



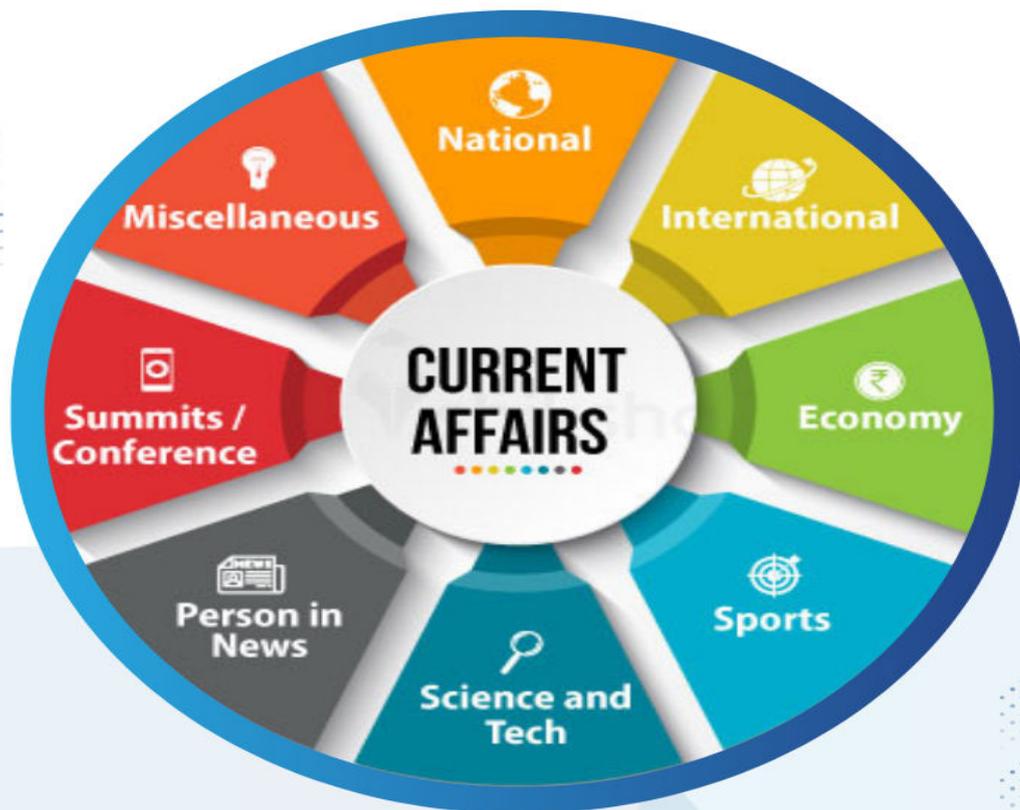
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 21/03/2026 (SATURDAY)



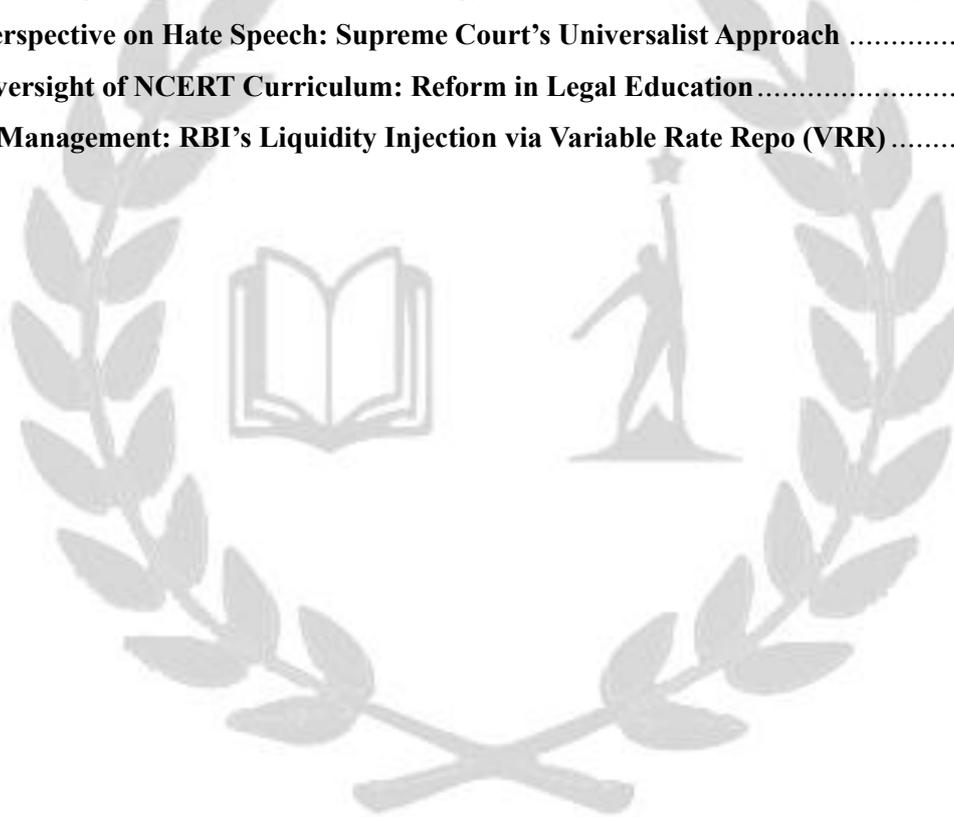
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VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Escalation of Conflict: Iran's Strikes on Israel and Gulf Energy Infrastructure

Core Summary of Developments

- **Strategic Shift in Targeting:** Iran has intensified its military operations, moving beyond conventional proxies to launch direct missile and drone strikes against Israel and critical energy infrastructure in the Gulf.
- **Impact on Global Energy Security:** Major facilities, including Kuwait's **Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery** (processing approx. 730,000 barrels/day), have been targeted, causing fires and disrupting supply chains in one of the world's most oil-dependent regions.
- **Regional Spillover:** The conflict has expanded to include Bahrain and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, where drone interceptions have been reported, signaling a breakdown in regional stability despite previous diplomatic thaws.
- **Resilience of Iran's Military Industrial Complex:** Despite three weeks of U.S.-Israeli strikes targeting Tehran's leadership and energy assets, the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** claims continued production and stockpiling of ballistic missiles.
- **Humanitarian and Expatriate Cost:** The conflict has begun to claim non-combatant lives, notably the death of an **Indian national in Riyadh** due to missile debris, highlighting the risks to the 8.5 million-strong Indian diaspora in West Asia.
- **Economic Chokepoints:** Iranian actions appear specifically designed to "choke off" oil supplies, utilizing asymmetric warfare (drones and missiles) to scramble the global economy and force international pressure for a ceasefire.

Key Definitions

- **Asymmetric Warfare:** A type of war between belligerents whose relative military power differs significantly, or whose strategy or tactics differ significantly.
- **Mina Al-Ahmadi:** A strategic petroleum refinery in Kuwait; it is a cornerstone of West Asian energy exports and a critical node in the global oil market.
- **IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps):** A branch of the Iranian Armed Forces intended to protect the country's Islamic republic system from internal and external threats.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions (UPSC Context)

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Mandates that India shall endeavor to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Protection of Diaspora:** While not a specific article, the Government of India operates under the **Passports Act, 1967** and established protocols for "Operation Rahat" style evacuations to protect citizens abroad during sovereign conflicts.
- **Energy Security:** India's **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)** program is the primary legal and logistical defense against the supply shocks caused by West Asian instability.





Additional Key Points

- **The "Grey Zone" Conflict:** Iran's use of drones allows for "plausible deniability" and complicates the legal threshold for a full-scale conventional declaration of war by Gulf states.
- **India's Balancing Act:** India must navigate its "Link West" policy, maintaining ties with Iran (Chabahar Port) while protecting its strategic partnership with Israel and energy interests in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Conclusion

The targeting of Gulf energy sites marks a dangerous transition from a localized Levant conflict to a global economic threat. As Iran demonstrates its ability to sustain missile production under duress, the probability of a protracted "war of attrition" increases. For India, the death of a citizen in Riyadh serves as a grim reminder that the West Asian crisis is no longer a distant geopolitical issue but a direct threat to national interest and the safety of its overseas workforce.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** International Relations, Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.
- **General Studies III:** Security challenges and their management in border areas, Energy Security, and Global Economic Impact.

2. Judicial Recusal and the CEC Selection Law Controversy

Summary of Key Developments

- **Recusal of the CJI:** Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant has shifted petitions challenging the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** to a different Bench to avoid potential "conflict of interest."
- **Avoidance of Bias:** The CJI noted that since the law directly concerns the inclusion or exclusion of the CJI's office from the selection panel, any ruling by a Bench he heads could invite criticism; he further suggested the case be heard by judges not in line to become future CJIs.
- **Dilution of Anoop Baranwal Ruling:** Petitioners, including the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), argue that the 2023 Act deliberately dilutes the Supreme Court's 2023 verdict in *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India*, which had mandated the CJI's presence in the selection committee.
- **Composition of the Selection Panel:** The contentious **Section 7(1)** of the new Act replaces the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister, creating a panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition (or leader of the largest opposition party), and a Cabinet Minister.
- **Executive Preponderance:** The primary legal challenge rests on the shift from a balanced panel to one where the executive (PM and a nominated Minister) holds a 2:1 majority, potentially undermining the independence of the Election Commission.
- **Scheduled Hearing:** Acknowledging the sensitivity of the matter, the Bench has listed the case for April 7 before an appropriate Bench that excludes the prospective CJI to ensure perceived and actual impartiality.



Key Definitions

- **Recusal:** The act of a judge abstaining from participating in a legal proceeding due to a conflict of interest or lack of impartiality.
- **Conflict of Interest:** A situation where an individual's personal or professional interests could compromise their judgment, decisions, or actions in an official capacity.
- **Executive Preponderance:** A state where the executive branch of government holds dominant power or influence over other branches or independent bodies.

'NO ROLE FOR COURT'

- Centre tells SC inclusion of CJI in CEC, EC selection process would amount to judicial overreach, **violation of separation of powers**
- Says 'presumption that inclusion of a judicial member' would bring fairness in selection is **'wholly flawed'**
- Argues that court can quash appointment if an unqualified person is chosen. SC replies **no qualification has been fixed**

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 324(2):** Provides that the appointment of the CEC and ECs shall be made by the President, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament.
- **Independence of the EC:** Though not explicitly mentioned as a "Basic Structure" element in isolation, the Supreme Court has held that "free and fair elections" are part of the Basic Structure, which necessitates an independent Election Commission.
- **Section 7 of the 2023 Act:** Specifies the Appointment Committee's composition; this is the specific provision currently under judicial scrutiny for allegedly bypassing the *Anoop Baranwal* guidelines.
- **Doctrine of Separation of Powers:** A constitutional principle where the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary function in their own domains; petitioners argue the new law encroaches upon judicial oversight of democratic purity.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **The Anoop Baranwal Precedent:** In March 2023, a Constitution Bench ruled that until Parliament makes a law, the selection committee should consist of the PM, LoP, and the CJI to ensure a "fair and transparent" process.
- **Legislative Overruling:** While Parliament has the power to vacate a judicial vacuum by passing a law, the judiciary can still test that law against the touchstone of the Constitution and the principle of institutional independence.
- **Nemo Judex in Causa Sua:** This Latin maxim means "no one should be a judge in their own cause." The CJI's decision to shift the Bench aligns with this fundamental principle of natural justice.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The transition of the selection process from a judicially-integrated panel to an executive-dominated one marks a significant friction point between the judiciary and the legislature. The CJI's move to ensure the case is heard by a "neutral" Bench highlights the Supreme Court's commitment to procedural propriety. For the UPSC aspirant, this topic is critical as it intersects with the independence of constitutional bodies, judicial ethics (recusal), and the evolving nature of the "Separation of Powers" in Indian democracy.

UPSC Relevance:

- **General Studies II:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Judiciary (Recusal, Doctrine of Bias); Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.



- **Ethics (GS IV):** Conflict of Interest and the principle of "Nemo Judex in Causa Sua."

3. Structural Shift in Indian Agriculture: The Decline of Cotton Acreage

Summary of Key Trends

- **Shift to Remunerative Crops:** Indian farmers are increasingly diversifying away from cotton toward rice and maize, driven by the search for stable yields and higher returns. Between 2019-20 and 2025-26, cotton acreage fell by nearly 20% to 11.2 million hectares.
- **Productivity Crisis:** India's cotton yield remains stagnant at 430-450 kg/hectare, significantly lagging behind global leaders like Australia (1,800-2,200 kg/hectare) and even neighboring Pakistan (700-800 kg/hectare).
- **Technological Stagnation:** The sector is hampered by a reliance on aging Bollgard-II technology, while competitors have moved to advanced versions. This gap has increased vulnerability to pests like the Pink Bollworm and erratic weather patterns.
- **Rise of Alternatives:** Maize acreage has surged by 64.7% due to strong demand from the livestock feed industry and the government's Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP), which offers an assured market.
- **Policy Intervention:** To arrest this decline, the Union Budget 2025-26 announced a five-year "Cotton Mission" with an allocation of ₹500 crore, focusing on technology support and extra-long staple (ELS) varieties.
- **Macroeconomic Impact:** As cotton supports 6 million farmers and forms the backbone of the textile export industry, the shift threatens rural livelihoods and India's competitive edge in the global garment market.

Key Definitions

- **Extra-Long Staple (ELS) Cotton:** High-quality cotton with longer fibers, used for premium textiles; India currently faces a deficit in this category, necessitating imports.
- **Bollgard-II:** A second-generation insect-protected cotton technology; its waning effectiveness against resistant pests is a primary cause of falling yields.
- **Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP):** A government initiative to blend ethanol (often derived from maize) with petrol to reduce crude oil imports and carbon emissions.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48 (DPSP):** Directs the State to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines.
- **Entry 14, State List (Schedule VII):** Agriculture, including agricultural education and research, is primarily a State subject, though the Centre influences it through Missions and MSP.
- **Seed Act, 1966:** Regulates the quality of seeds for sale, essential for the "Cotton Mission" to introduce high-yielding and pest-resistant varieties.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Global Yield Gap:** India's yield is nearly 1/4th of China's, highlighting a critical need for precision farming and biotechnology.



- **Structural Bottlenecks:** Small landholding sizes and limited access to micro-irrigation prevent the adoption of high-density planting systems (HDPS) used in Brazil and the US.
- **Industrial Linkage:** The textile industry contributes roughly 2% to India's GDP and 12% to export earnings; a raw material shortage could lead to higher manufacturing costs.

Conclusion

The transition from cotton to rice and maize reflects a rational economic choice by farmers faced with technological stagnation and climate risks. While the new Cotton Mission is a timely step, its success depends on bridging the biotechnology gap and improving per-hectare productivity to international benchmarks. Failure to revitalize the sector could lead to a permanent erosion of India's dominance in the global cotton trade.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country; e-technology in the aid of farmers; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Economics of animal-rearing.
- **GS Paper I:** Geography—Distribution of key natural resources (cotton belts); factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries (Textile Industry).

4. Legislative Action Against Malpractices: Chhattisgarh Examination Bill 2026

Summary of Key Provisions

- **Objective and Scope:** The Chhattisgarh Assembly has unanimously passed the 'Chhattisgarh (Lok Bharti evam Vyavsayik Parikshao me Anuchit Sadhano ki Roktham) Vidheyak, 2026' to eliminate unfair means in recruitment and higher education entrance exams.
- **Penalties for Candidates:** Aspirants found guilty of malpractice face result withholding and a debarment from all public examinations for a period ranging from 1 to 3 years.
- **Stringent Punishment for Organized Crime:** The Bill prescribes a maximum imprisonment of 10 years and fines reaching up to ₹1 crore for specified high-level violations and organized cheating syndicates.
- **Liability of Service Providers:** Educational institutions or private service providers involved in leakages can be fined up to ₹1 crore, face a 3-year debarment, and are liable for the recovery of examination costs.
- **Categorization of Offences:** Specific violations such as unauthorized possession of question papers, illegal entry into centers, and tampering with evaluation records attract 1 to 5 years of jail and fines up to ₹5 lakh.
- **Targeting Non-Candidates:** For individuals other than students (middlemen or officials) involved in paper leaks, the legislation mandates rigorous imprisonment of 3 to 10 years and fines up to ₹10 lakh.



Key Definitions

- **Unfair Means:** Includes unauthorized paper disclosure, impersonation (dummy candidates), tampering with computer networks, or providing assistance to candidates during examinations.



- **Service Provider:** Any agency, person, or group engaged by the examination authority to conduct any stage of the public examination, including printing or hosting digital platforms.
- **Public Examination:** Exams conducted by the State Public Service Commission (PSC), Vyapam, or other state-notified bodies for recruitment or admissions.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 315-323:** Deals with the Public Service Commissions for the Union and the States. Ensuring the integrity of these bodies is vital for the "merit system" envisioned by the Constitution.
- **Entry 41, State List (Schedule VII):** State Public Services; State Public Service Commission. This gives the State Legislature the competence to enact laws governing state recruitments.
- **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024:** A central legislation passed by the Parliament. The Chhattisgarh Bill aligns with the national trend of criminalizing organized cheating to ensure a level playing field.
- **Right to Equality (Article 14 & 16):** Malpractices in exams violate the fundamental right to equal opportunity in public employment for honest candidates.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Context of Scrutiny:** The legislation follows intense public and judicial scrutiny regarding previous irregularities in the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission (CGPSC) recruitments.
- **Deterrence Effect:** By introducing "recovery of costs," the state shifts the financial burden of re-conducting cancelled exams onto the perpetrators, acting as a strong fiscal deterrent.
- **Non-Bailable Nature:** Similar to the Central Act, such state laws typically categorize these offenses as cognizable and non-bailable to prevent easy exit for kingpins.

Conclusion

The passage of the Chhattisgarh Examination Bill 2026 represents a critical step toward restoring institutional credibility in state recruitments. By distinguishing between the penalties for desperate candidates and professional paper-leak mafias, the law balances reform with retribution. However, the success of this legislation will depend on its implementation and the digital fortification of examination infrastructure to prevent leaks at the source.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (PSC); Governance issues; Transparency and accountability.
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface; Integrity in public service; Case studies on corruption and administrative ethics.

5. Socio-Cultural Tradition: Sri Chowdeswari Devi Jathara, Kurnool

Core Summary of the Tradition

- **The Ritual Venue:** The annual Jathara (festival) is celebrated at the Sri Chowdeswari Devi temple located in Kallur, on the suburbs of Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh.
- **Symbolic Bullock Cart Rounds:** A central highlight of the festival involves local youth sitting on decorated bullock carts and circumambulating (going around) the temple premises.



- **Agricultural Connection:** The use of bullock carts signifies the deep-rooted link between the deity and the agrarian community, symbolizing gratitude for a good harvest and seeking future prosperity.
- **Community Participation:** The Jathara serves as a massive socio-cultural gathering, drawing devotees from across the Rayalaseema region, fostering communal harmony and regional identity.
- **Devotional Significance:** Sri Chowdeswari Devi is revered as a powerful manifestation of the Divine Mother (Shakti), particularly significant to the Togata Veera Kshatriya community and local farmers.
- **Preservation of Intangible Heritage:** Such local festivals act as a living museum of Andhra Pradesh's rural traditions, keeping ancient folk customs alive amidst rapid urbanization.



Key Definitions

- **Jathara:** A Sanskrit-derived term used in South India, particularly in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, to describe a local religious festival or pilgrimage gathering.
- **Circumambulation (Pradakshina):** The act of walking around a sacred object or deity, usually in a clockwise direction, as a mark of respect and devotion.
- **Rayalaseema:** A geographic region in Andhra Pradesh comprising districts like Kurnool, Nandyal, and Anantapur, known for its distinct folk traditions and "Veerabhadra" or "Shakti" cults.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 25:** Guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, which protects the conduct of such traditional Jatharas.
- **Article 29:** Mandates that any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India having a distinct language, script, or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.
- **Article 51A(f):** Part of Fundamental Duties, it states that it is the duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.
- **Animal Welfare Laws:** While bullock carts are traditional, the use of animals in such festivals is subject to the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960**, ensuring that the animals are treated with dignity during the ritual.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Deity Iconography:** Sri Chowdeswari Devi is often associated with the protection of the weaving and farming communities; she is frequently depicted in a fierce form, emphasizing her role as a protector.
- **Folk Arts Integration:** These Jatharas are typically accompanied by folk performances like 'Chekka Bhajana' or 'Kolattam', which are vital for the local performing arts ecosystem.
- **Economic Impact:** Local festivals drive the rural economy through temporary marketplaces (Melas), supporting local artisans, toy makers, and small-scale vendors.



Conclusion

The Sri Chowdeswari Devi Jathara is more than a religious event; it is a repository of the historical and social fabric of the Kurnool region. By integrating agricultural elements like bullock carts into religious circumambulation, the festival bridges the gap between the sacred and the secular. In an era of globalization, such localized traditions reinforce cultural continuity and the unique identity of the Deccan's rural heartland.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies I:** Indian Culture - Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times; Regional festivals and folk traditions of South India.
- **General Studies II:** Management of social sector/Services relating to Culture; Protection of the interests of distinct cultural groups.

6. Analytical Review: India's Foreign Policy Amidst the Iran-Israel-US Conflict

Core Summary of the Debate

- **Strategic Pragmatism vs. Civilizational Ties:** The current debate centers on India's response to the Israeli-American military action against Iran, contrasting the government's "cold calculation" of national interest against critics who view the stance as a departure from long-standing ties with Tehran.
- **National Interest as the Primary Driver:** Foreign policy remains an instrument to protect sovereignty and economic well-being. The government's current tilt is seen as a move to prioritize relations with the US (largest trading partner and technology provider) and the Gulf states (home to 10 million Indians and a key energy source).
- **Controversy over Diplomatic Protocol:** Specific criticism has been directed at the decision not to formally condole the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, at the highest level, which some interpret as a "weak-kneed" surrender to Western pressure.
- **Consistency in "Selfish" Policy:** Despite ideological shifts between ruling parties, the fundamental objective remains "Nehruvian" in its essence—essentially "selfish" and anchored in the pursuit of national interest, as once articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru in his correspondence with Einstein.
- **Limits of Strategic Autonomy:** While "Strategic Autonomy" is the preferred label, the author argues that the government missed opportunities to demonstrate independence, such as through higher-level diplomatic gestures toward Iran without compromising its core security interests.
- **Timing of Diplomatic Engagements:** The Prime Minister's visit to Israel (February 2026) just days before the escalation against Iran is highlighted as a moment where ideological affinity and geopolitical timing intersected, signaling India's bet on the US-Israeli coalition.



Key Definitions

- **Strategic Autonomy:** The ability of a state to pursue its national interests and adopt its preferred foreign policy without being constrained by other states.
- **Sui Generis Interests:** Interests that are unique or of their own kind, such as the fundamental duty to defend a nation's territorial integrity.



- **Ideological Orientation:** The set of beliefs or political philosophies of a ruling party that may influence—but ideally should not dictate—long-term foreign policy.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Mandates the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to all matters with respect to which Parliament has the power to make laws, including "Foreign Affairs" (Entry 10, List I).
- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **The Gulf Factor:** With nearly 10 million Indians in the Gulf sending back billions in remittances, any policy shift must account for the stability of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries.
- **Energy Chokepoints:** Iran's decision to allow Indian oil tankers safe passage through the **Strait of Hormuz** underscores the "graciousness" of Tehran despite India's perceived tilt, highlighting the fragility of energy security.
- **The Realist Paradigm:** The author notes that in a democracy, the government must explain its rationale to the people, as foreign policy decisions, even if unpopular, must be objective and calculated.

Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has forced India into a difficult balancing act, testing the limits of its "Strategic Autonomy." While the government appears to have aligned with the US-Israeli axis based on trade and technology dependencies, the lack of traditional diplomatic empathy toward Iran risks long-term "civilizational" friction. Ultimately, the debate highlights that while labels like "autonomy" are fashionable, the core of Indian foreign policy remains a pragmatic, and at times "selfish," pursuit of national survival and growth.

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; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **Political Science Optional:** Principles of Indian Foreign Policy; India's relations with the USA and West Asia; Challenges to Strategic Autonomy.

7. Displacement and Dilemmas: The Great Nicobar Mega-Infrastructure Project

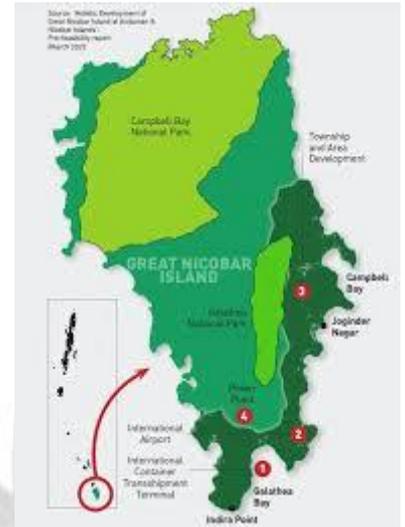
Summary of Key Issues

- **Settler Grievances over Compensation:** Non-tribal settler families (primarily descendants of ex-servicemen settled between 1969-1975) are protesting "unreasonably low" compensation rates. Under the **RFCTLARR Act, 2013**, they are being offered ₹113–₹180 per sq. metre, contrasted sharply with ₹11,370–₹20,500 per sq. metre provided for tourism-related acquisitions in the Andaman islands.
- **Double Displacement of Ex-Servicemen:** The affected community represents families originally brought to the island for strategic national security purposes. These families have already survived



two major displacements—initial settlement and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami—and now face a third due to the 2026 airport and transshipment project.

- **Marginalization of PVTGs:** The project necessitates the de-notification of approximately 84 sq. km of **Tribal Reserve**. This directly threatens the **Shompen** (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group or PVTG) and the **Great Nicobarese**, whose nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle and cultural identity are tethered to these specific forests and coasts.
- **Procedural and Ethical Concerns:** Reports highlight serious deficiencies in **Social Impact Assessments (SIA)** and violations of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)**. Critics allege that tribal consent is being obtained through "coercion" or "voluntary surrender" certificates, often signed by settler representatives rather than the tribes themselves.
- **The "Settler-Tribal" Contradiction:** A complex socio-political dynamic has emerged where the settler community, while fighting for their own "fair" compensation, is seen as collaborating with authorities to alienate the ancestral lands of the Shompen and Nicobarese to facilitate the project.
- **Strategic vs. Democratic Interests:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) cleared the ₹92,000 crore project in February 2026, citing its "strategic importance" for Indo-Pacific security. However, this has intensified the debate over whether geopolitical goals are overriding the democratic rights and survival of the island's most vulnerable inhabitants.



Key Definitions

- **RFCTLARR Act, 2013:** The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, which mandates a humane and transparent process for land acquisition.
- **Circle Rates:** The minimum price at which a property can be registered in government records; in Great Nicobar, these outdated rates are the primary cause of the compensation dispute.
- **PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group):** A government classification for tribes characterized by a declining/stagnant population, low literacy, and a pre-agricultural level of technology (e.g., the Shompen).

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 244(1) & Fifth/Sixth Schedule:** While the A&N Islands are governed by the President through an Administrator (Article 239), the spirit of tribal protection in these schedules is central to the legal challenges.
- **The A&N Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956:** This provides the primary legal shield for tribal reserves, making their de-notification for "developmental" purposes a high-stakes legal battle.
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Requires the recognition of forest dwelling rights and necessitates **Gram Sabha** consent before any forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes.
- **Section 11 of RFCTLARR Act:** Relates to the preliminary notification of land acquisition, which in this case is being contested for bypassing rigorous Social Impact Assessments.



Additional Important Keypoints

- **Strategic Location:** Great Nicobar sits at the mouth of the **Malacca Strait**, a global maritime chokepoint. The project includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) to rival Singapore and Colombo.
- **Ecological Footprint:** The project involves felling nearly **one million trees** in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, home to endemic species like the Nicobar Megapode and Leatherback turtles.
- **Demographic Shift:** Projections suggest the island's population could surge from 8,500 to over 6.5 lakh by 2050, potentially leading to the "submergence" of indigenous cultures.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar project epitomizes the "Development vs. Rights" dilemma. While its strategic necessity for India's maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is undeniable, the current implementation risks creating a hierarchy of suffering. By prioritizing "circle rates" for settlers and "strategic necessity" over tribal survival, the state faces a crisis of democratic legitimacy. A truly "strategic" autonomy must include the ethical preservation of its most unique human and biological heritage.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geographical features and their location; Changes in critical geographical features (flora and fauna); Social empowerment (Tribal issues).
- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections (PVTGs); Statutory/Regulatory bodies (NGT).
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Ports/Airports); Environment Impact Assessment (EIA); Internal Security (Strategic importance of A&N Islands).

8. Legislative Framework for Paramilitary Forces: The CAPF (General Administration) Bill, 2026

Core Summary of the Bill

- **Codification of IPS Deputation:** The Bill mandates specific quotas for Indian Police Service (IPS) officers in senior Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) ranks: 50% for Inspector General (IG), at least 67% for Additional Director General (ADG), and 100% for Special DG and Director General (DG) levels.
- **Shift from Executive Orders to Statute:** Currently, high-level postings in forces like BSF, CRPF, and ITBP are managed via executive memoranda; this Bill seeks to provide a permanent legislative basis for these administrative structures.
- **Neutralizing Judicial Precedent:** The legislation effectively negates a May 23, 2025, Supreme Court judgment which had directed the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to "progressively reduce" the reliance on IPS deputation up to the IG rank to favor cadre officers.
- **Justification for IPS Lead:** The government argues that because CAPFs operate in close coordination with State police and authorities for national security, the presence of IPS officers is essential for maintaining effective Centre-State relationships.





- **Litigation and Administrative Efficiency:** Home Ministry officials state that the lack of an "umbrella law" has led to fragmented regulatory provisions and chronic service-related litigation; the Bill aims to "avoid unnecessary legal hurdles" by streamlining rules.
- **Cadre Discontent and Stagnation:** Retired and serving CAPF officials oppose the move, highlighting that cadre-based officers face severe career stagnation, often waiting 15-18 years for their first promotion despite leading frontline operations.

Key Definitions

- **CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces):** Refers to the seven security forces in India under the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs (BSF, CRPF, CISF, ITBP, SSB, NSG, and AR).
- **Deputation:** The temporary transfer of a government employee (in this case, an IPS officer) from their parent cadre or department to another organization or force.
- **Cadre Officers:** Officers who are directly recruited into a specific force (e.g., through the UPSC CAPF Assistant Commandant exam) and spend their entire career within that specific organization.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 312:** Relates to the creation of All India Services (including IPS). The government utilizes this to justify the cross-functional utility of IPS officers in central organizations.
- **Article 33:** Empowers Parliament to restrict or abrogate the fundamental rights of the members of the Armed Forces or the Forces charged with the maintenance of public order to ensure proper discharge of duties.
- **Entry 2, List I (Union List):** "Naval, military and air forces; any other armed forces of the Union." This gives the Central Parliament exclusive power to legislate on matters concerning the CAPFs.
- **Doctrine of Separation of Powers:** The Bill highlights the tension between the Judiciary (protecting employee rights via the 2025 SC judgment) and the Legislature (exercising its power to frame administrative policy via the 2026 Bill).

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Operational vs. Administrative Command:** Cadre officers argue that while they possess superior tactical and operational experience specific to the terrain (e.g., anti-Naxal or border guarding), IPS officers are often preferred for administrative and policy-level roles.
- **Organised Group 'A' Service (OGAS):** CAPF officers fought a long legal battle to be recognized as OGAS, which entitles them to non-functional financial upgradation (NFU) to mitigate the impact of slow promotions.
- **Impact on Morale:** Critics of the Bill suggest that statutory capping of the highest ranks for "outsiders" (deputationists) may adversely affect the morale of the 10 lakh personnel serving in these forces.

Conclusion

The Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026, represents a significant move by the Union to solidify executive control over the paramilitary command structure. While the government views this as a necessary step for Centre-State coordination and legal clarity, it creates a direct confrontation with the principles of cadre equity established by the Supreme Court. The success of this law will depend on how



the government balances the strategic need for IPS leadership with the career aspirations of direct-entry CAPF officers who form the operational backbone of national security.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies; Governance; Parliament-Conduct of Business.
- **General Studies III:** Internal Security; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security; Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

9. Institutional Realignment in India's Green Energy Sector: MNRE's Bid for Authority

Summary of Key Developments

- **Demand for 'Central Government' Status:** The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has formally moved to be recognized as the "Central Government" in all matters related to renewables under the Electricity Act, 2003, a role currently dominated by the Ministry of Power.
- **Redrawing Institutional Boundaries:** The MNRE seeks to strip the Ministry of Power of its primary authority over grid-connected renewable energy, aiming to end the "fragmented" governance that currently splits oversight between the two ministries.
- **Proposed Regulatory Powers:** The Ministry has requested sweeping powers to design electricity markets for renewables, frame tariff determination principles for the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), and notify bidding guidelines for green projects.
- **Oversight of Transmission and Planning:** In a significant institutional claim, the MNRE has asked that the National Committee on Transmission (NCT) and the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) work under its guidance for renewable-related regulations and grid planning.
- **Addressing RPO Non-compliance:** The Ministry seeks direct oversight of Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO) to penalize laggard States and distribution companies (DISCOMs) that fail to meet mandatory clean energy procurement targets.
- **Current Capacity vs. Generation Gap:** As of January 31, 2026, India's non-fossil capacity stands at 271.96 GW (approx. 52% of total 520.50 GW capacity), yet actual electricity generation from these sources remains at only 25%, highlighting integration and efficiency challenges.

Key Definitions

- **Electricity Act, 2003:** The parent legislation governing the generation, transmission, distribution, and use of electricity in India; it currently vests most apex powers in the Ministry of Power.
- **Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO):** A mechanism under the Electricity Act requiring DISCOMs and large consumers to purchase a certain minimum percentage of their total electricity from renewable energy sources.
- **Central Electricity Authority (CEA):** A statutory body that advises the government on policy matters and frames technical standards for the electrical system and grid connectivity.





Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Entry 38, Concurrent List (Schedule VII):** "Electricity" is a concurrent subject, allowing both the Union and State governments to legislate, though Union laws (like the Electricity Act, 2003) prevail in case of conflict.
- **Article 77:** Conduct of Business of the Government of India; the "Allocation of Business Rules" define which Ministry handles specific subjects. MNRE's demand effectively seeks an amendment to these rules.
- **Section 176 of Electricity Act, 2003:** Empowers the Central Government to make rules; the MNRE wants to be the designated authority for this section regarding green energy.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Standalone Act vs. Empowerment:** While the MNRE rejected the need for a separate "Renewable Energy Act" to avoid grid fragmentation, it argues that "institutional clarity" is impossible without centralized administrative control.
- **2030 Climate Targets:** The proposal is driven by the urgent need to meet the **500 GW non-fossil capacity target by 2030**, which the Ministry believes is hampered by the current dual-ministry structure.
- **Tariff Determination Controversy:** Seeking the power to "guide" the CERC is a sensitive demand, as it may be perceived as an encroachment on the quasi-judicial independence of the regulatory commissions.

Conclusion

The MNRE's demand for sweeping powers marks a pivotal moment in India's energy governance. By seeking to lead transmission planning and market design—areas traditionally reserved for the Ministry of Power—the MNRE is pushing for a "Green-First" administrative logic. While this could accelerate the 2030 targets and streamline RPO enforcement, it risks creating institutional friction with established bodies like the CEA and CERC. The final decision will determine whether India's energy transition remains a collaborative effort or shifts toward a specialized, decentralized model.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (CERC, CEA).
- **General Studies III:** Infrastructure: Energy; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

10. Judicial Perspective on Hate Speech: Supreme Court's Universalist Approach

Core Summary of Judicial Observations

- **Universal vs. Sectional Protection:** The Supreme Court emphasized that the fight against hate speech must be a collective effort on behalf of all citizens, rather than being limited to seeking protection for one's own specific community.
- **Emphasis on Fraternity:** Justice B.V. Nagarathna observed that the elimination of hate speech is intrinsically linked to the constitutional value of 'Fraternity'; once society internalizes mutual respect, hate speech will naturally dissipate.



- **Critique of Selective Victimhood:** The Court questioned the trend of individual communities approaching the bench for exclusive protection, suggesting that the legal stand should be a categorical "no one should indulge in hate speech" regardless of the target.
- **The Concept of 'Brahmophobia':** The petitioner sought to criminalize 'Brahmophobia' as a form of caste-based discrimination; however, the Court maintained that legal interventions should not be community-specific but rather based on general societal standards of tolerance.
- **Social Resilience and Ignoring Hate:** The Bench advised that reacting to every instance of hate speech often triggers a chain reaction; instead, developing the intellectual capacity to ignore certain provocations can lead to such elements fading away naturally.
- **Role of Education and Development:** The Court highlighted that the prevalence of hate speech is a reflection of a society's level of education, intellectual development, and patience, rather than just a failure of legal machinery.



Key Definitions

- **Hate Speech:** While not explicitly defined in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), it is generally understood as any communication that vilifies, humiliates, or incites hatred against a group based on attributes such as religion, caste, or ethnicity.
- **Fraternity:** A foundational principle in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution that aims to promote a sense of common brotherhood among all Indians, transcending narrow communal or caste identities.
- **Jurisprudence:** The theory or philosophy of law; in this context, it refers to the evolving legal principles the Supreme Court uses to balance free speech with the prevention of communal disharmony.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(a) & 19(2):** While citizens have the right to freedom of speech, the State can impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interests of public order, decency, or morality.
- **Article 51A(e):** A Fundamental Duty of every citizen to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic, and regional or sectional diversities.
- **Sections 153A, 153B, and 505 of the IPC:** These sections penalize acts that promote enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.
- **The Preamble:** Explicitly mentions "Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation."



Additional Important Keypoints

- **Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan Case (2014):** A landmark judgment where the SC asked the Law Commission to define hate speech and suggest ways to curb it, noting that it marginalizes individuals from mainstream society.
- **Tehseen Poonawalla Case (2018):** The Court laid down guidelines against mob lynching and hate speech, emphasizing the "sacrosanct duty" of the state to protect secular ethos.
- **The Tolerance Threshold:** The recent observation suggests a shift toward building "societal resilience," where the judiciary encourages citizens to not be easily influenced by inflammatory rhetoric to prevent the "reaction-trigger" cycle.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's refusal to entertain community-specific petitions against hate speech reinforces a "Universalist" legal doctrine. By pivoting the argument toward "Fraternity" and "Societal Education," the Court is signaling that while laws exist to punish offenders, the ultimate cure for hate speech lies in the moral and intellectual evolution of the citizenry. This approach discourages the fragmentation of the legal system into various "identity-based" protections and upholds the constitutional vision of a unified, tolerant India.

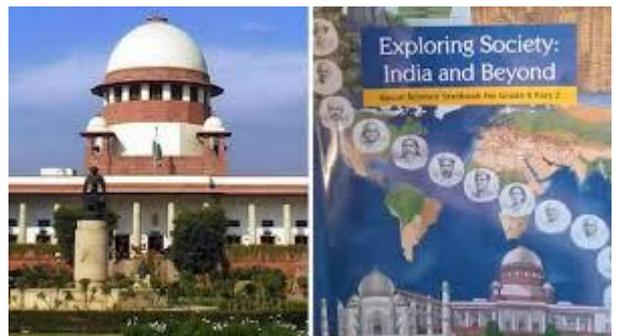
UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, and significant provisions; Role of Judiciary; Fundamental Rights and Duties.
- **General Studies IV (Ethics):** Human Values; Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values; Tolerance and compassion towards the weaker-sections.

11. Judicial Oversight of NCERT Curriculum: Reform in Legal Education

Summary of Key Developments

- **High-Level Expert Panel:** The Union Government has constituted a specialized committee including former Supreme Court judge Justice Indu Malhotra and senior advocate K.K. Venugopal to finalize NCERT legal studies curricula for Class 8 and above.
- **Judicial Collaboration:** The panel will work in association with Justice Aniruddha Bose, Director of the National Judicial Academy, ensuring that legal education for "impressionable minds" remains balanced and institutionally sound.
- **Origin of Dispute:** The Supreme Court took *suo motu* cognisance of a Class 8 Social Science textbook chapter titled "The Role of the Judiciary in our Society," specifically a sub-topic on "Corruption in the Judiciary" deemed to be maligning the institution.
- **Contempt and Ban:** Following the observation that the content was a "calculated move" to create bias, the Court initiated contempt proceedings and ordered a "blanket and complete" ban on the textbook, despite the Centre withdrawing 82,000 copies.





- **Mandatory Approval Mechanism:** The Court has directed that any revised or rewritten chapters concerning the judiciary must not be published unless vetted and approved by this committee of domain experts.
- **Broader Curricular Reform:** While initially focused on Class 8, the committee's mandate has been expanded to review and guide the legal studies curriculum across all higher secondary grades to ensure academic integrity.

Key Definitions

- **Suo Motu Cognisance:** A Latin term meaning "on its own motion," referring to a situation where a court takes up a case on its own without any complaint or petition filed by a party.
- **National Judicial Academy (NJA):** A premier government-funded training institute in Bhopal for the judges of the Supreme Court, High Courts, and the District Judiciary.
- **Contempt of Court:** Under the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, it refers to any act that lowers the authority of a court or interferes with the administration of justice.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 129 & 215:** Empowers the Supreme Court and High Courts respectively to punish for contempt of themselves to protect the dignity of the judicial process.
- **Article 21A:** While providing the Right to Education, the state is responsible for ensuring the quality and appropriateness of the curriculum provided to children.
- **Seventh Schedule (Entry 66, List I):** Coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions lie with the Union.
- **National Curriculum Framework (NCF):** The guiding document for NCERT, which must align with Constitutional values as per the National Policy on Education (NPE).

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Doctrine of "Impressionable Minds":** The Court emphasized that school-age children lack the critical faculty to distinguish between isolated instances and systemic failures, making balanced content essential.
- **Independence of Judiciary:** Protecting the image of the judiciary from "unwarranted maligning" is viewed as a corollary to maintaining the independence of the third pillar of democracy.
- **Role of National Judicial Academy:** The involvement of the NJA signifies a shift toward integrating judicial perspectives directly into educational pedagogy concerning law.

Conclusion

The formation of this expert committee marks a significant intervention by the judiciary into the domain of educational policy. By involving top-tier jurists in the framing of school textbooks, the Supreme Court aims to bridge the gap between academic freedom and institutional respect. This development underscores that while "Corruption in the Judiciary" is a valid subject for academic critique at higher levels, its presentation in primary education must be handled with extreme nuance to prevent the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions.



UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education; Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary.
- **General Studies IV (Ethics):** Content and characteristics of moral reasoning; Role of educational institutions in value-based learning; Institutional integrity.

12. Monetary Management: RBI's Liquidity Injection via Variable Rate Repo (VRR)

Core Summary of the Liquidity Operation

- **Liquidity Infusion:** On Friday, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) injected **₹25,101 crore** into the banking system through a 3-day Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auction to address transient liquidity deficits.
- **Auction Specifics:** While the RBI had notified an intent to inject up to ₹75,000 crore, the actual absorption by banks was significantly lower, with funds being disbursed at a cut-off and weighted average rate of **5.26%**.
- **Primary Drivers of Deficit:** The recent tightening of liquidity in the banking system is primarily attributed to large-scale outflows due to **advance tax payments** and year-end closing requirements.
- **Frequency of Intervention:** This marks a continued trend of active liquidity management, following a similar infusion of ₹48,014 crore on March 17, indicating the RBI's commitment to maintaining stable call money rates.
- **Operational Mechanism:** The use of the VRR tool allows the RBI to provide short-term capital to banks, ensuring that the Weighted Average Call Rate (WACR) remains aligned with the Repo rate, which is the primary signaling rate.
- **Market Sentiment:** The lower-than-expected subscription to the ₹75,000 crore notified amount suggests that while there is a deficit, banks are managing their immediate requirements through other internal windows or the interbank market.

Key Definitions

- **Variable Rate Repo (VRR):** An auction-based tool used by the RBI to inject liquidity into the banking system when it falls into a deficit. Unlike the fixed-rate repo, the interest rate here is determined through competitive bidding.
- **Transient Liquidity:** Short-term fluctuations in the availability of cash within the banking system, usually caused by seasonal factors like tax payments, government spending delays, or festival-linked currency withdrawals.
- **Cut-off Rate:** The lowest interest rate at which the RBI decides to lend money to banks in a repo auction.

RBI Infuses ₹25,000 Cr Through VRR to Aid Liquidity

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934:** Provides the legal mandate for the RBI to operate the Monetary Policy Framework and manage liquidity to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.



- **Section 45ZB:** Pertains to the constitution of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which sets the benchmark policy rates that these VRR auctions aim to track.
- **Article 280:** While primarily about the Finance Commission, it relates to the broader fiscal-monetary interface as tax collections (advance tax) managed under this article directly impact the liquidity handled by the RBI.

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF):** VRR is a component of the revised LAF framework introduced to fine-tune liquidity. It complements the Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) and Marginal Standing Facility (MSF).
- **Impact on Yields:** Active VRR auctions help in stabilizing short-term money market yields, preventing a spike in lending rates for corporates and retail borrowers.
- **Sterilization vs. Injection:** While the RBI uses VRR to inject money, it uses VRRR (Variable Rate Reverse Repo) to suck out excess liquidity, demonstrating its "two-way" liquidity management approach.

Conclusion

The RBI's recent VRR auction underscores its proactive role as the "Lender of Last Resort" and its focus on "calibrated withdrawal of accommodation" or neutral liquidity stance. By addressing the temporary friction caused by advance tax outflows, the central bank ensures that the transmission of monetary policy remains effective and that the credit needs of the economy are met without undue volatility in interest rates.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment; Monetary Policy; Banking Sector and RBI's instruments of credit control.
- **Prelims Focus:** Concepts of Repo, Reverse Repo, VRR, SDF, and the impact of fiscal actions (taxation) on monetary liquidity.