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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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1. Geopolitical Volatility and India's LNG Security: Impact of the West Asian Crisis

The recent conflict in West Asia, beginning February 28, has severely disrupted the global energy landscape, particularly the liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply chain. With the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and targeted attacks on Qatar's Ras Laffan industrial complex, India faces an acute energy squeeze. The following points summarize the critical dimensions of this crisis for the Indian economy and energy security.



- **Supply Chain Paralysis:** Approximately 20% of global LNG traverses the Strait of Hormuz. The blockade, coupled with a 17% reduction in Qatar's export capacity due to infrastructure damage at Ras Laffan, has forced QatarEnergy to declare *force majeure*, directly halting a significant portion of India's contracted supplies.
- **Price Volatility and Economic Strain:** Natural gas prices have surged globally, with Asian spot prices (JKM) doubling from \$10 to \$22 per MMBtu. This price shock increases India's import bill, worsens the current account deficit (CAD), and exerts inflationary pressure on downstream sectors.
- **Domestic Rationing and Prioritization:** In response to the crunch, the Indian government has diverted supplies to prioritize "City Gas Distribution" (cooking and mobility). Consequently, the fertilizer sector is receiving only 70% of its average requirements, while other industries like tea and steel face 20% supply cuts.
- **Infrastructure and Recovery Timeline:** The damage to Qatari production facilities is estimated at \$20 billion, with a recovery period of up to five years. This suggests that the "gas squeeze" is not a short-term glitch but a medium-term structural challenge for Indian energy procurement.
- **Strategic Diversification:** India is aggressively seeking to pivot its import basket toward Australia, the USA, and Algeria. Concurrently, there is a renewed focus on tapping India's domestic reserves, estimated at 1.3 trillion cubic metres of natural gas and 4.5 billion barrels of oil.
- **Sectoral Vulnerability:** While India produces nearly 50% of its gas needs domestically, this is almost entirely consumed by the residential and transport sectors. This leaves the industrial core—fertilizers, power, and manufacturing—entirely vulnerable to international market fluctuations and geopolitical blockades.

Key Definitions and Terminology

- **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG):** Natural gas (predominantly methane) that has been cooled to liquid form (approximately -162°C) for ease and safety of non-pressurized storage or transport.
- **Force Majeure:** A common clause in contracts which essentially frees both parties from liability or obligation when an extraordinary event or circumstance beyond their control (e.g., war, strike, riot) occurs.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A strategic chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; it is the world's most important oil and gas transit terminal.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Entry 53, List I (Union List):** Under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, the regulation and development of oilfields and mineral oil resources, petroleum, and petroleum products fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Union Government.



- **Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948:** Provides the basic legal framework for the regulation of oilfields and the development of mineral oil resources.
- **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) Act, 2006:** Established the PNGRB to regulate the refining, processing, storage, transportation, distribution, marketing, and sale of petroleum, petroleum products, and natural gas.

Strategic Key Points for Examination

- **Import Dependency:** India imported 27 million tonnes of LNG in FY2025, costing \$14.9 billion. Over 40% of this originates from West Asia, highlighting a significant geographical over-concentration risk.
- **Energy Transition:** The crisis threatens India's goal of increasing the share of natural gas in its primary energy mix from 6% to 15% by 2030, as high prices may force industries back to coal.
- **Fertilizer Subsidy:** Reduced gas supply and higher import costs will likely spike the government's fertilizer subsidy bill, as natural gas is the primary feedstock for urea production.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The current LNG crisis underscores the fragility of India's energy security when tethered to a single volatile region. For the **UPSC Civil Services Exam**, this topic is highly relevant under **GS Paper II (International Relations - Effect of politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests)** and **GS Paper III (Energy, Infrastructure, and Economic Development)**. The situation demands a dual strategy: "Strategic Autonomy" through diversified global partnerships (like the US and Australia) and "Atmanirbharta" by accelerating domestic exploration and the transition to renewable alternatives. The ability of India to navigate this "energy trilemma" of security, equity, and sustainability will define its economic resilience in the coming decade.

2. Delimitation and Women's Reservation: Towards the 2029 General Elections

The Union Government has signaled a major legislative push to synchronize the implementation of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, with an early delimitation exercise. This move aims to expand the Lok Sabha's strength and ensure 33% representation for women by the 2029 polls.

- **Early Delimitation Framework:** The Centre proposes a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census rather than waiting for the next full census. This provides a legal bypass to the freeze on seat reallocation that was originally set to expire after 2026.
- **Expansion of Parliamentary Strength:** Under the proposed amendments, the number of Lok Sabha seats is expected to increase significantly from 543 to 816. This 50% increase across the board is designed to accommodate the new reservation quotas without reducing the absolute number of seats available for general candidates.
- **Implementation of Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam:** The primary driver for this early exercise is to operationalize the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act. With the proposed 816 seats, 273 seats (one-third) would be legally reserved for women, marking a historic shift in India's legislative demography.
- **Mitigating Regional Imbalances:** To address concerns from Southern States regarding population-based representation, the government intends to





maintain the existing "pro rata" proportion of seats. This ensures that states successful in population control do not lose their relative political weightage compared to more populous Northern states.

- **Legislative Timeline:** The government may introduce these amendments during the ongoing Budget Session or a Special Session. This urgency underscores the intent to complete the complex process of boundary redrawing and seat identification well before the 2029 electoral cycle.

Key Definitions and Terminology

- **Delimitation:** The act or process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country to reflect changes in population.
- **Pro Rata Basis:** A Latin term meaning "in proportion." In this context, it refers to increasing seats across all states at the same ratio to preserve their current relative strength in Parliament.
- **Freeze on Delimitation:** The 42nd Amendment (1976) froze the reallocation of seats till 2001, which was further extended by the 84th Amendment (2001) until 2026 to encourage population stabilization.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 82:** Empowers Parliament to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census. Once the Act is in force, the Central Government constitutes a Delimitation Commission.
- **Article 81:** Defines the composition of the Lok Sabha. The proposed increase to 816 seats will require a formal amendment to this Article.
- **106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023:** Also known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, it mandates 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- **Article 170:** Governs the composition of State Legislative Assemblies and their delimitation process, which will also be impacted by these federal changes.

Critical Analysis for UPSC

- **The Federal Challenge:** The "North-South Divide" remains the biggest hurdle. Southern states argue that using population as the sole criterion for seats punishes them for following national family planning goals. The "pro rata" increase is a strategic compromise to maintain the federal equilibrium.
- **Census Dependency:** While the 2011 Census is being cited for "early" implementation, critics point out that using 15-year-old data may not accurately reflect current internal migration and urbanization patterns.
- **Infrastructure Readiness:** The transition to 816 MPs is physically supported by the New Parliament House (Sansad Bhavan), which was designed with a seating capacity specifically to accommodate a larger House after delimitation.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The intersection of delimitation and women's reservation represents one of the most significant democratic reforms in independent India. For the **UPSC Civil Services Exam**, this topic is vital for **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance)** under "Salient features of the Representation of People's Act" and "Constitutional Amendments." It also carries weight in **GS Paper I (Social Issues)** regarding women's empowerment. The move reflects an attempt to balance gender justice with federal sensitivity. Success will depend on building a political consensus that ensures "Representation" does not come at the cost of "Federal Fairness."

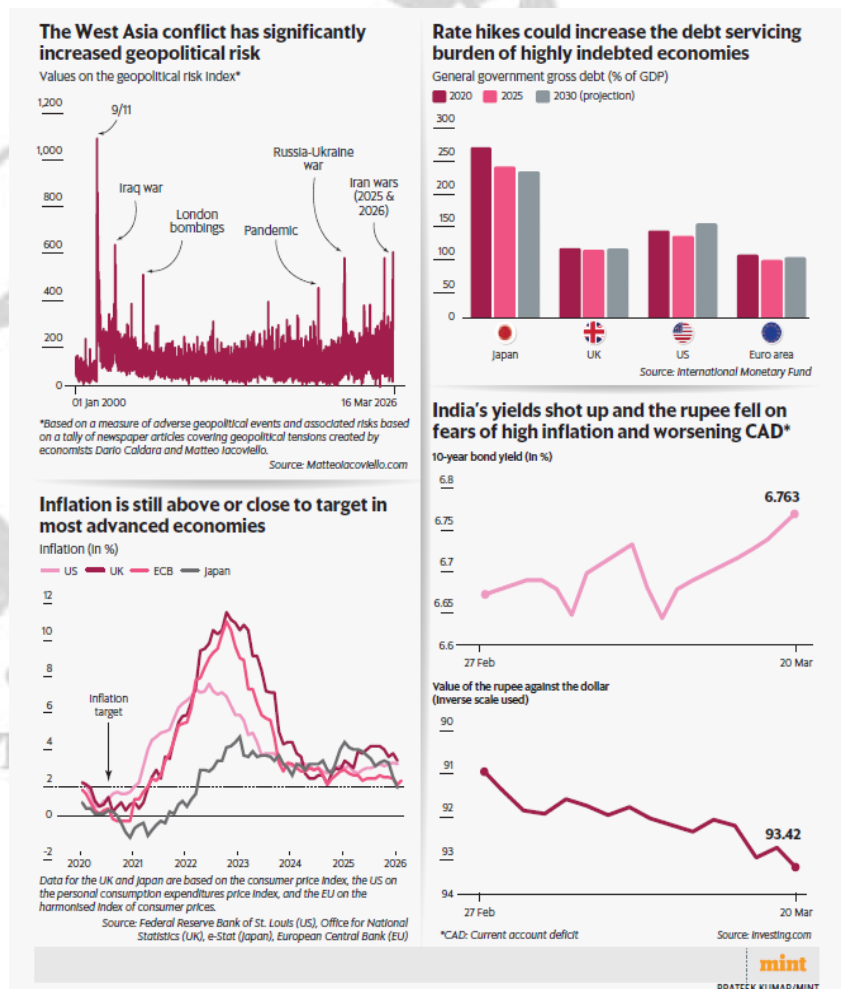


3. Geopolitical Conflicts and Global Monetary Policy: Challenges and India's Outlook

The recent escalation in West Asia, particularly the conflict involving the US, Israel, and Iran, has significantly disrupted the global economic recovery path. This crisis has forced major central banks to shift from planned rate cuts to a cautious "wait-and-watch" stance due to supply-side shocks and energy insecurity.

Core Summary of the Global Economic Crisis

- **Policy Turnaround:** Major central banks, including the US Fed, ECB, and Bank of England, have paused their interest rate trajectories. The closure of the **Strait of Hormuz**—a vital energy transit point—has invalidated earlier projections of rate cuts, forcing a shift to neutral stances.
- **Systemic Geopolitical Uncertainty:** The world is transitioning from a US-led rules-based order to a **multi-polar landscape**. Persistent shocks from the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and now the West Asian conflict have created a cumulative stress level that tests the predictive capabilities of modern policymakers.
- **The Threat of Stagflation:** With crude oil prices sustained above \$100 per barrel, economies face **Stagflation**—a condition where inflation remains high while economic growth stagnates. This renders traditional monetary tools less effective, as hiking rates to curb inflation further hurts growth.
- **Energy Vulnerability:** While the US is a major producer, regions like Japan and Europe are highly dependent on West Asian imports. High crude prices act as a "tax on consumption," increasing costs for fertilizers, plastics, and transport, thereby spilling over into core inflation.
- **Fiscal and Debt Constraints:** Sovereign debt-to-GDP ratios are at record highs (e.g., Japan at 227%, US at 129%). Tightening monetary policy to fight inflation increases the interest burden on government debt, potentially leading to a debt-sustainability crisis if growth does not outpace interest rates.
- **Impact on the Indian Economy:** India faces a "triple whammy" of rising inflation, currency depreciation (Rupee at 93/\$), and widening **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**. The RBI's room for rate cuts has vanished, as lowering rates could trigger capital flight and further weaken the Rupee.





Key Concepts and Definitions

- **Stagflation:** A simultaneous increase in inflation and stagnation of economic output, often accompanied by high unemployment.
- **Monetary Policy Transmission:** The process through which central bank rate changes affect the overall price level and GDP of an economy.
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):** A measurement of a country's trade where the value of the goods and services it imports exceeds the value of the products it exports.
- **Overnight Indexed Swaps (OIS):** A derivative contract where a fixed rate is swapped against a floating overnight reference rate; it serves as a market indicator for future interest rate expectations.

Constitutional and Legal Context

- **RBI Act, 1934:** Provides the legal framework for the **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
- **FRBM Act, 2003:** The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act mandates the government to ensure inter-generational equity in fiscal management and long-term macro-economic stability.
- **Article 292:** Empowers the Union Government to borrow upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of India within limits set by Parliament.

Conclusion

The convergence of war in West Asia and record-high global debt has created a policy "freeze." For India, the resilience of the domestic economy will depend on the RBI's ability to remain flexible and the government's capacity to manage fiscal slippages arising from higher energy subsidies and import bills. Navigating this multi-polar, uncertain era requires a delicate balance between containing imported inflation and supporting domestic manufacturing.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (Geopolitical impact of West Asian War).
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development; Inflationary trends and Monetary Policy.
- **Prelims:** Concepts like Stagflation, CAD, OIS, and the functions of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

4. SWAMIH Investment Fund II: Revitalizing Stalled Real Estate Projects

The Union Finance Ministry has initiated the formal launch of the Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Investment Fund II. With a corpus of ₹15,000 crore, this Category II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) aims to provide last-mile funding to complete approximately 100,000 stalled residential units. By targeting projects that are net-worth positive but facing liquidity crunches, the fund seeks to protect middle-class homebuyers and boost the construction sector's contribution to GDP.

Key Features and UPSC-Specific Summary

- **Targeted Intervention:** The fund specifically addresses "brownfield" projects—stalled housing developments that are RERA-registered but have halted due to lack of capital.



- **Funding Mechanism:** As a "last-mile" financier, SWAMIH II provides the final bridge of capital required to finish construction, ensuring that distressed homebuyers receive possession of their homes.
- **Social Impact Mandate:** Unlike traditional private equity, SWAMIH focuses on the affordable and mid-income housing segments, aligning with the government's "Housing for All" objectives.
- **Professional Management:** The fund is managed by SBICAP Ventures Ltd. (a subsidiary of SBI), ensuring high standards of due diligence and transparency in capital allocation.
- **Economic Multiplier:** By reviving construction, the fund stimulates demand for steel, cement, and labor, while simultaneously improving the balance sheets of banks by reducing Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in the real estate sector.
- **Fund Structure:** It operates as a closed-ended fund where the Government of India is the sponsor, with additional capital pooled from institutional investors like LIC and major nationalized banks.



Key Terms and Definitions

- **Alternative Investment Fund (AIF):** A privately pooled investment vehicle (established in India) which collects funds from sophisticated investors for investing in accordance with a defined policy. SWAMIH is a Category II AIF.
- **Net-Worth Positive:** A project where the value of the remaining receivables (unsold inventory and pending dues from buyers) exceeds the cost required to complete the construction.
- **Last-Mile Funding:** The final infusion of capital needed to take a project from near-completion to the hand-over stage.
- **RERA (Real Estate Regulatory Authority):** The state-level regulatory body established to protect home-buyers and help boost investments in the real estate industry.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Right to Housing:** While not a standalone Fundamental Right, the Supreme Court has interpreted the "Right to Shelter" as an integral part of the Right to Life under **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- **Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016:** Provides the statutory framework for transparency and accountability; SWAMIH only funds projects that are compliant with RERA.
- **SEBI (AIF) Regulations, 2012:** The legal framework under which SWAMIH is registered and regulated as an investment vehicle.
- **Budgetary Powers:** The fund's allocation is part of the Union Budget under the executive powers of the government to manage "Economic and Social Planning" (Concurrent List, Entry 20).

Additional Important Keypoints

- **Escrow Account Mechanism:** Funds are released into project-specific escrow accounts to prevent diversion of capital, ensuring every rupee is used for construction.
- **Criteria for Selection:** Projects must be stuck for at least 12 months, be at least 30% complete (physically), and must not be undergoing liquidation in the NCLT.



- **Impact on Banking:** Successful completion of projects allows developers to repay old debts, thus cleaning up the "Twin Balance Sheet" problem in the Indian economy.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The SWAMIH Investment Fund II represents a proactive state-led financial innovation to resolve market failures in the real estate sector. By bridging the liquidity gap, the government not only addresses a massive social grievance of homebuyers but also triggers a virtuous cycle of investment and employment. From a UPSC perspective, this topic is highly relevant for **GS Paper III (Indian Economy)** under infrastructure and resource mobilization, and **GS Paper II (Governance)** regarding social justice and housing rights. It serves as a prime example of how the state can act as a "Developer of Last Resort" to stabilize volatile markets.

5. Heat Action Plans (HAPs): Critical Gaps and Strategic Mitigation

The escalating frequency of extreme heat events in India, particularly in urban centers like Delhi, has necessitated the formulation of Heat Action Plans (HAPs). Despite projections of record-breaking temperatures and an early onset of the "heat season" (March–July), administrative delays and a focus on short-term relief over long-term structural resilience remain significant challenges.

Key Summary Points

- **Institutional Delay in Planning:** Despite the India Meteorological Department (IMD) recording 35.7°C in early March—the highest in 50 years for that period—critical Heat Action Plans are often delayed, missing the window for pre-summer preparation.
- **Short-term vs. Long-term Measures:** Current interventions are skewed toward immediate relief, such as ORS distribution and water supply, while long-term strategies like "cool roofs" and urban greening remain in pilot stages or suffer from poor implementation.
- **Cool Roof Technology:** This entails using solar-reflective paints or tiles to deflect radiation. While effective for reducing indoor temperatures in heat-stressed areas like slums, it requires periodic maintenance (every 12–18 months) and large-scale application to be impactful.
- **Labor and Vulnerable Groups:** There is a significant implementation gap in protecting outdoor laborers. Recommendations to shift working hours and provide shaded resting areas often lack the legal teeth or executive will to force employer compliance.
- **Data and Accountability Deficit:** While most states have drafted HAPs, there is nearly zero public data on the progress of these goals, leading to a lack of accountability for missed targets and stalled projects.
- **Urban Heat Island Effect:** Extensive concretization and the lack of tree cover in densely populated clusters exacerbate heat stress, requiring localized "heat hotspot" identification and targeted shading interventions.



HEAT WAVE ACTION PLAN

Key Definitions

- **Heatwave:** A period of abnormally high temperatures, more than the normal maximum temperature, occurring during the summer season. In India, it is declared when the maximum temperature reaches at least 40°C for Plains and at least 30°C for Hilly regions.



- **Cool Roofs:** Passive cooling architectural interventions using high albedo materials to reflect more sunlight and absorb less heat than a standard roof.
- **Heat Action Plan (HAP):** A comprehensive framework involving early warning systems, public awareness, and inter-agency coordination to reduce health risks from heat.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to a healthy environment and protection from life-threatening climatic conditions.
- **Disaster Management Act, 2005:** Provides the legal framework for the NDMA and SDMA to prepare and implement plans for disaster mitigation, which now includes heatwaves as a notified disaster in several states.
- **Directive Principles (Article 48A):** Mandates the State to protect and improve the environment.
- **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020:** Contains provisions for the health and safety of workers, which can be invoked to regulate outdoor work during peak heat.

Conclusion

The transition from reactive to proactive heat management is no longer optional. While the NDMA's involvement provides a structural template, the success of HAPs depends on localized implementation, mandatory "cool roofing" in urban planning, and strict accountability for labor safety. Without a shift toward long-term urban cooling and transparent data tracking, cities will remain ill-equipped to handle the intensifying climate reality.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes (Urban Heat Islands).
- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (NDMA/SDMA).
- **GS Paper III:** Disaster and disaster management; Environmental pollution and degradation.

6. Foreign Exchange (Forex) Reserves: Shielding India Against External Shocks

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its recent monthly report highlighted the adequacy of India's foreign exchange reserves as a primary defense mechanism against global economic volatility. Amidst a depreciating rupee—which has seen a decline of nearly 4% since the beginning of the year—the central bank has actively intervened in the currency market to prevent a free fall and ensure macroeconomic stability.

Key Summary Points

- **Adequacy of Reserves:** India's current forex levels are deemed sufficient to cover several months of imports and meet short-term external debt obligations, providing a crucial safety net against sudden capital outflows.
- **Exchange Rate Management:** The RBI has utilized its reserves to sell dollars heavily, aiming to curb excessive volatility in the USD/INR exchange rate and maintain the rupee's competitive stability.



- **Mitigating Spillovers:** Proactive monetary and liquidity measures are being prioritized to insulate the domestic economy from "spillovers" caused by global geopolitical tensions and tightening monetary policies in advanced economies.
- **External Sector Resilience:** Despite the 4% depreciation of the rupee this year, the reserves act as a buffer that prevents a balance of payments crisis, maintaining investor confidence in India's sovereign creditworthiness.
- **Intervention Strategy:** The RBI's stance is not to fix the rupee at a specific level but to ensure "orderly movement" in the market, preventing speculative attacks on the currency.



Key Definitions

- **Forex Reserves:** Assets held on reserve by a central bank in foreign currencies, which can include foreign banknotes, treasury bills, and other government securities. In India, it includes Foreign Currency Assets (FCA), Gold, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), and the Reserve Tranche Position (RTP) with the IMF.
- **External Shocks:** Unexpected events outside a country's borders—such as a sudden spike in global oil prices or interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve—that negatively impact its domestic economy.
- **Currency Depreciation:** A fall in the value of a currency in a floating exchange rate system due to market forces (supply and demand).

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **RBI Act, 1934:** Section 40 of the Act mandates the RBI to sell or buy foreign exchange to maintain the stability of the exchange rate as per the government's policy.
- **FEMA, 1999:** The Foreign Exchange Management Act empowers the RBI and the Central Government to regulate all transactions involving foreign exchange to promote orderly development and maintenance of the foreign exchange market in India.
- **Article 246:** Under the Seventh Schedule (Union List, Entry 36), the Parliament has the exclusive power to legislate on matters related to currency, coinage, and foreign exchange.

Conclusion

The RBI's strategic deployment of forex reserves underscores the importance of a "war chest" in an era of global financial interconnectivity. While the depletion of reserves for currency stabilization is a temporary necessity, long-term stability will depend on narrowing the Current Account Deficit (CAD) and attracting stable Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to offset the pressures of a strengthening US dollar.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; External Sector (Balance of Payments, Forex Reserves, and Exchange Rate).
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (RBI's role and mandates).



- **Prelims Focus:** Components of Forex Reserves (FCA, Gold, SDR, RTP), impact of FED tapering on emerging markets, and mechanisms of RBI intervention (Sterilization).

7. Exclusion of Non-Tribals from GHADC Polls: A Shift in Sixth Schedule Governance

The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) in Meghalaya has passed a landmark amendment to its electoral rules, mandating that only members belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) are eligible to contest council elections. This resolution ends a 70-year-old practice that allowed non-tribal participation, following intense ethnic tensions and long-standing demands from indigenous communities for greater protection of their socio-political rights.

Key Summary Points

- **Historic Policy Shift:** For over seven decades, the GHADC allowed non-tribals to contest elections; the new amendment strictly restricts candidacy to those possessing a valid Scheduled Tribe certificate.
- **Response to Ethnic Unrest:** The move follows significant civil unrest and protests in the Garo Hills, which resulted in two fatalities and led the state government to defer the elections originally scheduled for April 10.
- **Extension of Council Tenure:** To facilitate these legislative changes, the state government extended the GHADC's tenure by six months, allowing the executive committee to align council rules with public sentiment.
- **Focus on Self-Governance:** Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma termed the resolution a "historic milestone," emphasizing that the change reinforces the primary objective of the Sixth Schedule—protecting tribal identity.
- **Political Stability vs. Public Demand:** The amendment highlights the delicate balance between maintaining inclusive democratic norms and addressing the "son of the soil" sentiments prevalent in North-East India's autonomous regions.

Key Definitions

- **Autonomous District Council (ADC):** Administrative bodies constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution that possess legislative, judicial, and executive powers over specific tribal areas.
- **Sixth Schedule:** A special provision in the Constitution (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)) designed to provide autonomy to tribal populations in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.
- **Scheduled Tribe (ST) Certificate:** An official document issued by state authorities certifying an individual's membership in a tribe notified under Article 342 of the Constitution.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 244(2):** Specifies that the provisions of the Sixth Schedule shall apply to the administration of tribal areas in the State of Meghalaya.
- **Sixth Schedule (Paragraph 2):** Empowers the Governor to constitute District Councils and allows these councils to make rules regarding the term of office, procedure for conduct of business, and the qualifications for being elected as members.





- **Article 19(5):** Allows the State to impose reasonable restrictions on the fundamental right to move freely or reside in any part of India for the protection of the interests of any Scheduled Tribe.
- **The Meghalaya Interpretation Act:** Often used alongside council rules to define the scope of legislative amendments within the state's autonomous frameworks.

Conclusion

The exclusion of non-tribals from contesting GHADC polls represents a significant tightening of ethnic boundaries within the constitutional framework of the Sixth Schedule. While the move aims to preserve the purity of tribal self-rule and quell local unrest, it also raises broader questions about the rights of long-term non-tribal residents in these protected zones. The legal sustainability of this amendment may eventually be tested against the principle of universal adult franchise and equal opportunity.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, and devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies; Special provisions for North-East states and the Sixth Schedule.
- **GS Paper I:** Regionalism, communalism, and secularism; Social empowerment and the impact of ethnic identity on Indian polity.

8. Revolutionizing TB Diagnostics: The Shift Toward Accessible Elimination

In the lead-up to World Tuberculosis (TB) Day (March 24), the World Health Organization (WHO) has introduced pivotal recommendations for TB diagnostics. These include the use of near point-of-care (nPOC) molecular tests, tongue swab samples, and sputum pooling. For India, which aims for TB elimination by 2025, these technological advancements—ranging from AI-driven screening to decentralized molecular testing—are essential to bridging the gap between undetected cases and timely treatment.

Key Summary Points

- **WHO Diagnostic Breakthroughs:** The formal endorsement of nPOC molecular tests and tongue swabs marks a shift away from infrastructure-heavy labs. These tools are particularly vital for children and those unable to produce sputum samples.
- **AI-Enabled Screening:** Portable chest X-rays (CXR) integrated with Artificial Intelligence are being deployed in mobile vans under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan. This allows for "active case-finding" in remote and tribal areas, bypassing the need for onsite radiologists.
- **Transition from Microscopy to Molecular:** India is moving away from low-sensitivity sputum smear microscopy toward Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests (NAAT) like CBNAAT and the indigenous Truenat. The goal is 100% upfront molecular testing to detect drug resistance early.
- **Tackling Asymptomatic and Extra-Pulmonary TB:** National surveys indicate a high prevalence of asymptomatic TB, necessitating non-symptom-based screening. Furthermore, AI-enabled ultrasound





and molecular tests are being explored to address Extra-Pulmonary TB, which constitutes 25% of India's burden.

- **Systemic Strengthening:** Effective elimination requires "diagnostic network optimization"—ensuring that screening leads immediately to sample collection and that patients with non-TB lung lesions (e.g., lung cancer) receive appropriate referrals.
- **The "Test and Treat" Paradigm:** New biomarkers are needed to predict disease progression in those with latent TB infection, facilitating more targeted and persuasive TB Preventive Therapy (TPT) in both public and private sectors.

Key Definitions

- **Point-of-Care (POC) Testing:** Diagnostic testing performed at or near the site of patient care, providing rapid results to inform immediate clinical decisions.
- **Sputum Pooling:** A strategy where samples from multiple individuals are tested together to increase efficiency and reduce costs in low-prevalence settings; if a pool is positive, individual samples are then tested.
- **Drug-Resistant TB (DR-TB):** A form of TB caused by bacteria that do not respond to at least isoniazid and rifampicin, the two most powerful first-line anti-TB drugs.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to health. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the State has a constitutional obligation to provide health facilities and eliminate diseases that threaten life.
- **Article 47:** A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) that mandates the State to regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- **National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2017-2025:** A policy framework aimed at eliminating TB in India by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 2030.
- **Nikshay Poshan Yojana:** A centrally sponsored scheme under the National Health Mission providing financial incentive of 500/month for nutritional support to TB patients.

Conclusion

The evolution of a "comprehensive diagnostic toolbox"—combining AI, molecular biology, and non-invasive sampling—is the most potent lever for TB elimination. By streamlining procurement through the ICMR and ensuring decentralized access, India can reduce out-of-pocket expenditure and break the chain of transmission. The focus must now shift toward robust implementation research to ensure these innovations translate into real-world recovery for the most vulnerable populations.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology.
- **Prelims Focus:** TB vs. MDR-TB, NAAT/Truenat technology, WHO recommendations, and India's "Ni-kshay" portal.



9. The TB Champion Movement: Humanizing India's Path to TB Elimination

The fight against Tuberculosis (TB) in India is undergoing a paradigm shift from a purely biomedical approach to a community-led social movement. Central to this transformation is the "TB Champion"—survivors who leverage their lived experiences to navigate the complexities of stigma, treatment adherence, and social exclusion. As India strives for TB elimination by 2025, the integration of these empowered survivors into the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) marks a critical milestone in patient-centered care.

Key Summary Points

- **Evolution of TB Champions:** Moving beyond clinical recovery, survivors are now formally trained as "TB Champions" to act as peer supporters, dispelling the myth that TB patients prefer anonymity over advocacy after treatment.
- **Addressing the "Biomedical Gap":** Early global responses focused solely on drugs and diagnostics; the current movement addresses the "loneliness of the disease" by providing essential emotional and psychological support.
- **Combating Stigma and Myths:** Champions play a crucial role in reducing "self-stigmatization" and community discrimination, particularly among vulnerable groups like women, transgender individuals, and the elderly.
- **Improving Treatment Literacy:** Through the "Survivor to Champion" curriculum adopted by the NTEP, these leaders improve patient understanding of shorter, less toxic regimens and nutritional support (Nikshay Poshan Yojana).
- **Last-Mile Advocacy:** Champions serve as a bridge between health services and the community, conducting meetings and engaging panchayat leaders to ensure that symptoms are recognized and care is sought early.
- **Sustainability of Networks:** While state-level survivor networks have formed, their long-term viability remains a challenge due to dependence on external funding, necessitating a shift toward self-sustaining socio-economic models.



Key Definitions

- **TB Champion:** A tuberculosis survivor who has undergone specialized training to provide peer counseling, advocacy, and community mobilization to support current patients.
- **Treatment Literacy:** The ability of a patient to understand their diagnosis, the importance of adherence to medicine, and the management of potential side effects.
- **Social Exclusion:** A process where individuals are blocked from rights, resources, and opportunities (like employment or marriage) due to the stigma associated with a disease like TB.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life and Personal Liberty. The Supreme Court has interpreted this to include the right to health and the "right to live with dignity," which is directly hindered by social stigma.



- **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Advocacy for TB patients often intersects with protecting these rights for marginalized groups.
- **National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2017-2025:** The official policy framework that prioritizes "Pillar 4: Build," which focuses on strengthening social segments and community engagement for TB elimination.
- **Human Rights and TB:** International covenants (to which India is a signatory) recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Conclusion

The success of India's TB elimination targets rests not just on indigenous molecular tests or AI-enabled X-rays, but on the social capital provided by TB Champions. By transforming survivors into leaders, the movement addresses the socio-economic and psychological scars of the disease. However, for this to be a permanent fixture in public health, the government must move toward institutionalizing and funding these survivor-led networks as essential components of the primary healthcare delivery system.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Role of Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- **GS Paper I:** Social empowerment, communalism, and regionalism (impact of health on social structures).
- **Ethics (GS Paper IV):** Empathy and compassion towards the weaker sections; Case studies on health-related stigma and public service delivery.

10. Water Contamination: Evaluating Technologies for Fluoride Removal in India

The Union Government has commissioned a targeted research project to reassess and map fluoride contamination across India. This initiative aims to evaluate the efficacy of current treatment technologies—ranging from large-scale community plants to household purifiers—to address the persistent public health crisis of fluorosis. With NITI Aayog estimating 200,000 deaths annually due to inadequate safe water access, the move signals a shift toward modernizing aging standards like the Nalgonda technique to align with contemporary technological advancements.

Key Summary Points

- **Technological Reassessment:** The project focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of existing fluoride removal systems in at least 10 urban and rural locations, aiming to upgrade the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) protocols (IS 12742:1989).
- **Geographical Hotspots:** Fluoride contamination is primarily geogenic (natural mineral leaching), concentrated in states including Rajasthan, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar.
- **Public Health Impact:** Prolonged consumption of high-fluoride water leads to Dental Fluorosis (tooth discoloration) and progresses to Skeletal Fluorosis, causing bone deformities, joint stiffness, and permanent mobility issues.





- **Limitations of the Nalgonda Technique:** While historically significant as a low-cost method using alum and lime, this technique is being scrutinized for its inability to meet modern safety and operational standards in the field.
- **Monitoring Gaps:** Recent contamination-linked deaths in cities like Indore highlight a critical need for better monitoring, maintenance, and operational standards for water treatment plants.
- **Vulnerability Factor:** Rural and low-income populations remain the most at risk due to a heavy dependence on untreated groundwater and a lack of decentralized, high-efficiency purification systems.

Key Definitions

- **Fluorosis:** A chronic condition caused by excessive intake of fluorine compounds, marked by mottling of teeth and, in severe cases, calcification of ligaments and skeletal deformities.
- **Nalgonda Technique:** A method developed in India involving the addition of Aluminium salts (Alum), Lime, and Bleaching powder to water, followed by rapid mixing, flocculation, and sedimentation to remove fluoride.
- **Geogenic Contamination:** Contamination that results from natural geological processes, such as the weathering of rocks and minerals, rather than human activity (anthropogenic).

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to clean and safe drinking water as a fundamental necessity for human survival and dignity.
- **Article 47:** A Directive Principle mandating the State to improve public health and raise the level of nutrition as a primary duty.
- **The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974:** Provides the legal framework for maintaining or restoring the wholesomeness of water and preventing its contamination.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM):** A central flagship program aiming to provide Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) to every rural household by 2024, with a specific component for treating contaminated water in "Quality Affected" habitations.

Conclusion

The government's decision to evaluate and map fluoride treatment technologies is a vital step toward ensuring water security. However, technology alone cannot solve the crisis; it must be coupled with rigorous localized monitoring, community-level maintenance training, and a shift from the aging Nalgonda process to more efficient membrane-based or adsorption technologies. Addressing the geogenic roots of this contamination is essential to prevent a long-term public health catastrophe that disproportionately affects India's rural poor.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and Water.
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental pollution and degradation; Science and Technology- developments and their applications in everyday life (Water purification tech).
- **Prelims Focus:** Nalgonda Technique, types of Fluorosis, states with high groundwater contamination, and NITI Aayog's Composite Water Management Index (CWMI).



11. RBI Calibration: Managing Rupee Volatility Amidst West Asia Crisis

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently recalibrated its intervention strategy, easing back from aggressive dollar sales despite the Indian rupee touching record lows. As the conflict in West Asia intensifies—marked by strikes on energy assets in the Gulf and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz—global factors like surging crude oil prices (surpassing \$100 per barrel) and risk aversion have become the primary drivers of currency movement. In this high-volatility environment, the RBI is allowing the rupee to act as a "shock absorber" to protect its narrowing foreign exchange reserves.

Key Summary Points

- **Strategic Pullback:** After heavily defending the rupee, the RBI has reduced market intervention, allowing the currency to find its market-determined level amidst global geopolitical shocks.
- **Rupee as Shock Absorber:** By permitting a gradual depreciation (hitting record lows near ₹93.95/USD), the central bank aims to avoid a rapid drain of forex reserves while the economy adjusts to higher import costs.
- **Impact of Crude Surge:** Brent crude prices have spiked over 50% since the conflict's onset, trading near \$108–\$115 per barrel, which directly widens India's trade deficit and fuels "imported inflation."
- **Depleting Reserves:** India's forex kitty fell from an all-time high of \$728.49 billion in late February to approximately \$709.76 billion by mid-March 2026, reflecting the cost of earlier aggressive defenses.
- **Shift in Driver Dynamics:** Economists note that the rupee's decline is now increasingly driven by external global factors rather than domestic macroeconomic weakness, rendering traditional intervention less effective.
- **Managing Volatility vs. Defending Levels:** The RBI maintains its long-standing mandate to manage "excessive volatility" rather than targeting a specific numerical exchange rate for the rupee.



Key Definitions

- **Shock Absorber:** In economics, this refers to a flexible exchange rate that adjusts to external pressures (like oil price hikes), helping to mitigate the direct impact of those shocks on the domestic output and employment.
- **Imported Inflation:** A rise in domestic prices caused by an increase in the cost of imported products, often due to a weakening domestic currency or rising global commodity prices.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A critical maritime chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, through which approximately 20–25% of the world's total oil consumption passes.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **RBI Act, 1934 (Section 40):** Empowers the RBI to manage the exchange rate to ensure the stability of the rupee, though the specific mechanism (floating vs. managed) is a matter of policy.
- **FEMA, 1999:** The Foreign Exchange Management Act provides the framework for the RBI and the Central Government to regulate foreign exchange markets to maintain orderly conditions.



- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Often invoked alongside energy crises to manage the supply and pricing of petroleum products to prevent domestic inflationary spirals.
- **Article 246 (Union List):** Grants Parliament exclusive power over "Currency, coinage and legal tender; foreign exchange" (Entry 36).

Conclusion

The RBI's shift to a more "nuanced" intervention strategy reflects the reality that no amount of reserves can fully insulate a currency from a major regional war and a structural oil shock. While a weaker rupee may provide a marginal boost to export competitiveness, the immediate challenges of higher fuel prices and capital outflows pose significant risks to India's FY27 growth targets. Moving forward, the focus will likely shift toward domestic liquidity management and supporting the bond market to prevent rising yields from hurting investment.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to mobilization of resources, growth, and development; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; International Relations (West Asia conflict impact).
- **Prelims Focus:** Components of Forex reserves, Current Account Deficit (CAD) triggers, and the mechanics of "Managed Float" exchange rate systems.

12. Geopolitical Conflict and Global Energy Security: The Impact of the 2026 West Asia War

The ongoing conflict in West Asia, marked by the 2026 Iranian missile strikes on critical energy infrastructure in Qatar and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, has triggered the most significant global energy disruption since the 1970s. Key facilities, including Shell's Pearl Gas-to-Liquids (GTL) plant and QatarEnergy's LNG trains (joint ventures with ExxonMobil), have sustained severe damage, with repairs estimated to take up to five years. For India and the global economy, this "energy war" has led to record-high Brent crude prices, force majeure on long-term gas contracts, and a systemic threat to both energy and food security.

Key Summary Points

- **Infrastructure Sabotage:** Iranian missile strikes on March 18-19, 2026, targeted the Ras Laffan Industrial City, damaging 17% of Qatar's LNG export capacity and Shell's Pearl GTL plant, which may remain offline for at least a year.
- **Financial Fallout for "Big Oil":** Western energy giants face multi-billion dollar revenue losses; ExxonMobil alone estimates an annual loss of \$5 billion. Conversely, soaring oil prices (exceeding \$120/barrel) have temporarily boosted share prices despite physical asset damage.
- **The "Hormuz Blockade":** The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has stranded approximately 20 million barrels of oil per day (one-fifth of global consumption) and 20% of global LNG, forcing a shift to costlier, longer maritime routes via the Cape of Good Hope.
- **Force Majeure and Supply Shocks:** QatarEnergy has declared force majeure on long-term LNG contracts, severely impacting major importers like China, South Korea, Italy, Belgium, and India (specifically Petronet LNG).



- **Diplomatic Defiance:** Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, has positioned Tehran as a "defiant victim," ruling out ceasefires and negotiations with the U.S. while threatening further strikes if Iranian infrastructure is targeted.
- **Macroeconomic Contagion:** The crisis has catalyzed a "second energy crisis" for Europe and high "imported inflation" for India, where 90% of LPG imports are at risk due to the maritime blockade.



Key Definitions

- **Force Majeure:** A legal clause in contracts that frees both parties from liability or obligation when an extraordinary event or circumstance beyond their control (e.g., war, strike, or "Act of God") occurs.
- **Gas-to-Liquids (GTL):** A refinery process that converts natural gas into high-quality liquid hydrocarbons such as gasoline, diesel, and wax.
- **Stagflation:** An economic condition characterized by slow growth, high unemployment, and rising prices (inflation) simultaneously.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations—relevant to India's diplomatic role in the Middle East.
- **Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA):** Often invoked during energy crises to ensure the uninterrupted supply of petroleum and LPG as "essential services" to the public.
- **The Petroleum Act, 1934:** Regulates the import, transport, and storage of petroleum, providing the legal basis for emergency government interventions during supply disruptions.
- **Article 297:** Provides that all lands, minerals, and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters or the continental shelf of India vest in the Union—critical for offshore energy security.

Conclusion

The 2026 West Asia conflict has exposed the extreme vulnerability of the global "just-in-time" energy model, which relies on a single maritime chokepoint. While Western oil companies are suffering asset losses, the real burden falls on import-dependent nations like India, facing ballooning current account deficits and energy poverty. The shift toward "energy sovereignty" through renewables and diversified supply chains (e.g., U.S. shale and African gas) is no longer a climate goal but a strategic survival necessity.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Diaspora (safety of 8 million+ Indians in the Gulf).
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure: Energy; Security challenges and their management in border areas; Impact of war on global supply chains.
- **Prelims Focus:** Location of Ras Laffan, Pearl GTL technology, Strait of Hormuz geography, and India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).