



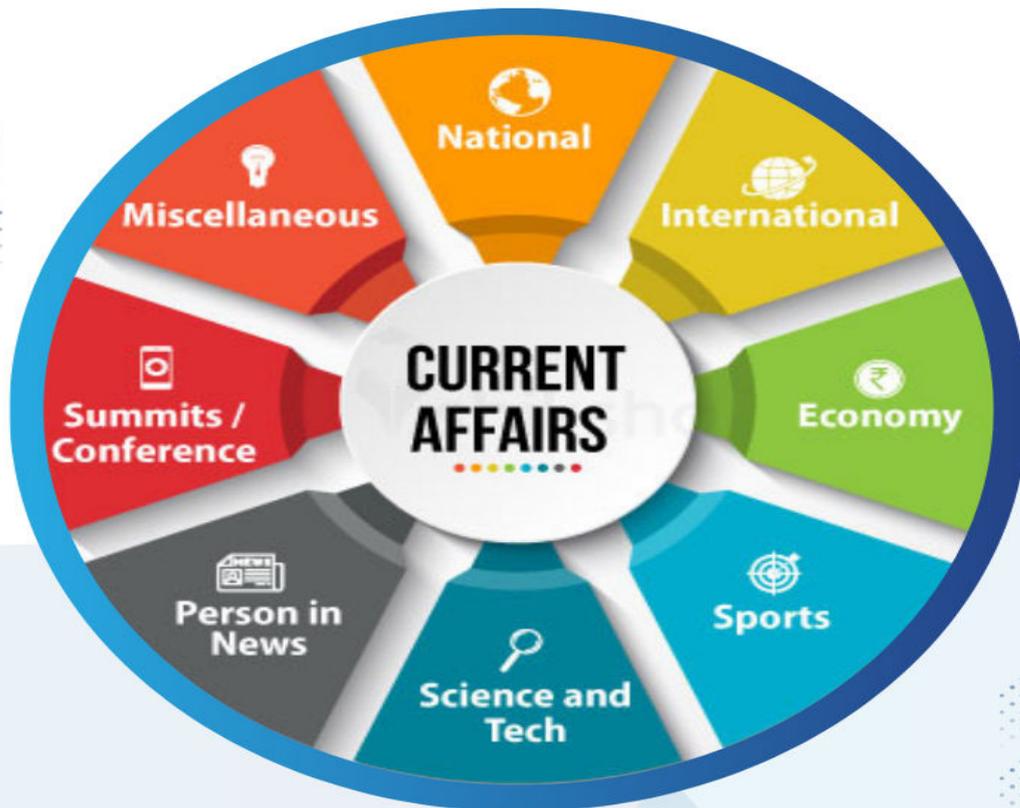
“ We help you reach for the star ”

VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY
&
STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 09/03/2026 (MONDAY)



 **9972258970 & 9740702455**

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



Table of Contents

1. Phase–2 of Viksit Bharat Yuva Connect Programme (VBYCP)	2
2. Implementation Challenges of the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025	3
3. Geopolitical Instability in West Asia and its Ripple Effects on India's Marine Export Sector	5
4. Shared Liability Framework for Digital Payment Fraud Compensation	6
5. Relaunch of Canada-India Strategic and Economic Partnership	8
6. Strengthening India's Care Ecosystem: Budget 2026-27 and the Care Paradox	10
7. Impact of Customs Duty Exemptions on Cancer Care Affordability	11
8. U.S. Supreme Court Ruling on Presidential Trade Powers and IEEPA	13
9. 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14): Navigating Global Trade Headwinds	15
10. 16th Finance Commission and the Urban Fiscal Paradox	16
11. Impact of West Asia Crisis on India's Wheat Export Resurgence	18
12. Risks of AI-Generated Wildlife Content: Impacts on Conservation and Safety	20



1. Phase-2 of Viksit Bharat Yuva Connect Programme (VBYCP)

The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports has launched the second phase of the Viksit Bharat Yuva Connect Programme in Delhi to deepen youth engagement with the national vision of a developed India by 2047.

- **Institutional Outreach:** The program expands its footprint to over 35 colleges in the National Capital, aiming to mobilize 10,000+ students through interactive dialogues and institutional partnerships.
- **Peer-to-Peer Leadership:** Sessions are led by "Youth Icons," including winners of the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament and Young Leaders Dialogue presenters, fostering a relatable "Amrit Peedhi" connection.
- **Digital Integration via MY Bharat:** The initiative utilizes the Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) digital platform as a single-window interface for registration, volunteering, and seamless engagement in nation-building activities.
- **Grassroots Mobilization:** Building on Phase-1, which covered 274 universities across 22 States/UTs, the program emphasizes *Jan Bhagidari* (People's Participation) to transform the national development agenda into a mass movement.
- **Focus on Atmanirbhar Bharat:** The core objective is to align youth aspirations with the goal of an "Atmanirbhar" (Self-reliant) and "Viksit" (Developed) India, encouraging students to contribute perspectives on governance and innovation.
- **Capacity Building:** Beyond dialogue, the program sets up awareness stalls to recruit volunteers for various national-level social and developmental projects, bridging the gap between youth energy and structured contribution.



Key Definitions

- **Viksit Bharat@2047:** The Government of India's roadmap to transform the nation into a completely developed country by the 100th anniversary of its independence in 2047.
- **MY Bharat (Mera Yuva Bharat):** An autonomous body established by the Union Cabinet to serve as an overarching institutional mechanism powered by technology for youth development and youth-led development.
- **Amrit Peedhi:** A term used to describe the current generation of Indian youth who will be the primary drivers of the country's progress during the "Amrit Kaal" (the 25-year lead-up to 2047).

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A (Fundamental Duties):** Clause (j) mandates citizens to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.
- **National Youth Policy (NYP-2014):** Provides a holistic vision for the youth of India to empower them to achieve their full potential, which is the statutory precursor to the MY Bharat initiative.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 39):** Directs the State to ensure that children and youth are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and protected against exploitation.



Additional Keypoints

- **Jan Bhagidari:** This phase emphasizes that development is not just a government-led process but a collaborative effort where youth voices act as stakeholders in policy feedback.
- **Youth Parliament:** This component of the program allows students to simulate legislative processes, enhancing their understanding of parliamentary democracy and public speaking.
- **Multi-disciplinary Reach:** The selection of colleges—ranging from technical institutes like IIIT Delhi to business schools like SS CBS—ensures a diverse range of ideas from different academic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The launch of Phase-2 in Delhi signifies a strategic shift from broad national awareness to deep institutional immersion. By leveraging the MY Bharat portal and peer-led icons, the government is institutionalizing youth participation. This ensures that the vision of 2047 is not merely a top-down administrative target but a bottom-up movement fueled by the "Yuva Shakti" of the country.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources, and Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development.
- **Essay & Ethics:** Role of youth in nation-building, the concept of *Jan Bhagidari*, and the moral responsibility of the "Amrit Peedhi" toward sustainable national goals.

2. Implementation Challenges of the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025

The Union Ministry of Rural Development is currently finalizing the operational parameters for the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, which recently replaced the MGNREGA.

- **Normative Allocation Framework:** A central challenge involves defining "normative allocation" under Section 4(5), where the Centre determines state budgets based on objective parameters like rural migration rates and past performance.
- **Categorization of Panchayats:** The Act mandates the classification of Gram Panchayats into A, B, and C categories based on development indicators such as "proximity to urban areas" to tailor interventions to local needs.
- **Enhanced Employment Guarantee:** The legislation raises the statutory floor for unskilled manual work to 125 days per household, up from 100 days under the previous regime, aiming for higher income security.
- **Mandatory "Agricultural Pause":** To prevent labor shortages during peak seasons, the Act empowers states to notify a 60-day period annually during which no public works are executed, stabilizing the farm economy.
- **Digital and Fiscal Transition:** States must onboard platforms like DBT Sparsh for payments and Yuktdhara for geospatial planning, while adapting to a new 60:40 fund-sharing ratio for wages.



- **Four Vertical Focus:** Work is strictly aligned with four thematic domains: water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related assets, and climate change mitigation (extreme weather works).

Key Definitions

- **Normative Allocation:** A top-down budgetary mechanism where funds are allocated based on pre-defined objective criteria rather than being an open-ended, demand-driven response to local labor budgets.
- **Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan:** A master schedule of works prepared at the village level and integrated into the "National Rural Infrastructure Stack" to ensure alignment with national development goals.
- **DBT Sparsh:** A specialized digital banking platform mandated for the direct and transparent transfer of wages to rural workers, aimed at minimizing leakages and delays.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 41 (DPSP):** The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity, make effective provision for securing the right to work, which provides the constitutional basis for employment guarantee laws.
- **Article 243G:** Empowers Panchayats to prepare plans for economic development and social justice; the VB-G RAM G Act utilizes this by making the Gram Panchayat the primary planning unit.
- **Section 4(5) & 4(6) of VB-G RAM G Act:** These specific legal clauses grant the Union Government the power to prescribe funding parameters and mandate that states bear costs exceeding the central normative allocation.

Rough edges

The Centre has to frame rules under 11 categories before implementation of the VB-G RAM G Act

■ According to Section 4(5) of the Act, the Centre will determine State-wise normative allocation based on 'objective parameters'

■ Parameters also needed to categorise Gram Panchayats based on development

Additional Keypoints

- **Fiscal Burden on States:** Unlike MGNREGA, where the Centre paid 100% of unskilled wages, the 60:40 split (90:10 for NE/Himalayan states) increases the financial accountability and pressure on state treasuries.
- **Infrastructure Stack:** The integration of rural works with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan marks a shift from creating temporary "relief" assets to high-quality "productive" national infrastructure.
- **Accountability Measures:** The Act introduces a 10,000 penalty for administrative lapses and mandates AI-based fraud detection alongside traditional social audits.

Conclusion

The transition from MGNREGA to the VB-G RAM G Act reflects a broader policy shift from a purely rights-based "safety net" to a development-linked "mission." While the 125-day guarantee offers better income potential, the success of the mission hinges on resolving federal friction regarding "normative allocation" and ensuring that the "agricultural pause" does not inadvertently harm workers during sudden economic shocks.



UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Government policies and interventions; issues arising out of their design and implementation; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Decentralization and PRIs.
- **General Studies III:** Mobilization of resources; Employment; Inclusive growth; Land reforms and rural infrastructure; Disaster management (Extreme weather works).
- **Comparison Matrix:** Questions may focus on the shift from demand-driven to supply-led/normative models and its impact on cooperative federalism.

3. Geopolitical Instability in West Asia and its Ripple Effects on India's Marine Export Sector

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has triggered localized economic distress among aquaculture farmers in Andhra Pradesh. Driven by fears of shipping route blockades and logistics disruptions, farmers have resorted to premature harvesting, leading to an oversupply in domestic markets and a sharp decline in price realization.

- **Panic-Driven Market Distortions:** Rumours regarding the disruption of international shipping services have induced panic selling. Farmers are harvesting shrimp prematurely to minimize potential losses, inadvertently depressing local market prices (e.g., selling 60-count shrimp at ₹220/kg compared to the usual ₹300/kg).
- **Andhra Pradesh as a Seafood Powerhouse:** Andhra Pradesh serves as the backbone of India's marine export economy, accounting for approximately 30–35% of national seafood shipments by value. The state's coastal districts (East Godavari, Nellore, Krishna, etc.) are central to this production, making its farmers disproportionately vulnerable to export-market volatility.
- **Sentiment vs. Reality:** While farmers are reacting to fears of trade collapse, official government assessments, including statements from the Fisheries Commissioner, suggest that the direct impact on marine exports remains minimal, indicating a disconnect between market sentiment and actual trade logistics.
- **Logistics and Rising Costs:** Geopolitical instability near critical shipping bottlenecks (such as the Red Sea/Strait of Hormuz) affects broader agricultural exports. Increased insurance premiums and logistical delays are raising the cost of "Delivered Duty Paid" (DDP) shipments, putting pressure on export margins.
- **Strategic Diversification:** The resilience of the sector is increasingly tied to market diversification. Exporters are shifting away from over-reliance on single regions (like the U.S. or Gulf) and expanding into the European Union, China, and Southeast Asia to absorb production surpluses.
- **The Role of Regulatory Oversight:** Bodies like the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) remain critical in disseminating verified trade information, providing quality certification, and helping farmers navigate the transition from local distress to stable global supply chains.





Key Definitions

- **Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA):** A statutory body established under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, mandated to promote the marine products industry, fix quality standards, and provide extension services to exporters and farmers.
- **Aquaculture:** The controlled cultivation of aquatic organisms, such as shrimp and fish, in ponds or other confined environments. Unlike capture fisheries (wild-caught), aquaculture requires significant capital investment and is highly sensitive to market-price fluctuations.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **MPEDA Act, 1972:** The foundational legislation that empowers the Authority to regulate exports, maintain quality standards, and provide financial assistance to the seafood industry.
- **Article 21 (Right to Livelihood):** While not explicitly invoked in this market scenario, judicial precedents recognize that state interventions must protect the livelihood of small-scale farmers and fishers, providing the moral/legal basis for government stabilization measures during market shocks.

Conclusion

The current crisis in West Asia highlights the fragility of export-oriented aquaculture in coastal India. While the operational impact may currently be manageable, the episode underscores the vulnerability of farmers to speculative rumors and geopolitical instability. Sustaining India's marine export leadership requires not just resilient logistics but also robust information dissemination systems to prevent irrational market exits by producers.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** International Relations (Impact of West Asian instability on Indian economy); Government policies/interventions for agriculture.
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy (Export-import policy, structural reforms in agriculture, and challenges in the marine sector).
- **Essay/Ethics:** The role of the "Amrit Peedhi" and farmers in global supply chains; the ethics of market stability vs. geopolitical risks.

4. Shared Liability Framework for Digital Payment Fraud Compensation

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced a draft framework aimed at providing financial relief to victims of small-value digital frauds, specifically addressing the gap where customer negligence previously barred compensation.

- **Partial Compensation for Negligence:** In a departure from earlier "zero-liability" norms that required zero customer fault, the new rules allow for compensation even if the victim unknowingly shared credentials or downloaded malicious apps, acknowledging the sophistication of social engineering.
- **Defined Financial Caps:** The mechanism applies to transactions up to ₹50,000. Victims can receive up to 85% of the lost amount, capped at a maximum of ₹25,000. This is designed to act as a safety net for common, small-scale retail users.
- **One-Time Benefit Clause:** To prevent moral hazard and discourage habitual negligence, this compensation is proposed as a "once-in-a-lifetime" claim per customer, emphasizing that the primary responsibility for digital hygiene remains with the user.



- **Strict Reporting Timelines:** Eligibility is contingent upon the speed of action. Customers must report the fraudulent activity to their bank and the National Cyber Crime Helpline (1930) or portal within five calendar days.
- **Ecosystem Funding Model:** The compensation burden is shared. For a ₹25,000 claim, the RBI contributes approximately 76% (₹19,118), while the issuing and beneficiary banks contribute equal shares (roughly ₹2,941 each), ensuring all stakeholders have "skin in the game" to improve security.
- **Addressing Systemic Trends:** Despite a drop in high-value frauds (above ₹1 lakh), small-value cyber-attacks remain a persistent threat to financial inclusion. The framework seeks to maintain public trust in the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and digital banking ecosystems.



Key Definitions

- **Social Engineering:** A manipulative technique used by fraudsters to trick individuals into divulging confidential information, such as OTPs or passwords, often by impersonating bank officials.
- **Shared Liability:** A regulatory principle where the financial loss from a transaction is distributed between the service provider, the regulator, and the user, rather than falling entirely on one party.
- **Moral Hazard:** A situation where an individual has an incentive to take unusual risks because the negative consequences of those risks will be borne by another party (e.g., the bank or the regulator).

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Section 45L of the RBI Act, 1934:** Grants the RBI power to give directions to non-banking institutions and financial systems to ensure financial stability and consumer protection.
- **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007:** Provides the legal framework for the RBI to regulate and supervise payment systems in India, including the authority to set standards for security and grievance redressal.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000 (Section 43A):** Imposes liability on body corporates for failing to protect sensitive personal data, which complements RBI's guidelines on digital security.

Additional Keypoints

- **Incentivizing Vigilance:** By offering only partial compensation and a one-time claim, the RBI balances consumer protection with the need for individual accountability.
- **Beneficiary Bank Accountability:** Including the receiving bank in the compensation payout incentivizes banks to strengthen their "Know Your Customer" (KYC) norms to prevent "mule accounts" used by fraudsters to siphon money.
- **Focus on Retail Users:** The ₹50,000 limit specifically targets the most vulnerable segment of digital users—rural and semi-urban citizens who are primary targets of phishing.

Conclusion

The proposed framework marks a shift from a "punitive" approach toward victims of fraud to a "supportive" one. By recognizing that even vigilant users can fall prey to advanced cyber-tactics, the RBI is strengthening the social contract of digital India. However, the long-term success of this initiative will depend on the



seamless integration of the National Cyber Crime portal with banking backend systems to ensure the 5-day reporting window is met.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy (Banking sector reforms, Digital Public Infrastructure); Science & Technology (Cyber security, challenges to digital payments).
- **General Studies II:** Statutory bodies (RBI) and their role in protecting citizen interests; Governance (Government initiatives for financial inclusion).
- **Ethics (GS IV):** The dilemma of Moral Hazard vs. Compassionate Governance in financial regulation.

5. Relaunch of Canada-India Strategic and Economic Partnership

The landmark visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India (February 27 to March 2, 2026) marks a decisive "economic reset," moving past years of diplomatic friction toward a structured commercial alliance centered on energy security and technology.

- **Relaunch of CEPA Negotiations:** A primary outcome was the formal signing of Terms of Reference to resume the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Both nations aim to finalize the pact by late 2026, targeting a bilateral trade volume of \$70 billion by 2030.
- **Strategic Energy and Mineral Security:** The visit highlighted a Canadian \$2.6-billion, nine-year uranium supply deal with Cameco. Canada is positioned as a reliable provider of critical minerals (for EVs), oil, gas, and nuclear fuel to support India's clean energy transition.
- **Institutional Investment Surge:** Canadian pension funds and institutional investors (like Brookfield and Fairfax) have already deployed over Canadian \$100 billion into Indian infrastructure, including telecom towers, renewable energy, and airports, signaling long-term fiscal trust.
- **Technology and AI Collaboration:** Canada's deep Artificial Intelligence (AI) research clusters and stable regulatory environment are being leveraged by Indian IT giants like HCL Technologies, positioning Canada as a predictable gateway for Indian firms into the North American market.
- **Agriculture and Food Security:** The partnership emphasizes the role of Canadian agri-food exporters in complementing India's food sustainability needs, ensuring a stable supply chain for pulses and other essential commodities.
- **Geopolitical Realignment:** Amid global uncertainty, both nations are diversifying partnerships. For Canada, India represents a "defining economic reality," while for India, Canada offers a rules-based platform for advanced manufacturing and financial services.



Key Definitions

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** A bilateral treaty that covers trade in goods and services, investment, and intellectual property rights, aiming for a more holistic economic integration than a standard Free Trade Agreement (FTA).



- **Baseload Power:** The minimum amount of electric power a grid must provide consistently. In the context of this visit, Canadian uranium supports nuclear energy as a clean baseload source to complement India's intermittent renewables.
- **Critical Minerals:** Metallic or non-metallic elements (like lithium, cobalt, or graphite) essential for modern technologies and green energy, where Canada holds a comparative advantage in responsible extraction.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to matters with respect to which Parliament has the power to make laws, providing the basis for the Central Government to enter into international treaties and agreements.
- **Article 253:** Empowers the Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country.
- **Nuclear Energy Act, 1962:** Provides the domestic legal framework for India to engage in international nuclear commerce and ensures the safe development of nuclear power using imported fuel like Canadian uranium.

Additional Keypoints

- **The "North American Gateway":** A CEPA would provide Indian exporters a predictable rules-based entry point into the USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement) trade zone.
- **Venture Capital Expansion:** Beyond infrastructure, there is a growing trend of Canadian capital entering Indian public equity and venture markets, particularly in logistics and industrial parks.
- **Reciprocal Diplomacy:** The invitation for the Indian Prime Minister to visit Canada suggests a shift toward a "sustained and reciprocal" relationship, moving away from previous "episodic" engagement.

Conclusion

The Carney-Modi summit represents a transition from "reactive diplomacy" to "proactive commercialism." By focusing on the "Four Pillars"—Energy, Infrastructure, Tech, and Agri-food—both nations are attempting to insulate their economic interests from historical political sensitivities. The success of this reset will depend on the timely conclusion of the CEPA and the ability of the private sector to convert this high-level political will into tangible joint ventures.

UPSC Relevance

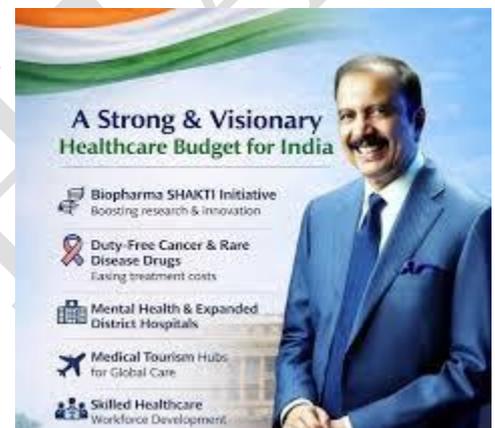
- **General Studies II:** India and its neighborhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Infrastructure and Energy.
- **International Relations:** Shift in "Indo-Pacific" strategies and the importance of middle powers like Canada in India's "Multi-aligned" foreign policy.



6. Strengthening India's Care Ecosystem: Budget 2026-27 and the Care Paradox

The Union Budget 2026-27 introduces a strategic focus on the "Care Economy" by proposing to train 1.5 lakh multiskilled caregivers. While this marks a formal recognition of geriatric and allied care needs, it highlights a structural paradox regarding India's existing 5 million "volunteer" women workers who sustain the national rural health and nutrition sectors.

- **NSQF-Aligned Skilling Initiative:** The Budget proposes training 1.5 lakh caregivers in geriatric and core care skills under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). This aims to professionalize care work to meet the demands of an aging population and expanding healthcare needs.
- **The "Volunteer" Paradox:** Despite the push for new certified professionals, India's primary welfare pillars—Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), and Mid-day Meal workers—remain classified as "honorary volunteers" rather than formal employees, depriving them of statutory benefits.
- **Economic Survey Insights on Care Penalty:** The Economic Survey 2025-26, citing the 2024 Time Use Survey, reveals a stark gender disparity; 41% of women (ages 15-59) spend 140 minutes daily on unpaid care, compared to 21.4% of men spending only 74 minutes, reinforcing care as a "gendered" domestic duty.
- **The "Shadow Labour Force":** By labeling essential public service providers as volunteers, the state limits its fiscal liability. These workers operate without formal contracts, maternity benefits, or fixed wages, receiving instead fragmented "honorariums" that vary significantly across states.
- **Judicial Intervention on Permanency:** The Supreme Court in *Dharam Singh vs State of U.P.* (2025) ruled that recurrent work central to an institution's function cannot remain temporary indefinitely. This provides a legal precedent for transitioning "honorary" care roles into permanent government posts.
- **Adoption of the ILO 5R Framework:** Experts advocate for the full implementation of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) framework—Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent—to ensure decent work conditions and a "seat at the table" for frontline care workers.



Key Definitions

- **Care Economy:** The sector of the economy comprising paid and unpaid work involving caregiving for children, the elderly, and the ill, as well as domestic chores.
- **NSQF (National Skills Qualification Framework):** A quality assurance framework that organizes qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills, and aptitude.
- **Honorarium:** A payment given for professional services that are rendered nominally without a fixed fee, used by the state to avoid the legal obligations of a "salary."

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 23:** Prohibits *begar* (forced labor) and other similar forms of forced labor. Arguments are often made that underpaying workers for essential, full-time state functions borders on forced labor.



- **Article 42 (DPSP):** Mandates the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** While it aims to extend benefits to unorganized workers, the specific inclusion of ASHA and Anganwadi workers under formal "employee" definitions remains a point of legal contention.

Additional Keypoints

- **Geriatric Care Gap:** With India's demographic shift, the demand for specialized elderly care is rising, justifying the Budget's focus on new training programs.
- **Piecemeal Benefits:** Currently, some workers are covered under *Ayushman Bharat* and *PM Shram Yogi Maandhan*, but these are insurance/pension schemes rather than wage protections.
- **Integration Opportunity:** Experts suggest the first step should be allowing existing ASHA and Anganwadi workers to undergo NSQF certification to bridge the gap between "volunteer" status and "certified professional."

Conclusion

India's ambition to become a global healthcare powerhouse is fundamentally tied to the dignity of its frontline workers. Moving beyond the "volunteer" label is not just a fiscal challenge but a cultural necessity. Reimagining the care economy requires transforming "invisible" domestic-style labor into a recognized, rewarded, and professionalized pillar of the national economy.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues relating to the management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and Education.
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to employment, mobilization of resources, and inclusive growth.
- **Social Justice:** Gender issues, the "Care Penalty," and the rights of unorganized workers in the welfare state.

7. Impact of Customs Duty Exemptions on Cancer Care Affordability

The Union Budget 2026-27 has proposed a full exemption of Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on 17 life-saving cancer drugs. This fiscal intervention targets the "cost multiplier" effect of oncology, where treatment expenses are significantly higher than average hospitalisation costs, disproportionately affecting the rural poor.

- **High Cost Multiplier:** Cancer treatment in India costs nearly three times the average hospitalisation expenditure. In public hospitals, a cancer-related stay is five times more expensive than a standard admission, creating a severe financial barrier for low-income patients.
- **Medicine as the Primary Cost Driver:** In government facilities, where consultation and surgeon fees are subsidized, medicines account for 40% to 50% of the total treatment bill. Reducing import duties directly tackles this specific out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure.
- **Rising Disease Burden:** India recorded a 26.4% increase in cancer incidence between 1990 and 2023. The duty cut serves as a strategic response to one of the highest global rises in oncology cases, aiming to prevent "catastrophic health expenditure" for middle and low-income groups.



- **Rural-Urban Disparity:** The financial strain is most acute in rural public hospitals, where the cost multiplier for cancer treatment is 5.5x compared to 4.1x in urban public facilities. This highlights the critical need for making life-saving drugs affordable in remote areas.
- **Deteriorating Affordability in Public Sector:** Data indicates that the relative cost burden in public hospitals increased by a full point (from a multiplier of 4 to 5) between 2014 and 2018, necessitating the current policy shift toward complete duty exemptions.
- **Targeted Fiscal Relief:** By exempting 17 specific drugs from Basic Customs Duty, the government aims to lower the "landed cost" of imported advanced therapies, which are often the only recourse for late-stage cancer patients.

Key Definitions

- **Basic Customs Duty (BCD):** A tax imposed under the Customs Act, 1962, on goods imported into India. Exempting BCD on drugs reduces the retail price of imported medicines.
- **Cost Multiplier:** A statistical ratio comparing the cost of treating a specific disease (cancer) to the cost of a standard medical event, used to measure the relative financial intensity of an ailment.
- **Catastrophic Health Expenditure:** Defined as out-of-pocket spending for health care that exceeds a certain proportion of a household's income, often forcing families into poverty.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

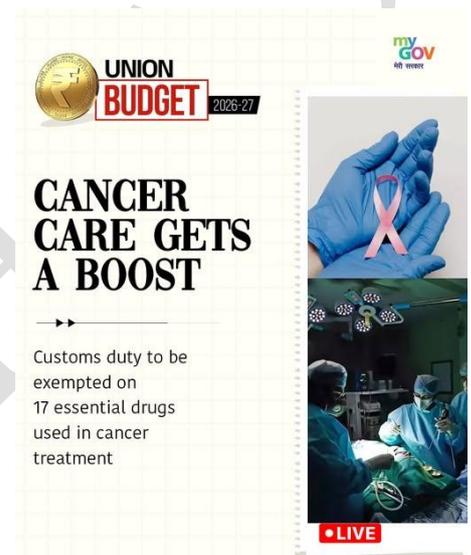
- **Article 21 (Right to Life):** The Supreme Court has repeatedly interpreted the Right to Life to include the Right to Health, placing an obligation on the State to ensure affordable medical care.
- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Directs the State to regard the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- **Section 25 of the Customs Act, 1962:** Empowers the Central Government to grant exemptions from customs duty in the public interest, which is the legal instrument used for this Budget proposal.

Additional Keypoints

- **Private vs. Public Burden:** While private hospitals are more expensive in absolute terms (avg. ₹93,305 per stay), the "relative" burden is higher in public hospitals due to the low baseline cost of other treatments, making cancer an outlier in government care.
- **Import Dependency:** Many advanced oncological drugs (biologics and targeted therapies) are not yet manufactured indigenously in India, making customs duty a significant factor in final pricing.
- **Complementary Schemes:** The duty cut is expected to work in tandem with the PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat) scheme to further reduce the financial risk for the bottom 40% of the population.

Conclusion

The exemption of basic customs duty on cancer drugs is a vital step toward bridging the "affordability gap" in Indian healthcare. By targeting the single largest component of medical expenditure—medicine—the government is providing tangible relief to the most vulnerable sections. However, for this to translate into





actual patient benefit, strict monitoring of Maximum Retail Price (MRP) adjustments by pharmaceutical companies will be essential.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Government policies and interventions for development.
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy (Budgeting, Mobilization of resources); Science and Technology (Developments in the field of medicine).
- **Social Justice:** Vulnerability of the rural poor to health shocks and the role of the State in mitigating "catastrophic health expenditure."

8. U.S. Supreme Court Ruling on Presidential Trade Powers and IEEPA

On February 20, 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered a landmark 6-3 verdict in *Trump v. United States*, significantly curbing the executive's unilateral authority to impose tariffs under emergency statutes. The ruling struck down the 2025 tariff regime, asserting that such powers reside primarily with the legislature.

- **Judicial Check on IEEPA:** The Court ruled that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977, does not grant the President the authority to impose tariffs. While IEEPA allows for freezing assets or blocking financial transfers during a national emergency, using it for broad-based taxation was deemed an unconstitutional overreach.
- **Constitutional Supremacy of Congress:** The judgment reaffirmed that the power "to lay and collect taxes, duties, and imposts" and to "regulate commerce with foreign nations" is an Article I power belonging to Congress. Any executive action in this domain requires "clear congressional authorization."
- **Economic Magnitude and Legal Limbo:** Approximately \$180 billion was collected under the now-invalidated 2025 tariffs. While the ruling renders the collection illegal, it does not automatically trigger refunds, leading to massive litigation by over 1,000 corporations, including FedEx, in the U.S. Court of International Trade.
- **Executive Workarounds:** Despite the setback, the administration has pivoted to alternative statutes such as Section 122 (Trade Act of 1974) for balance-of-payment deficits, Section 301 for unfair trade practices, and Section 232 (Trade Expansion Act of 1962) for national security, though these carry stricter time limits and procedural hurdles.
- **Impact on Global Trade Stability:** The ruling introduces a layer of "judicial scrutiny" to U.S. trade policy. For trading partners like India, China, and Canada, it shifts the focus from purely executive negotiations to the legislative and legal landscape of the United States.
- **The 150-Day Constraint:** Under the fallback Section 122 authority, new "temporary" duties are limited to 150 days unless explicitly extended by Congress, effectively placing the legislature back at the center of long-term trade strategy.





Key Definitions

- **IEEPA (International Emergency Economic Powers Act):** A 1977 federal law authorizing the President to regulate economic commerce after declaring a national emergency in response to an extraordinary foreign threat.
- **Reciprocal Tariff:** A trade policy where a country imposes import duties on another nation at the same rate that the other nation charges on its exports.
- **Section 232:** A legal provision that allows the U.S. government to conduct investigations to determine the effects of imports on "national security" and allows the President to adjust those imports.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8:** Grants Congress the exclusive power to regulate commerce with foreign nations and to levy duties.
- **The "Major Questions Doctrine":** A judicial principle applied in this case, suggesting that if an executive agency (or the President) seeks to decide an issue of great economic and political significance, it must have clear permission from Congress.
- **Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974:** Provides the President authority to deal with "large and serious" balance-of-payments deficits via temporary surcharges not exceeding 15%.

Additional Keypoints

- **Bipartisan Legislative Role:** Any permanent redesign of tariff authority now requires a bipartisan consensus in Congress, as the Court has narrowed the scope of "implied" executive powers.
- **Sectoral Specificity:** Unlike the blanket IEEPA tariffs, Section 232 requires the Secretary of Commerce to prove a national security threat, making it harder to apply to general consumer goods.
- **International Precedent:** This ruling may encourage similar legal challenges in other jurisdictions where executive "emergency" powers are used to bypass legislative oversight in trade.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's decision marks a pivotal return to constitutional originalism regarding trade. By decoupling "emergency" economic powers from "taxing" powers, the Court has forced the Executive to seek more specific, time-bound, or sectoral justifications for protectionist measures. While the immediate "tariff war" may continue through alternative legal routes, the era of unlimited, unilateral executive trade mandates appears to have faced a significant judicial roadblock.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with that of other countries (Executive-Legislative relations in U.S. vs. India); Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests.
- **General Studies III:** Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; International Trade.
- **International Relations:** U.S.-India trade ties, the impact of "Section 301" investigations on Indian exports, and the stability of the rules-based global order.



9. 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14): Navigating Global Trade Headwinds

The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organization, scheduled for March 26–29, 2026, in Yaounde, Cameroon, arrives at a critical juncture for the multilateral trading system. Amidst rising protectionism and geopolitical crises in West Asia, the 166-member body faces the daunting task of reconciling diverging interests between developed and developing nations on systemic reforms and agricultural subsidies.

- **Deadlock over Public Stockholding (PSH):** A primary objective for India is securing a "permanent solution" for food security stockpiling. Developing nations demand the right to purchase food grains at administered prices (MSP) for public distribution without the risk of legal challenges, while the Cairns Group and developed nations view these as market-distorting subsidies.
- **Restoration of the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB):** The WTO's "crown jewel"—the two-tier appellate system—has been paralyzed since 2019 due to the U.S. blocking judge appointments. India and the Global South are pushing for a fully functional, independent appellate body, whereas some developed nations advocate for more informal, alternative litigation methods.
- **E-commerce Moratorium and Digital Divide:** WTO members must decide whether to extend the 1998 moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions. India has flagged significant revenue losses from digital imports (movies, music, software) and seeks to end the moratorium to provide policy space for domestic digital industrialization.
- **Fisheries Subsidies (Phase 2):** Following the 2022 agreement, MC14 aims to finalize "additional disciplines" to curb overcapacity and overfishing. India's stance focuses on "Special and Differential Treatment" (S&DT) to protect the livelihoods of small-scale, traditional fishers while disciplining large-scale industrial fleets from distant-water fishing nations.
- **Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD):** A China-led plurilateral initiative, supported by 128 members, seeks to integrate investment facilitation into the WTO framework. India and South Africa have historically opposed its inclusion as a formal WTO agreement, arguing that it lacks a multilateral mandate and could erode the organization's foundational consensus-based nature.
- **Geopolitical Disruptions:** The conference is overshadowed by the West Asia crisis and unilateral trade measures by major economies. These disruptions have increased shipping costs and insurance premiums, necessitating a WTO response to ensure "level playing field" issues in maritime and energy trade.

14th WTO Ministerial Conference



14th WTO Ministerial Conference
Yaounde - Cameroon
2026

Key Definitions

- **Ministerial Conference:** The highest decision-making body of the WTO, established under the Marrakesh Agreement (1994), mandated to meet at least once every two years.
- **Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM):** A tool sought by developing countries to temporarily raise tariffs to protect domestic farmers from sudden import surges or price drops.
- **E-commerce Moratorium:** A long-standing agreement not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions (digital products) during the transition between ministerial meetings.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO:** The foundational international treaty that provides the legal personality to the WTO. In India, international treaties are signed under the executive power of the Union (Article 73).
- **Article 253 of the Indian Constitution:** Empowers Parliament to make laws for implementing international agreements. Any outcome at MC14 requiring domestic legislative change (like tariff adjustments) would be processed under this article.
- **The "Peace Clause":** A temporary legal shield established at the 2013 Bali Ministerial that prevents WTO members from challenging India's food procurement programs, even if they breach the 10% subsidy ceiling.

Additional Keypoints

- **Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs):** These are plurilateral negotiations (like those on E-commerce or IFD) that occur among a subset of WTO members. India remains wary of JSIs, viewing them as a threat to the multilateral, consensus-driven spirit of the WTO.
- **S&DT Provisions:** Special and Differential Treatment provisions allow developing and least-developed countries (LDCs) longer timeframes for implementing agreements and greater flexibilities in trade commitments.
- **Global South Leadership:** India's role at MC14 is increasingly defined by its leadership of the G-33 and the African Group, advocating for "development-centric" outcomes that prioritize poverty alleviation over market access for advanced economies.

Conclusion

The Yaounde Ministerial represents a test of the WTO's relevance in a fragmented world. While developed nations are pushing for "modernization" and digital trade expansion, India and its peers are fighting for "traditional" issues like food security and dispute resolution restoration. A failure to achieve a permanent solution on PSH or a roadmap for the Appellate Body could further undermine faith in the rules-based multilateral trading system.

UPSC Relevance

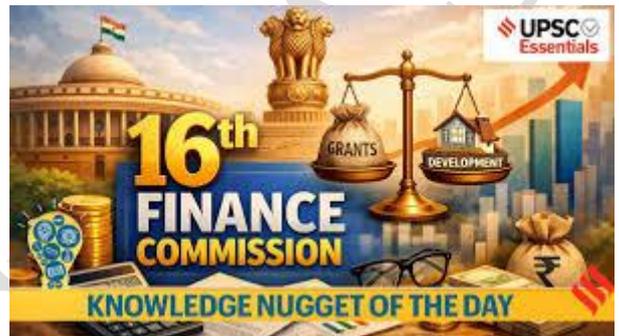
- **General Studies II:** Important International institutions, agencies and fora—their structure, mandate; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India.
- **General Studies III:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; Issues of food security.
- **Economic Diplomacy:** The evolution of India's stance from the Doha Development Agenda to the current MC14 agenda.

10. 16th Finance Commission and the Urban Fiscal Paradox

The 16th Finance Commission (FC) has outlined the roadmap for fiscal devolution to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) for the 2026-31 period. While urban centers contribute nearly 67% of India's GDP and 90% of total government revenue, the fiscal framework reveals a persistent gap between the economic importance of cities and their financial empowerment.



- **Stagnant GDP-to-Devolution Ratio:** Under the 16th FC, ULBs are allocated approximately ₹3.56 lakh crore over five years (roughly ₹75,000 crore annually). Despite the absolute increase, the transfer remains stagnant at about 0.13% of the projected GDP, failing to keep pace with the needs of rapid urbanization.
- **Per Capita Devolution Gap:** With India's urban population projected to exceed 600 million during the 2026-30 cycle, the per capita transfer remains nearly constant or declines in real terms. This stagnation limits the capacity of cities to address infrastructure deficits and rising service demands.
- **Conditionality and Performance-Based Grants:** Roughly 20% of funds are linked to strict performance criteria, including the regular constitution of local bodies, auditing of accounts, and increasing Own Source Revenue (OSR). The benchmark for OSR is set at raising ₹1,200 per household through property taxes and user charges.
- **Tied Grants vs. Fiscal Autonomy:** A substantial portion of grants remains "tied" to specific sectors like sanitation and water management. While addressing core needs, this earmarking restricts the flexibility of cities to prioritize local issues like climate resilience or public transport.
- **The "Peri-Urban" Integration Challenge:** The Commission has earmarked ₹10,000 crore as an incentive for merging urban villages (population >1 lakh) into city limits. Critics argue this may infringe upon state jurisdiction over urban development and disrupt robust rural governance models in states like Kerala.
- **The Divisible Pool and Cess Concerns:** The FC remains silent on the growing share of "Cess and Surcharges" collected by the Centre (approx. 2.2% of GDP), which remains outside the divisible pool. Since much of this is generated in cities, its exclusion limits the actual revenue available for urban devolution.



Key Definitions

- **Own Source Revenue (OSR):** Revenue generated by local bodies through their own powers of taxation (e.g., property tax) and non-tax sources (e.g., user charges for water or parking).
- **Tied Grants:** Financial assistance provided by the Centre or State that can only be spent on specific, pre-determined sectors or projects.
- **Divisible Pool:** The portion of central tax revenue that is shared between the Union and the States based on the recommendations of the Finance Commission.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 280:** Mandates the President to constitute a Finance Commission every five years to recommend the distribution of net proceeds of taxes between the Union and States.
- **74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992):** Revolutionized urban governance by providing constitutional status to ULBs and mandating the creation of State Finance Commissions (SFCs) to review their financial position.
- **Twelfth Schedule:** Contains 18 functional items (e.g., urban planning, land-use regulation) that can be devolved to ULBs under the 74th Amendment.



Additional Keypoints

- **Utilisation Crisis:** Historical data shows a significant backlog in fund utilization; nearly ₹30,000-35,000 crore meant for ULBs under the 15th FC remained unspent due to administrative bottlenecks.
- **Climate Change Silence:** Despite cities being at the frontlines of climate risks (urban flooding, heat islands), the 16th FC lacks a dedicated fiscal channel for urban climate adaptation.
- **Administrative Complexity:** Forcing rural-to-urban transitions for revenue purposes can lead to lopsided development where peripheral areas get taxed without receiving commensurate urban services.

Conclusion

The 16th Finance Commission's approach emphasizes "fiscal discipline" and "self-reliance" for Indian cities. However, by maintaining a low GDP-share and increasing conditionalities, it risks turning ULBs into administrative agents of the Centre rather than autonomous units of self-government. For a truly "Viksit" urban India, the transition must shift from being an enabler of central schemes to empowering cities to plan their own sustainable futures.

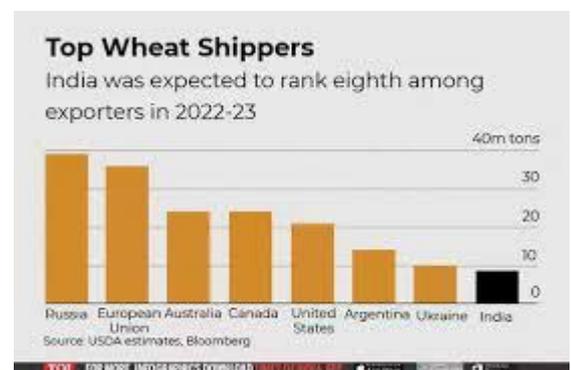
UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth and development; Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.
- **Essay & Ethics:** Urban-Rural divide, the ethics of taxation without adequate representation/services, and the philosophy of "Jan Bhagidari" in urban planning.

11. Impact of West Asia Crisis on India's Wheat Export Resurgence

The intensifying conflict in West Asia has emerged as a major strategic bottleneck for India's agricultural trade. Despite a record projected production of 120 million tonnes and the reopening of exports after a four-year hiatus, volatile freight rates and maritime insecurity are dampening the "rabi" harvest's global prospects.

- **Logistical Paralysis and Freight Volatility:** Geopolitical tensions have led to highly unstable shipping costs and uncertain vessel schedules. This uncertainty is deterring exporters from committing to large forward contracts, as rising insurance premiums and fuel surcharges threaten to erode profit margins.
- **Missed Opportunity Amidst Rising Global Prices:** While the FAO Cereal Price Index indicates a 1.8% rise in world wheat prices due to winterkill risks in the US and Europe, Indian farmers are unable to fully capitalize on this surge. Disruptions in the Black Sea and West Asia have effectively neutralized India's competitive price advantage.
- **Shift to "Neighborhood First" Logistics:** In response to the high cost of deep-sea shipping, Indian traders are redirecting supplies to land-linked or nearby maritime markets. Bangladesh, Nepal, and





Sri Lanka are emerging as the primary stable outlets, minimizing exposure to the volatile corridors of the Middle East.

- **Procurement Caution and Inventory Risks:** Industry bodies like the Roller Flour Millers' Federation of India highlight that many traders are avoiding building large inventories. This caution stems from "carrying cost" losses incurred in previous seasons, leading to a "hand-to-mouth" procurement strategy that may affect price stability for farmers.
- **Supply Chain Displacement:** The crisis has created a paradox where India possesses a massive surplus (120 million tonnes) but faces restricted market access. This displacement forces a domestic glut, potentially putting downward pressure on local prices even as global demand remains high.
- **Strategic Role of Malwa and Northern Belts:** Major wheat-producing regions like Madhya Pradesh's Malwa belt are particularly affected, as their export-oriented high-quality Sharbati and Durum varieties face restricted pathways to premium international markets.

Key Definitions

- **Rabi Harvest:** The winter crop in India, sown in October-November and harvested in Spring (March-April), where wheat is the primary staple.
- **FAO Cereal Price Index:** A measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of cereal commodities, used as a global benchmark for food inflation.
- **Carrying Costs:** The total cost of holding inventory, including warehousing, insurance, and opportunity cost of capital; high carrying costs often deter traders from bulk procurement.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 301:** Guarantees freedom of trade, commerce, and intercourse throughout the territory of India, which is frequently impacted by central export bans or restrictions to manage domestic inflation.
- **Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955:** Empowering the government to regulate the production, supply, and distribution of wheat to prevent hoarding and ensure food security.
- **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** Provides the legal framework for the Public Distribution System (PDS), which competes with the export sector for the procurement of wheat surpluses at Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Additional Keypoints

- **Black Sea Tension Synergy:** The continued disruption in the Russia-Ukraine corridor (Black Sea) initially created a vacuum for Indian wheat, but the West Asia crisis has now blocked the primary transit routes to North Africa and the Mediterranean.
- **Food Inflation Balancing Act:** The government faces a delicate balance—allowing exports to help farmers earn better returns versus restricting exports to maintain a buffer for the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).
- **Maritime Insurance:** The "War Risk Premium" added by international insurers for vessels passing near conflict zones has increased the "Landed Cost" of Indian wheat, making it less competitive in distant markets like Egypt or Turkey.



Conclusion

India's return to the global wheat market is being stifled not by a lack of production, but by the collapse of predictable maritime logistics. While record harvests offer the potential for India to emerge as a global "breadbasket," the West Asia crisis underscores the vulnerability of landlocked surpluses to maritime chokepoints. For Indian agriculture to be truly "Atmanirbhar" and export-ready, domestic procurement infrastructure must be coupled with resilient, diversified trade routes.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and MSP; Public Distribution System; Food security; Transport and marketing of agricultural produce.
- **General Studies II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; International Relations (Impact of West Asia on Indian trade).
- **Economy:** Balance of Trade, Agriculture as a driver of export earnings, and the impact of global commodity prices on domestic inflation.

12. Risks of AI-Generated Wildlife Content: Impacts on Conservation and Safety

The rise of "AI slop"—low-effort, hyper-realistic AI-generated animal videos—is fundamentally altering public perception of the natural world. While these clips often chase viral engagement on short-form platforms like TikTok and YouTube Shorts, they present a growing threat to wildlife conservation, digital literacy, and human safety.

- **Distortion of Animal Behaviour:** AI videos frequently depict implausible "friendships" between predators and prey or domestic-style interactions between humans and wild animals. This encourages **anthropomorphism**—attributing human emotions to animals—which can lead to dangerous real-world encounters when humans fail to recognize potential threats.
- **Threats to Conservation Efforts:** A landmark September 2025 report in *Conservation Biology* (e70138) highlights that AI deepfakes can mislead the public into believing vulnerable species are common or easily accessible. This misinformation can lead to **overtourism** in sensitive habitats and a decline in support for critical protection projects.
- **Retaliatory Violence and Fear:** Sensationalized AI content often portrays animals as crazed or excessively violent (e.g., sharks mauling swimmers or tigers attacking people in beds). This "fear-mongering" can incite public panic and lead to **retaliatory killing** of wild animals by communities who perceive a fake digital threat as real.
- **Fueling the Illegal Wildlife Trade:** By making exotic and dangerous animals appear as "cute" or "attractive" pets, AI-generated content can increase the demand for exotic wildlife. This directly undermines global and national laws aimed at curbing **wildlife trafficking**.
- **Erosion of Scientific Trust:** As hyper-realistic fakes become indistinguishable from reality, genuine conservation tools like **camera trap footage** and bioacoustic recordings may face public skepticism. This "liar's dividend" makes it harder for scientists to use digital evidence to prove environmental crimes or track species.





- **Technological Dual-Use:** While "entertainment AI" is harmful, WWF-India and other groups utilize "responsible AI" for positive impact, such as segregating thousands of mammal images from camera traps in minutes—a task that previously took researchers days to complete manually.

Key Definitions

- **Anthropomorphism:** The interpretation of non-human things or events in terms of human characteristics, which in wildlife leads to a misunderstanding of instinctual behaviors.
- **AI Slop:** A term used for low-quality, high-volume AI-generated content designed purely for algorithmic engagement rather than informational value.
- **Deepfakes:** Synthetic media in which a person or animal in an existing image or video is replaced with someone else's likeness using artificial neural networks.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026:** Notified in February 2026, these rules mandate the "prominent labelling" of synthetically generated information (SGI). Platforms must now remove non-consensual deepfakes within **2 hours** and other illegal AI content within **3 hours** to maintain "safe harbour" protection.
- **Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000:** The legal principle of "safe harbour" that protects intermediaries from liability for user-generated content. Under the 2026 amendments, platforms lose this immunity if they fail to label AI-generated content or act on takedown orders.
- **Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution:** Specifies the Fundamental Duty of every citizen "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures."
- **The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Prohibits the capturing, killing, or trafficking of listed species; AI content that promotes these activities can be treated as an incitement to illegal acts.

Additional Keypoints

- **Platform Incentives:** Algorithms on X and Meta reward "virality," incentivizing creators to produce high-impact, low-cost AI violence involving animals to maximize ad revenue.
- **Public Perception vs. Reality:** A tiger depicted in an AI video in an African savanna (where they do not exist) can confuse ecological literacy, making it harder for younger generations to distinguish between native and invasive species.
- **Digital Traceability:** The 2026 IT Rules now require platforms to embed permanent **metadata or provenance markers** in AI files, allowing law enforcement to trace the origin of harmful animal deepfakes.

Conclusion

AI-generated animal videos are not just "harmless fun"; they are a digital pollutant that warps our understanding of ecology and safety. While AI is a powerful tool for processing conservation data, its misuse for "slop" entertainment threatens to undo decades of public education regarding wildlife boundaries. Combating this trend requires a combination of strict regulatory enforcement of labelling laws and enhanced digital literacy for users.



UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III:** Issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights; Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, and AI; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation.
 - **General Studies II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation (IT Rules 2026).
 - **Environment & Ecology:** Human-wildlife conflict; Threats to biodiversity; Impact of misinformation on conservation.
-

VIDHVATH IAS