Startups are no longer just innovation hubs but have become primary drivers of mass employment in the tech and service sectors.
- **Flagship Vision:** The initiative serves three core pillars: Simplification and Handholding, Funding Support and Incentives, and Industry-Academia Partnership and Incubation.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(g):** Provides the fundamental right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business.
- **Income Tax Act, 1961 (Section 80-IAC):** Eligible startups can avail of a tax holiday for three consecutive financial years out of their first ten years since incorporation.
- **Section 56(2)(viib):** Provisions related to 'Angel Tax' have been significantly reformed to ease the tax burden on investments in recognized startups.
- **IPR Reforms:** Fast-tracking of patent applications and up to 80% rebate in patent filing fees for startups under the Start-ups Intellectual Property Protection (SIPP) scheme.

### Definitions and Key Concepts

- **Startup:** As per DPIIT, an entity is considered a startup up to 10 years from its date of incorporation/registration, with an annual turnover not exceeding ₹100 crore in any of the preceding financial years.
- **Unicorn:** A privately held startup company with a current valuation of \$1 billion or more.
- **Initial Public Offering (IPO):** The process by which a private corporation can go public by sale of its stocks to general public for the first time.



- **Angel Investor:** A high-net-worth individual who provides financial backing for small startups or entrepreneurs, typically in exchange for ownership equity.

#### UPSC Relevance: Significance for Civil Services Exam

- **Economy (GS Paper III):** Important for topics related to "Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment."
- **Governance (GS Paper II):** Relates to "Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors."
- **Essay & Ethics:** Useful for themes regarding self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat), innovation-led development, and the changing social contract of employment in India.

#### Conclusion

The Startup India mission has successfully transitioned from a government scheme to a national "revolution." By recording its highest-ever annual registrations in 2025, the movement underscores a fundamental shift in India's economic DNA. To sustain this momentum, the focus must now shift toward "Deep Tech" innovation, increasing the survival rate of early-stage ventures, and ensuring that Indian startups can compete on a global scale while solving local structural challenges.

## 2. Integration of Tribal Healers into the National Health Framework

The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs has launched a landmark initiative to formally recognize one lakh tribal healers as "partners in health services." This move aims to bridge the healthcare gap in remote tribal regions by integrating Traditional Tribal Knowledge (TTK) with modern medical practices. During a capacity-building event in Hyderabad, the government emphasized the role of these healers in strengthening community health surveillance and creating sustainable livelihoods through market linkages with pharmaceutical and FMCG sectors.

#### Key Highlights for UPSC Preparation

- **Formal Recognition:** The government seeks to institutionalize the role of one lakh tribal healers, elevating them from informal practitioners to recognized partners in the public health delivery system.
- **Capacity Building:** Technical knowledge and service delivery are being enhanced through collaborations with premier institutes like AIIMS, ICMR, AYUSH, and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- **Bharat Tribal Health Observatory:** A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with ICMR-RMRC Bhubaneswar to establish India's first national tribal health observatory for tribe-disaggregated data.
- **Disease Focus:** The initiative specifically targets the elimination of localized health burdens such as malaria, leprosy, and tuberculosis in tribal districts through research-driven interventions.
- **Economic Linkages:** State governments are encouraged to facilitate partnerships between healers and the industry to transform traditional medicine into a viable employment domain.
- **Evidence-Based Planning:** By addressing the gap in tribal-specific health analytics, the government aims to move toward more precise and culturally sensitive health planning.

#### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 342:** Deals with the identification and notification of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India.



- **Article 47 (Directive Principles):** Mandates 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.
- **Article 21:** The Right to Health is an integral part of the Right to Life, necessitating accessible healthcare for marginalized tribal communities.
- **PESA Act, 1996:** Empowering Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas to manage and protect their traditional knowledge and community resources.
- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Protects the traditional knowledge of local communities and ensures equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such knowledge.

### Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Tribal Healers:** Traditional practitioners within tribal communities who use herbs, minerals, and indigenous rituals to treat ailments, often serving as the first point of medical contact.
- **Tribe-Disaggregated Data:** Health data that is categorized by specific tribal groups rather than being generalized, allowing for the identification of group-specific genetic or environmental health risks.
- **FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods):** In this context, it refers to the commercialization of herbal and traditional health products for daily consumer use.
- **Health Observatory:** A centralized platform or institution that collects, analyzes, and disseminates health information to monitor trends and guide policy.

### Conclusion

The formal recognition of tribal healers marks a paradigm shift from viewing traditional medicine as an "informal" sector to an "essential" component of the healthcare ecosystem. By combining indigenous wisdom with the technical rigor of institutions like ICMR, India is creating a unique, pluralistic health model. The success of this initiative will depend on balancing the commercialization of traditional products with the intellectual property rights of tribal communities while ensuring that modern medical ethics are maintained.

### UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and issues related to vulnerable sections of the population.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology-indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Bio-diversity and conservation of traditional knowledge.
- **Prelims:** Specifically relevant for questions on Ministry of Tribal Affairs initiatives, ICMR collaborations, and the newly established Bharat Tribal Health Observatory.

## 3. Unified FEMA Regulations: Streamlining India's Foreign Trade

On January 13, 2026, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) notified the **Foreign Exchange Management (Export and Import of Goods and Services) Regulations, 2026**. Replacing the decade-old 2015 framework, these regulations integrate the management of both goods and services under a single regulatory umbrella. Set to take effect in **October 2026**, the overhaul aims to reduce the compliance burden on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), empower Authorised Dealer (AD) banks with greater discretion, and transition toward a more transparent, digital-first monitoring system.



## Key Features of the Unified Regulations

- **Consolidated Framework:** For the first time, export and import rules for both physical goods and intangible services (including software) are merged into a single regulation to eliminate procedural overlaps.
- **Empowerment of AD Banks:** Responsibility has shifted to Authorised Dealer banks to manage routine trade matters based on internal board-approved policies and risk assessments rather than seeking case-by-case RBI approvals.
- **Ease for MSMEs:** Transactions up to **₹10 lakh** can now be closed in the RBI's monitoring systems (EDPMS/IDPMS) through self-declaration, significantly reducing paperwork for small-scale exporters.
- **Service Export Reporting:** Service exporters now have a formal **30-day window** to file declarations from the date of invoice, bringing them on par with the transparency standards of goods exports.
- **Revised Realisation Timelines:** While the standard 15-month timeline for repatriation of proceeds remains, it has been extended to **18 months** for trades settled in **Indian Rupees (INR)**, supporting the internationalization of the Rupee.
- **Stricter Discipline for Defaulters:** Exporters with dues outstanding for more than a year beyond the allowed period will be restricted to shipments only against **100% advance payment** or irrevocable letters of credit.



RBI'S DRAFT FEMA  
REGULATIONS  
2025: A  
COMPREHENSIVE  
GUIDE FOR  
INDIAN  
EXPORTERS AND  
IMPORTERS.

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## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **FEMA, 1999:** The primary legislation governing foreign exchange in India. Unlike its predecessor FERA, FEMA treats violations as civil offenses.
- **Article 246 & Union List:** Parliament has the exclusive power to make laws regarding "Foreign Loans" and "Trade and Commerce with foreign countries" (Entries 37 and 41).
- **Section 5 of FEMA:** Deals with Current Account transactions, which include payments due in connection with foreign trade and other current business.
- **Section 47 of FEMA:** Grants the RBI the power to make regulations to carry out the provisions of the Act, under which this new 2026 notification has been issued.

## Definitions and Key Systems

- **EDPMS & IDPMS:** The Export/Import Data Processing and Monitoring System—digital platforms used by the RBI and banks to track the flow of goods and the corresponding inward/outward remittances.
- **Authorised Dealer (AD):** Any person/bank authorized by the RBI under Section 10(1) of FEMA to deal in foreign exchange or foreign securities.
- **Merchanting Trade:** Transactions where the shipment of goods takes place from one foreign country to another foreign country without the goods entering the domestic tariff area of India.



- **EDI Ports:** Electronic Data Interchange ports where customs documentation is processed digitally, allowing for the automatic embedding of Export Declaration Forms (EDF).

## Conclusion

The 2026 FEMA Regulations represent a strategic shift from "regulation by control" to "regulation by monitoring." By decentralizing authority to banks and simplifying the exit of small-value entries, the RBI is fostering a more "Ease of Doing Business" environment. However, the success of this unified regime depends on the robustness of the digital tracking systems and the capacity of AD banks to assess transaction bona fides without creating new bottlenecks.

## UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III (Economy):** Highly relevant for topics like "Liberalization," "Changes in Industrial Policy," and "Effects of Liberalization on the Economy."
- **General Studies II (Governance):** Relates to "Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability" and "Institutional and other measures."
- **Economic Survey/Prelims:** Understanding the mechanics of the Balance of Payments (BoP) and the regulatory framework of India's external sector.

## 4. Economic Resilience and Structural Reforms: Roadmap for Budget 2026-27

Despite global headwinds and protectionist trade policies in 2025, the Indian economy has demonstrated significant resilience, driven by continuous structural reforms. As the nation prepares for Budget 2026-27, the focus is on strengthening domestic growth levers, enhancing self-reliance in strategic sectors like defence, and securing the supply chain for critical minerals. By balancing fiscal consolidation with growth-enhancing capital expenditure, the government aims to catalyze private investment and cement India's position as a global manufacturing and technology hub.

### Key Pillars for Strengthening the Growth Mission

- **Defence Indigenisation & Exports:** A strategic push to increase the defence capital outlay to 30% and establish an Eastern Defence Industrial Corridor to supplement existing ones. The goal is to reach ₹50,000 crore in defence exports by 2028-29.
- **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM):** Focus on securing 30 identified critical minerals essential for green energy and semiconductors through domestic exploration, overseas asset acquisition, and a new "tailings recovery" programme to extract minerals from industrial waste.
- **Export Competitiveness:** Significant upward revision of the **RoDTEP** scheme allocation (currently ₹18,233 crore) and addressing the **inverted duty structure** to make Indian manufactured goods globally competitive.
- **Technology & Global Hubs:** Catalysing the drone ecosystem by increasing PLI outlay to ₹1,000 crore and providing clear Transfer Pricing (TP) guidance for **Global Capability Centres (GCCs)** to reduce tax litigation.
- **Financial Market Deepening:** Diversifying credit beyond banks by lowering borrowing thresholds for corporate bonds and allowing Provident Funds to invest in infrastructure-linked instruments like InvITs and REITs.
- **Judicial & Administrative Reforms:** Implementing a dual-track disposal system for tax disputes to clear the massive backlog at the CIT(Appeals) level and filling existing vacancies to unlock blocked capital.



## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 112:** Mandates the presentation of the Annual Financial Statement (Budget), detailing estimated receipts and expenditure for the upcoming fiscal year.
- **FRBM Act, 2003:** Provides the legal framework for fiscal consolidation, ensuring the government maintains a sustainable fiscal deficit glide path.
- **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957:** Recently amended in 2023 to grant the Centre power to auction critical mineral blocks, forming the legal basis for the NCMM 2025.
- **Article 292:** Governs the executive power of the Union to borrow upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of India within limits set by Parliament.

## Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Inverted Duty Structure:** A situation where the import duty on finished goods is lower than the import duty on raw materials/intermediates, discouraging domestic value addition.
- **Global Capability Centres (GCCs):** Offshored units of multinational corporations that handle specialized functions like R&D, IT, and data analytics, moving beyond traditional back-office roles.
- **Transfer Pricing (TP):** The rules and methods for pricing transactions between related enterprises (e.g., a parent company and its Indian GCC) to ensure fair tax distribution.
- **Tailings Recovery:** The process of extracting valuable minerals from "tailings"—the materials left over after the process of separating the valuable fraction from the uneconomic fraction of an ore.

## Conclusion

Budget 2026-27 serves as a critical juncture for India to transition from a "resilient" economy to a "dominant" one. By addressing structural bottlenecks in tax administration and customs, and doubling down on high-tech sectors like drones and semiconductors, the government can foster a predictable regulatory environment. The success of this mission will rely on the synergy between fiscal prudence and aggressive capital investment in strategic self-reliance (Atmanirbharta).

## UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III (Economy):** Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Government Budgeting.
- **General Studies III (Security):** Indigenisation of technology and developing new technology in the defence sector.
- **Prelims:** Specific focus on schemes like RoDTEP, PLI, and the National Critical Mineral Mission; concepts like Inverted Duty Structure and Corporate Bond Market reforms.

## 5. Chabahar Port: Navigating Geopolitical Headwinds and Strategic Interests

India is actively engaged in diplomatic discussions with the United States and Iran to maintain the operational continuity of the **Chabahar Port** in southeastern Iran. Despite the recent imposition of new US tariffs and the "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran, New Delhi is leveraging its existing **sanctions waiver—valid until April 26, 2026**—to safeguard its investments. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has reiterated that while the situation remains dynamic, India remains committed to this "long-standing" partnership, which serves as a vital gateway to landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia.



## Key Strategic Highlights for UPSC

- **Strategic Bypassing:** Chabahar serves as India's primary alternative to bypass Pakistan's overland transit restrictions, providing direct maritime access to the **Zaranj-Delaram highway** in Afghanistan.
- **The "Golden Gate" to Central Asia:** The port is a central node of the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, designed to connect India to Russia and Europe, potentially reducing transit time by 15 days compared to the Suez Canal.
- **Countering China's "String of Pearls":** Strategically located just 76 nautical miles from the Chinese-operated **Gwadar Port** in Pakistan, Chabahar allows India to monitor and balance maritime influence in the Arabian Sea.
- **Sanctions Diplomacy:** India is navigating a "conditional waiver" from the US Department of Treasury (issued October 2025). Reports suggest India has already liquidated its financial commitment of **\$120 million** to insulate the project from future banking restrictions.
- **Humanitarian Hub:** The port has been instrumental in delivering over 10 million tonnes of bulk cargo, including wheat and medical aid, to Afghanistan since 2018.
- **Operational Shift:** To minimize direct sovereign risk, India is exploring the creation of new entities or transferring operations to manage the port without direct government exposure amid the evolving US-Iran friction.

## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Long-term Lease Agreement (2024):** A landmark 10-year contract signed between **India Ports Global Limited (IPGL)** and Iran's Port and Maritime Organisation (PMO) for the operation of the Shahid Beheshti terminal.
- **Trilateral Transit Agreement (2016):** A legal framework between India, Iran, and Afghanistan for the establishment of an international transport and transit corridor.
- **US Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA):** The primary US law under which sanctions are applied; India seeks "carve-outs" under the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for its Chabahar activities.

## Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Sanctions Waiver:** A legal exemption granted by a sanctioning body (like the US Treasury) allowing a specific entity or country to engage in otherwise prohibited trade.
- **Shahid Beheshti Terminal:** The specific portion of Chabahar port developed and operated by India; distinct from the Shahid Kalantari terminal.
- **INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor):** A 7,200-km multi-modal trade route (ship, rail, road) for moving freight between India, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia.
- **Maximum Pressure Policy:** A diplomatic and economic strategy used by the US to isolate Iran through comprehensive sanctions to force a renegotiation of its nuclear program and regional policies.



## Conclusion

The Chabahar project is the litmus test of India's "**Strategic Autonomy**." By balancing its growing security partnership with the US against its historic and logistical ties with Iran, India aims to secure its energy and connectivity interests. As the April 2026 deadline approaches, New Delhi's ability to demonstrate the port's value as a "humanitarian and non-military" asset will be crucial to securing a further extension and preventing the project's collapse under the weight of great-power competition.

## UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** 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 (Economy/Security):** Infrastructure: Ports; Security challenges and their management in border areas; Strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Prelims Focus:** Location-based questions (Gulf of Oman, Sistan-Baluchestan), INSTC member countries, and the roles of IPGL and STPI.

## 6. India-EU Strategic Partnership: 77th Republic Day Celebrations

India has invited **António Costa**, President of the European Council, and **Ursula von der Leyen**, President of the European Commission, as the joint Chief Guests for the **77th Republic Day** on January 26, 2026. This historic invitation marks the first time the top leadership of the European Union (EU) will attend together, reflecting the deepening of the India-EU Strategic Partnership. The 90-minute parade at Kartavya Path will be anchored by the theme of **150 years of 'Vande Mataram'**, blending a display of indigenized military might with a powerful tribute to India's national song and cultural heritage.

### Key Highlights of Republic Day 2026

- **Thematic Focus:** The central theme, "**150 Years of Vande Mataram**", will be showcased through 30 tableaux, specialized band performances at 235 locations, and a dedicated aerial battle array formation.
- **Symbolic Reform:** In a move to eliminate "VIP culture," all parade enclosures have been renamed after **Indian Rivers** (e.g., Ganga, Yamuna), and Beating Retreat enclosures after **Musical Instruments**, replacing the traditional V1/V2 labels.
- **Military Debut:** The parade will feature the first-ever display of the newly raised **Bhairav Battalion** (light commando units), **Shaktibaan regiments** (drone-centric artillery), and the **Bhairav contingent** performing the "Uncha Kadam Taal."
- **Phased Battle Array:** For the first time, the Indian Army will present equipment in a functional sequence—surveillance, mobilization, strike, and support—accompanied by live operational commentary.
- **Global Participation:** A **European Union naval contingent** will march for the first time, symbolizing growing maritime cooperation between India and the EU in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Diverse Displays:** An animal contingent featuring **Zanskar ponies**, **Bactrian camels** from Ladakh, and Army dogs will represent India's readiness across varied and difficult operational terrains.





## Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51-A (Fundamental Duties):** Explicitly mentions that it shall be the duty of every citizen to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag, and the **National Anthem**. While Vande Mataram is the National Song, it holds equal constitutional status in the spirit of the 1950 constituent assembly resolution.
- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** Encourages the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations, providing the framework for India's "Chief Guest" diplomacy.
- **Flag Code of India, 2002:** Governs the display of the National Flag during the Republic Day celebrations to ensure its dignity and honor are maintained during the ceremonies.

## Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Sesquicentenary:** The 150th anniversary of a significant event; in this case, celebrating 150 years since the composition of Vande Mataram by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1876.
- **Battle Array:** A tactical formation where military units are arranged in a specific order of readiness for combat, rather than just for ceremonial marching.
- **Kartavya Path:** Formerly known as Rajpath, this 3.2km stretch in New Delhi is the ceremonial axis of India, symbolizing the shift from colonial "power" to the "duty" of the citizens.
- **Bhairav Battalion:** Elite light commando units designed to fill the operational gap between standard infantry and Special Forces, focused on rapid-response and precision strikes.

## Conclusion

Republic Day 2026 serves as a dual statement of India's **strategic autonomy** and its **cultural decolonization**. By hosting the EU leadership, India signals its intent to diversify its global partnerships amid shifting geopolitical alliances. Domestically, the transition from "VIP enclosures" to river-named seating and the focus on the Bhairav battalions reflect a nation that is modernizing its military and governance structures while remaining deeply rooted in its civilisational history.

## UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II (International Relations):** Bilateral and regional groupings involving India; Significance of the European Union as a strategic partner in trade (FTA) and security.
- **General Studies II (Governance):** Government initiatives to promote transparency and remove "VIP culture" (Enclosure renaming).
- **General Studies I (Culture/History):** Significance of the song Vande Mataram in the Indian Freedom Struggle; Role of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.
- **Prelims:** Military exercises/new units (Bhairav), locations (Kartavya Path), and the specific dignitaries visiting for the year.

## 7. Transparency and Accountability in Democratic Institutions

The 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC), hosted in New Delhi in January 2026, underscored the essential role of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in strengthening democratic legitimacy. Chaired by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, the conference addressed the intersection of tradition and technology, emphasizing that while consensus and dissent are democratic pillars, they must be exercised within the bounds of parliamentary propriety. The summit served as a critical



platform for Commonwealth nations to discuss emerging challenges like the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the influence of social media on legislative discourse.

### Key Highlights for UPSC Preparation

- **Core Principles of Strong Democracy:** Transparency in decision-making and inclusivity of marginalized voices are vital for maintaining public trust and the legitimacy of democratic institutions.
- **Role of Presiding Officers:** The Speaker is the "decisive" guardian of the House's dignity, responsible for ensuring impartiality and adapting institutions to contemporary needs without compromising constitutional values.
- **Ethical AI Integration:** Discussion focused on balancing innovation with oversight, ensuring the "responsible" use of AI to enhance parliamentary efficiency while curbing potential misuse like misinformation.
- **Social Media & Citizen Engagement:** The conference explored strategies to move citizen engagement beyond periodic elections and addressed the psychological health and well-being of legislators and parliamentary staff.
- **Parliamentary Propriety:** While dissent is vital, its expression must remain within the framework of procedural decorum to protect the institutional credibility of the legislature.
- **Global Leadership:** By hosting CSPOC 2026, India reinforced its role as the "Mother of Democracy," facilitating a global dialogue on harmonizing democratic traditions with rapid technological changes.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 93:** Mandates the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha to ensure the House has a functional head.
- **Article 94:** Provides the legal process for the vacation, resignation, and removal of the Speaker's office.
- **Article 105:** Defines the powers, privileges, and immunities of the Houses of Parliament, their members, and committees, which the Speaker is tasked to protect.
- **Rule 373 & 374 (Rules of Procedure):** Empowers the Speaker to direct a member to withdraw from the House for "disorderly conduct" or to name a member for suspension for "willfully obstructing" business.
- **The Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law):** Grants the Speaker the quasi-judicial power to decide on the disqualification of members on grounds of defection (upheld in *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu*).

### Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Parliamentary Propriety:** The standards of behavior, etiquette, and decorum expected of members within the chamber to ensure productive and respectful deliberation.
- **Presiding Officer:** The individual (Speaker in Lok Sabha, Chairman in Rajya Sabha) who oversees proceedings, maintains order, and interprets the rules of the House.



- **CSPOC (Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth):** An organization created in 1969 to promote knowledge and understanding of parliamentary democracy among the Speakers of the Commonwealth.
- **Inclusivity in Democracy:** The practice of ensuring that the legislative process reflects the diversity of the citizenry, particularly including women, minorities, and marginalized groups.

## Conclusion

As democratic institutions navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the message from CSPOC 2026 is clear: institutions must evolve or risk becoming irrelevant. The integration of AI and digital tools offers a path toward a more "paperless" and accessible parliament, but this must be balanced with robust ethical frameworks. Ultimately, the resilience of a democracy depends on the Presiding Officer's ability to rise above partisan politics and act as the neutral arbiter of a House that values both the government's right to rule and the opposition's right to dissent.

## UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II (Polity):** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the State Legislatures; Role of the Speaker; Separation of powers between various organs.
- **General Studies II (Governance):** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, and models.
- **General Studies IV (Ethics):** Ethical issues in governance; Accountability and ethical use of technology (AI) in public service.
- **Essay Paper:** Useful for themes related to the "future of democracy," "technology in governance," and "civility in public discourse."

## 8. Guidelines for Religious Structures in Protected Areas

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL) has formulated a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to regulate the diversion of forest land for religious structures within wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. Triggered by a land-use proposal in Gujarat's Balaram Ambaji Wildlife Sanctuary, these guidelines aim to balance religious sentiments and traditional faith with the stringent requirements of environmental conservation. The primary objective is to prevent the "regularization of encroachments" while acknowledging historical "sacred groves" and ancient sites mentioned in religious texts.

### Key Guidelines and Expert Recommendations

- **The 1980 Cut-off Rule:** As a general principle, any construction, establishment, or expansion of religious structures on forest land after the enactment of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, is to be treated as an illegal encroachment.
- **Settlement of Rights:** Land diversion will only be considered if the religious institution's rights were formally recognized and recorded in the forest settlement reports or government records prior to the notification of the protected area.
- **Precedent Prevention:** The committee warned that arbitrary allotments to religious trusts could set a dangerous precedent, leading to a surge in similar demands across India's protected area network.
- **Exceptional Regularization:** In rare cases where a State government justifies regularization, it must provide a "reasoned and documented order" for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to review on a case-by-case basis.



- **SOP for Applications:** A formal procedure has been established for religious institutions to submit applications, which must be vetted by the Chief Wildlife Warden and the State Board for Wildlife before reaching the National Board.
- **Focus on Sacred Sites:** The guidelines acknowledge "sacred caves" and historical sites but emphasize that modern "development" of these areas must not compromise the ecological integrity of the habitat.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It shall be the duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Section 33 gives the Chief Wildlife Warden control over sanctuaries, and any diversion of land requires the recommendation of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).
- **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** Prohibits the use of forest land for non-forest purposes without prior approval from the Central Government.
- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Provides the legal framework for the "Settlement of Rights" mentioned by the expert panel.

### Definitions of Key Concepts

- **NBWL (National Board for Wildlife):** A statutory "Apex Body" chaired by the Prime Minister that serves as the highest authority for all wildlife-related matters and projects in and around protected areas.
- **Standing Committee of NBWL:** A smaller, specialized committee chaired by the Union Environment Minister that performs the board's functions, specifically reviewing proposals for infrastructure or land diversion.
- **Encroachment:** Unauthorised occupation or use of forest land that has not been legally diverted under the Forest (Conservation) Act or recognized under the Forest Rights Act.
- **Settlement of Rights:** The legal process of determining, recording, and demarcating the rights of local communities or entities within a forest area before it is declared a sanctuary or national park.

### Conclusion

The formulation of these norms marks a significant step in institutionalizing the "eco-sensitive" management of religious sites within India's forests. By strictly adhering to the 1980 cut-off and requiring documented evidence of historical claims, the government seeks to curb the "commercialization of faith" within fragile ecosystems. The challenge remains in the implementation phase, as many sanctuaries are yet to complete their forest settlement reports, leaving the legal status of several existing structures in a state of limbo.



## UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III (Environment):** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Legislation related to wildlife protection.
- **General Studies II (Governance):** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **General Studies I (Geography/Society):** Interplay between cultural/religious practices and environmental conservation; Sacred groves and their ecological significance.
- **Prelims:** Powers of the NBWL vs. SCNBWL; Significance of the 1980 Forest Act; Locations of major sanctuaries (e.g., Balaram Ambaji).

## 9. Geopolitical Instability and Civil Unrest in Iran (2025-26)

The Islamic Republic of Iran is currently witnessing its most significant domestic upheaval since the 1979 Revolution. Triggered on **December 28, 2025**, by a drastic currency collapse and soaring inflation, the protests rapidly evolved from economic grievances into a nationwide movement challenging the clerical establishment. Despite a brutal crackdown involving a near-total internet blackout and thousands of reported fatalities, a tense "uneasy calm" prevails as the international community, led by the United States, monitors the situation with "all options on the table."

### Key Highlights for UPSC Preparation

- **Trigger and Evolution:** Protests began in the Tehran bazaar over the devaluation of the **Rial** and 42% inflation, quickly spreading to all 31 provinces with demands for systemic political change.
- **Casualty Toll & Human Rights:** While the Iranian government claims 2,000 to 3,000 deaths, independent monitors like **Iran Human Rights (IHR)** have verified over **3,428 deaths**, with some estimates from activist groups suggesting the toll could exceed 12,000.
- **The "Digital Darkness":** Since January 8, 2026, a 200-hour **internet blackout** (reducing connectivity to 1% of normal levels) was used to disrupt protest coordination and mask the scale of state violence.
- **U.S. Strategic Stance:** President Donald Trump has maintained a "wait-and-see" posture while warning that "all options are on the table," following reports that Iran halted over 800 scheduled executions under international pressure.
- **Regional Diplomacy:** Gulf allies (Saudi Arabia and UAE) have reportedly played a mediatory role, encouraging the U.S. to allow the Iranian leadership a "chance" to de-escalate rather than pursuing immediate military strikes.
- **Institutional Mobilization:** The regime has deployed the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** and Basij paramilitaries, using lethal force and labeling protesters as *Mohareb* (enemies of God), a charge carrying the death penalty.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 27 (Iranian Constitution):** Nominally allows public gatherings and marches as long as they are "unarmed" and "not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam," though in practice, such rights are heavily restricted.



- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):** Iran is a signatory to the ICCPR. Articles 19 (Freedom of Expression) and 21 (Right to Peaceful Assembly) are central to the international condemnation of the current crackdown.
- **Concept of 'Moharebeh' (Enmity against God):** Under Articles 279-285 of the **Islamic Penal Code of Iran**, this is a capital offense used by the judiciary to justify the execution of political dissidents and protesters.
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** Article 3 (Right to Life) and Article 19 (Freedom of Opinion/Expression) form the basis of the UN Human Rights Council's scrutiny of the 2026 massacres.

### Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Theocratic System:** A form of government in which a deity or divine law is the ultimate source of authority, and the state is governed by religious officials (in Iran, the Supreme Leader).
- **Internet Blackout:** A deliberate disruption of internet or electronic communications to render them inaccessible or unusable, often used by regimes to suppress dissent.
- **"All Options on the Table":** A diplomatic and military idiom used by U.S. administrations to signal that military intervention remains a possibility alongside sanctions and diplomacy.
- **Stagflation:** A combination of stagnant economic growth, high unemployment, and high inflation—the underlying economic driver of the 2025 Iranian unrest.

### Conclusion

The current crisis in Iran represents a critical "inflection point" where domestic economic failure has met a deep-seated crisis of political legitimacy. While the state's militarized response has suppressed the visible street presence of protesters for now, the underlying causes—economic despair and a youthful population's desire for reform—remain unaddressed. The survival of the clerical system may depend on its ability to offer genuine concessions, even as the shadow of external military intervention persists.

### UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India's strategic ties with Iran (Chabahar Port vs. Sanctions).
- **General Studies II (Polity):** Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries (Secularism vs. Theocracy).
- **General Studies III (Security):** Role of non-state actors and state-sponsored repression in regional instability; Cyber-security and internet shutdowns as tools of statecraft.
- **Prelims Focus:** Locations of Iranian cities, the concept of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), and names of rights monitoring groups like HRANA and IHR.

## 10. Strategic and Cultural Significance of Republic Day 2026

The 77th Republic Day celebrations at Kartavya Path represent a landmark convergence of India's revolutionary history, futuristic military doctrine, and burgeoning strategic ties with Europe. With the theme **"150 Years of Vande Mataram,"** the event commemorates the sesquicentenary of the national song, while the joint presence of the **European Council and European Commission Presidents** as Chief Guests signals a high-water mark in India-EU diplomacy. This year also marks a shift in military display with the



debut of the "**Battle Array**" format, replacing traditional ceremonial marching with functional combat groupings.

### Key Highlights for UPSC Preparation

- **Theme of National Resonance:** The 2026 parade centers on "**150 Years of Vande Mataram**" (composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1876), featuring historic 1923 illustrations by Tejendra Kumar Mitra as view-cutters along the parade route.
- **First-Ever "Battle Array" Format:** Breaking from tradition, the Indian Army will showcase mechanized columns in an operational sequence, including the **61 Cavalry**, T-90 Bhishma tanks, and the **Bhairav Contingent** known for the "Uncha Kadam Taal."
- **Strategic Chief Guests:** For the first time, dual leadership from the European Union—**António Costa** (President, European Council) and **Ursula von der Leyen** (President, European Commission)—will be the Chief Guests, highlighting India's role in the global order.
- **Inclusive "Jan Bhagidari":** Over **10,000 Special Guests** representing the "bottom-up" growth of India, including beneficiaries of the Lakhpati Didi, PM JANMAN, and Gaganyaan mission scientists, will be seated in enclosures named after **Indian Rivers** to symbolize the end of VIP culture.
- **Technological Prowess:** The display includes cutting-edge indigenous assets like the **Shaktiban**, **NAMIS-II Nag Missile System**, and **Drone Shakti**, alongside a 29-aircraft flypast featuring Rafale and Su-30.
- **Tableaux Hierarchy:** A total of **30 Tableaux** will roll down the path, focusing on "Vande Mataram" (Freedom Mantra) and "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" (Prosperity Mantra), with first-time veteran-specific displays.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A(a):** Fundamental Duty to respect the National Flag and National Anthem (while Vande Mataram is the National Song, it holds equal status in national life).
- **Constituent Assembly Resolution (1950):** Dr. Rajendra Prasad's statement gave *Vande Mataram* an equivalent status with *Jana Gana Mana*.
- **Article 51 (DPSP):** Promotion of international peace and security, providing the constitutional basis for hosting foreign heads of state for national celebrations.
- **The Flag Code of India, 2002:** Sets the legal standards for the hoisting and display of the Tricolour during the parade.

### Definitions of Key Concepts

- **Battle Array Formation:** A tactical arrangement of troops and equipment according to their combat roles (surveillance, strike, support) rather than purely for aesthetics.
- **Vande Mataram Sesquicentenary:** The 150th anniversary of the creation of the song by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1876, first published in the novel *Anandamath*.
- **European Council vs. Commission:** The Council (Costa) defines the EU's general political direction and priorities, while the Commission (von der Leyen) is the executive branch that proposes and implements legislation.



- **Lakshpati Didi:** A government initiative aimed at empowering women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to earn an annual income of at least ₹1 lakh.

#### UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies I (Art and Culture):** Significance of the national song in the freedom struggle; literary contributions of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.
- **General Studies II (Polity & Governance):** Republic Day as a symbol of constitutional sovereignty; administrative reforms like "naming enclosures after rivers" to tackle VIP culture.
- **General Studies II (International Relations):** India-EU Strategic Partnership; the importance of the Chief Guest choice in foreign policy.
- **General Studies III (Defence & Security):** Modernization of the Indian Army; "Indigenisation of Technology" through showcased assets like ATAGS and BrahMos.

#### Conclusion

The 2026 Republic Day celebrations serve as a powerful narrative of a "Viksit Bharat" that respects its civilisational roots while modernizing its security apparatus. By integrating traditional themes like Vande Mataram with modern diplomatic triumphs and "Jan Bhagidari," the event effectively projects India's soft and hard power to a global audience.