



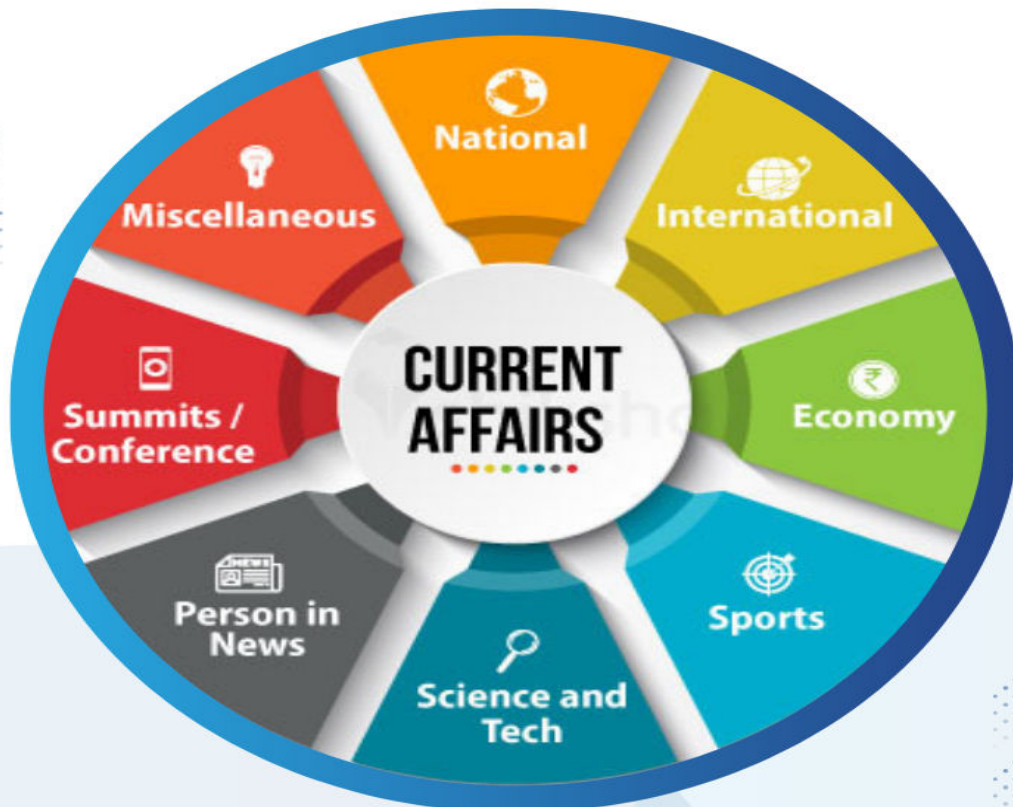
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY
&
STUDY CENTRE

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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 26/03/2026 (THURSDAY)



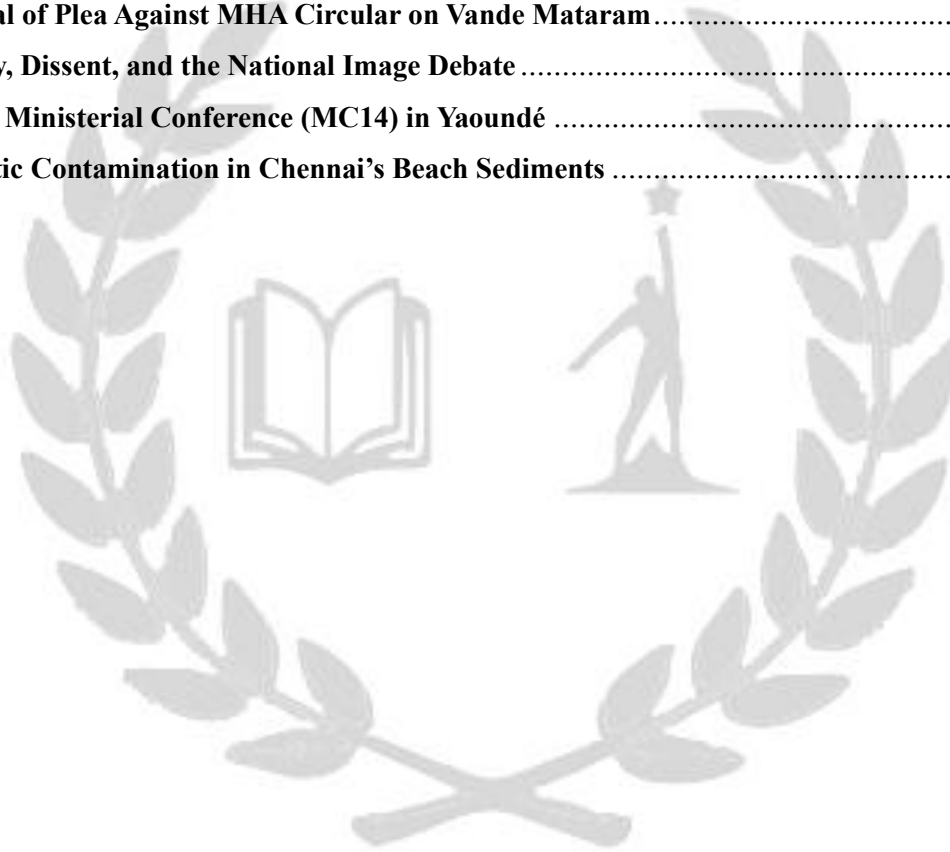
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1. India's Nationally Determined Contribution (2031-2035)

- **Emission Intensity Reduction:** India has committed to reducing the emissions intensity of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 47% by the year 2035, using 2005 levels as the baseline.
- **Non-Fossil Fuel Transition:** The nation aims to achieve 60% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2035, building on the early achievement of previous targets.
- **Carbon Sink Expansion:** A target has been set to create an additional carbon sink of 3.5 to 4.0 billion tonnes of CO_2 equivalent through enhanced forest and tree cover by 2035.
- **Strategic Alignment:** These commitments are synchronized with the long-term vision of **Viksit Bharat @2047** and the ultimate goal of achieving **Net-Zero emissions by 2070**.
- **Policy Integration:** The NDC is operationalized through the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and its missions, emphasizing a "whole-of-government" approach involving both Central and State levels.
- **Global Leadership:** India's strategy incorporates international partnerships like the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Global Bio-fuel Alliance, while adhering to the principle of **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC)**.



Key Definitions

- **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs):** Climate action plans submitted by countries under the Paris Agreement to outline targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate impacts.
- **Emissions Intensity:** The volume of emissions per unit of GDP; it measures the carbon efficiency of economic growth rather than absolute emission limits.
- **Carbon Sink:** A natural or artificial reservoir (like forests or oceans) that absorbs and stores more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it releases.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It is the duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** Provides the framework for the protection and improvement of the environment and for matters connected therewith.
- **The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022:** Facilitates the development of a Carbon Credit Trading Scheme and mandates the use of non-fossil energy sources.

Additional Key Points

- **Adaptation Measures:** Focus includes **MISHTI** for mangrove restoration, Heat Action Plans, and glacier monitoring in the Himalayan region to mitigate GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood) risks.



- **People-Centric Initiatives:** The **LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)** movement and 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' encourage individual responsibility in climate action.
- **Global Stocktake (GST):** This NDC update considers the outcomes of the first GST, ensuring India's targets align with global collective progress under the Paris Agreement.

Conclusion

India's updated NDC for 2031-2035 reflects a matured climate governance model that bridges the gap between developmental imperatives and environmental sustainability. By setting ambitious yet achievable targets ahead of global timelines, India reinforces its status as a "Climate Leader" among G20 nations, ensuring that the transition to a green economy remains inclusive, just, and rooted in equity.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: International Relations (UNFCCC, Paris Agreement), Government Policies and Interventions.

GS Paper III: Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Conservation, Energy Sector (Renewable Energy), and Disaster Management.

Prelims: NDCs, Net-Zero targets, Carbon Sink values, and specific schemes like PM-KUSUM, ISA, and CDRI.

2. Continuation of the Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT) Scheme

- **Extended Timeline and Outlay:** The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the IVFRT scheme for a five-year period from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2031, with a dedicated budget outlay of Rs.1800 crore.
- **Core Objective:** The scheme seeks to modernize and interlink functions related to immigration, visa issuance, and the registration of foreigners to facilitate legitimate travel while simultaneously bolstering national security and immigration control.
- **Technological Transformation:** The next phase emphasizes "strategic transformation" through the adoption of emerging technologies like mobile-based services, self-service kiosks, and automated e-gates to reduce human intervention.
- **Operational Efficiency:** IVFRT has achieved a 100% contactless and faceless visa process; notably, over 91% of e-Visa applications are now cleared within 72 hours, and average manual clearance time at airports has been halved to 2.5-3 minutes.
- **Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP):** The scheme integrates the Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Traveller Programme at 13 major airports, utilizing automated e-gates to reduce immigration clearance time to a mere 30 seconds for Indian nationals and OCI cardholders.
- **Legal and Strategic Alignment:** The extension is tailored to meet the requirements of the newly enacted Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, ensuring the system can effectively manage modern challenges like illegal migration and evolving global travel demands.





Key Definitions

- **IVFRT Platform:** An integrated digital ecosystem designed to track the movement of foreigners from the point of visa application to their exit from the country.
- **e-Visa:** A digital travel authorization that allows foreign nationals to apply for and receive a visa online without visiting an Indian embassy or consulate.
- **FRRO/FRO:** Foreigners Regional Registration Officer / Foreigners Registration Officer; the primary authorities responsible for regulating the registration, movement, and stay of foreigners within India.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Entry 17, List I (Seventh Schedule):** The Constitution places "Admission into, and emigration and expulsion from, India; passports and visas" under the Union List, giving the Central Government exclusive power.
- **Article 11:** Grants Parliament the power to regulate the right of citizenship and matters relating to the entry and exit of individuals.
- **Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025:** The primary legislative framework (replacing/updating older acts like the Foreigners Act, 1946) that governs the legal entry, stay, and departure of foreigners in India.
- **Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920:** Requires persons entering India to be in possession of passports and empowers the government to make rules regarding the same.

Additional Key Points

- **Economic Impact:** By streamlining entry processes, the scheme provides a significant boost to the "Medical Value Travel" (medical tourism), business, and hospitality sectors, contributing to the "Ease of Doing Business."
- **Security Architecture:** The system enables real-time tracking and data sharing between Indian Missions abroad, Immigration Check Posts (ICPs), and FRROs to identify and intercept security threats.
- **Infrastructure Expansion:** The scheme currently covers 117 Immigration Posts, 15 FRROs, and 854 Foreigners Registration Offices (FROs) across various districts, ensuring a pan-India digital grid.

Conclusion

The continuation of the IVFRT scheme marks a transition from simple digitization to a sophisticated, tech-driven immigration governance model. By balancing the "security-facilitation" trade-off through automation and AI-ready infrastructure, India is positioning itself as a global destination for tourism and commerce while ensuring robust border integrity. This initiative is a vital component of the broader Digital India mission, reflecting a proactive approach to international mobility and internal security.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: Governance, Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation. **GS Paper III:** Internal Security; Challenges to internal security through communication networks; Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges. **Prelims:** Budgetary outlays of major schemes, names of regulatory bodies (FRRO/FRO), and specific initiatives like FTI-TTP and the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025.



3. National Seminar-cum-Exhibition on Organic and Natural Farming

- **Organizing Body:** The event was conducted by the National Centre for Organic and Natural Farming (NCONF), Ghaziabad, under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, focusing on the nationwide promotion of sustainable agriculture.
- **Core Objective:** The seminar aimed to create a national platform for integrating traditional agricultural wisdom with modern scientific approaches to achieve the vision of **Viksit Bharat @2047**.
- **Scientific Integration:** Deliberations centered on the science of natural farming, emphasizing soil health management, biodiversity-based pest management, and the reduction of cultivation costs to enhance farmer income.
- **Certification and Quality:** A key focus area was the **PGS-India (Participatory Guarantee System)** certification, which is essential for providing organic integrity and market trust for small and marginal farmers.
- **Value Chain Strengthening:** Discussions highlighted the need for robust market linkages, the role of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), and the development of value chains to make organic products competitive in global markets.
- **National Mission Alignment:** The seminar supported the objectives of the **National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)**, emphasizing innovation in bio-inputs and quality testing of organic fertilizers.



Key Definitions

- **Natural Farming:** A chemical-free, livestock-based traditional farming method (often associated with Zero Budget Natural Farming) that relies on on-farm biomass recycling and microbial formulations like *Jeevamrut*.
- **Organic Farming:** A production system that avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilizers, pesticides, and growth regulators, relying instead on crop rotations, green manures, and biological pest control.
- **PGS-India:** A decentralized organic certification system for local consumption that certifies producers based on active participation of stakeholders and is built on a foundation of trust.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Mandates the State to improve public health, which includes providing nutritious, chemical-free food through sustainable agriculture.
- **Article 48 (DPSP):** Directs the State to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines, which aligns with the scientific upgrading of natural farming.
- **Fertilizer Control Order (FCO), 1985:** Regulates the quality and distribution of fertilizers; recent amendments include specifications for organic fertilizers and bio-stimulants.
- **Food Safety and Standards (Organic Foods) Regulations, 2017:** Governs the manufacture, sale, and import of organic foods to ensure they comply with NPOP or PGS-India standards.



Additional Key Points

- **NCONF Functions:** Formerly NCOF, it is the nodal agency for implementing the National Project on Organic Farming and maintains the National Bio-fertilizer Culture Collection.
- **Environmental Impact:** Natural farming reduces the "Carbon Footprint" of agriculture by eliminating the use of energy-intensive synthetic fertilizers.
- **Global Standing:** India ranks first in the number of organic farmers and ninth in terms of area under organic farming globally.
- **Economic Viability:** By utilizing on-farm resources, natural farming aims to achieve "Zero Budget" inputs, significantly reducing the debt burden on small-scale farmers.

Conclusion

The transition toward organic and natural farming is no longer merely an ecological preference but a strategic necessity for India's food security and climate resilience. By fostering a "lab-to-land" approach where scientific research meets traditional practices, the government aims to ensure soil longevity and sustainable livelihoods. The emphasis on certification and FPOs further ensures that the economic benefits of this transition reach the grassroots level, making Indian agriculture both "Atmanirbhar" and globally competitive.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper III: Major crops/cropping patterns; Different types of irrigation and irrigation systems; Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers; Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices. **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors. **Prelims:** National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF), Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), PGS-India vs NPOP certification, and the role of NCONF.

4. India's Strategic Position and Response to West Asia Crisis

- **Balanced Diplomatic Stance:** The Union Government has defended its "calculated silence" on recent West Asia developments, emphasizing that maintaining a balanced position is essential for the safety of nearly one crore Indian expatriates and India's vast economic interests in the region.
- **Mediation and Neighborhood Policy:** Addressing Opposition concerns regarding Pakistan's reported role as a mediator between the U.S. and Iran, the External Affairs Minister noted that such "intermediary" roles by the neighboring country have a historical precedent dating back to 1981 and do not diminish India's unique direct communication channels with all parties.
- **Energy Security and SPR:** The government assured that India maintains a Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) sufficient for 74 days; while the LPG supply cycle has temporarily extended from 20 to 45 days due to regional instability, no imminent energy crisis is anticipated.
- **Maritime Safety:** Following high-level diplomatic interventions with Iranian authorities, two Indian ships were recently permitted to transit the Strait of Hormuz, with 18 others expected to follow, highlighting India's ability to navigate volatile maritime corridors.
- **Diversified Partnerships:** India's foreign policy continues to balance complex relationships, viewing the U.S. as its largest trading partner, Israel as a critical technological collaborator, and Russia as a consistent energy supplier despite international sanctions.



- **Sanctions and Sovereignty:** The government reiterated that U.S. sanctions have a long history and that India prioritizes its national interest and energy security—specifically regarding Russian oil imports—over external pressure.



Key Definitions

- **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR):** Emergency fuel storage maintained by a country to ensure energy security during supply disruptions or geopolitical crises.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A vital maritime chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; it is one of the world's most strategically important oil transit routes.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** A foreign policy doctrine where a state makes independent decisions based on national interest without being constrained by alliances or external powers.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** The Constitution mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security, maintain just and honorable relations between nations, and foster respect for international law.
- **Entry 10, List I (Seventh Schedule):** Grants the Union Parliament exclusive power over "Foreign Affairs; all matters which bring the Union into relation with any foreign country."
- **The Petroleum Act, 1934:** Provides the legal framework for the import, transport, and storage of petroleum, under which the SPR initiatives are managed.
- **The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958:** Governs the registration and safety of Indian ships, relevant to the protection of vessels in conflict zones like the Strait of Hormuz.

Additional Key Points

- **Expatriate Welfare:** The safety of the Indian diaspora in West Asia is a primary driver of India's non-aligned stance, as remittances from this region are a significant pillar of the Indian economy.
- **Trade Dynamics:** While energy is a major factor, the West Asian region is also a key destination for Indian exports (food security, textiles, and services), making regional stability a non-negotiable priority.
- **Historical Context:** The reference to the 1981 mediation role of Pakistan pertains to the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, where various nations vied for intermediary status.

Conclusion

India's current approach to the West Asia crisis reflects a transition from traditional non-alignment to "Multi-alignment." By prioritizing domestic energy security and the safety of its citizens over taking ideological sides, India leverages its unique status as a "Vishwa-Mitra" (Global Friend) that can engage both Western powers and regional actors like Iran. The resilience of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and the successful negotiation for ship passage demonstrate that India's "silent diplomacy" is backed by proactive crisis management.



UPSC Relevance

GS Paper 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 (West Asia Crisis, US-Iran relations). **GS Paper III:** Energy Security (SPR); Infrastructure; Security challenges and their management in border/maritime areas.

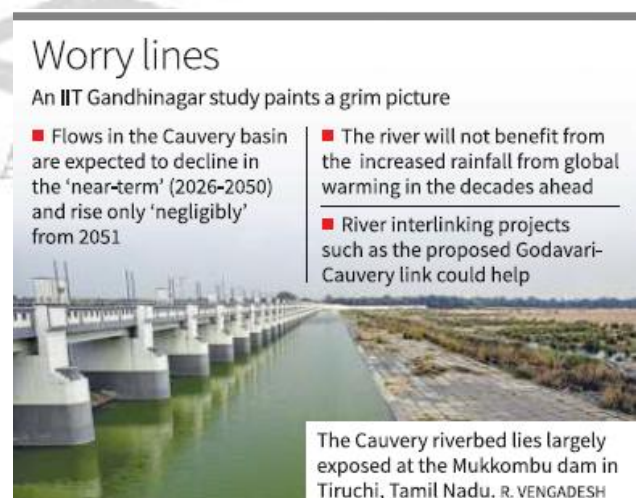
Prelims: Location-based questions (Strait of Hormuz), SPR locations in India (Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, Padur), and International Organizations/Treaties.

5. Hydrological Outlook for the Cauvery Basin (2026–2050)

- **Projected Near-Term Decline:** A study by researchers at IIT Gandhinagar indicates that the Cauvery basin is likely to face a 3.5% reduction in water flow between 2026 and 2050, despite a global warming trend that typically increases river discharge.
- **Regional Exception:** While northern Indian rivers are expected to experience increased flows and potential flooding due to climate change, the Cauvery stands out as a significant geographical exception facing a persistent dry spell.
- **Historical Context of Depletion:** Data analyzed from the Kollegal station reveals that the river already experienced a substantial 28% decline in streamflow during the period between 1951 and 2012.
- **Methodological Innovation:** The research, published in the journal *Earth's Future*, utilizes a "constrained modelling" approach to reduce errors common in standard climate models, basing projections on actual historical river flow measurements across nine major basins.
- **Mitigation through Interlinking:** Given the historical water-sharing disputes between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the study suggests that river interlinking projects, specifically the Godavari-Cauvery link, may become a hydrological necessity to offset the projected deficit.
- **Climate Paradox:** The findings highlight a paradox where increased rainfall projected by global climate models for the Indian subcontinent may not translate into beneficial water gain for the southern peninsular basins.

Key Definitions

- **Streamflow:** The volume of water moving through a river channel over a specific period, typically used as a primary indicator of water availability in a basin.
- **Constrained Modelling:** A statistical framework that limits model extrapolations based on real-world historical data (1951–2012) to ensure more geographically accurate climate predictions.
- **River Interlinking:** A civil engineering project aimed at diverting water from "surplus" river basins to "deficit" basins through a network of reservoirs and canals.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 262:** Empowering Parliament to provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution, or control of the waters of any inter-State river or river valley.



- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:** Enacted under Article 262, this law provides the legal machinery (Tribunals) for resolving conflicts like the Cauvery Water Dispute.
- **Entry 17 (State List):** Pertains to water, including water supplies, irrigation, and canals, drainage and embankments, and water storage.
- **Entry 56 (Union List):** Gives the Central Government the power to regulate and develop inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.

Additional Key Points

- **Socio-Economic Risk:** The Cauvery basin is the lifeline for agriculture in the Mandya (Karnataka) and Delta (Tamil Nadu) regions; any decline in flow directly threatens food security and rural livelihoods.
- **The Godavari-Cauvery Link:** Part of the National Perspective Plan (NPP), this project aims to divert surplus water from the Godavari to the Krishna, and then to the Cauvery, acting as a regional insurance against the projected dry spell.
- **Anthropogenic Factors:** Beyond climate change, land-use changes, deforestation in the Western Ghats (the river's source), and excessive groundwater extraction have historically contributed to the streamflow decline.

Conclusion

The IIT Gandhinagar study serves as a critical warning for water management in Southern India. As climate change alters traditional hydrological cycles, the "business-as-usual" approach to water sharing will likely become untenable. Proactive measures—ranging from the completion of the Godavari-Cauvery interlinking project to the adoption of climate-resilient cropping patterns—are essential to prevent the projected 3.5% decline from escalating into a full-scale regional crisis.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper I: Geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps). **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions (Inter-state water disputes). **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Disaster management (droughts); Infrastructure (Water Resources). **Prelims:** Origin of Cauvery (Talakaveri), major tributaries (Arkavathi, Hemavati, Kabini, Bhavani), and the locations of SPR/Interlinking projects.

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6. Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill, 2026

- **Enhanced Executive Powers:** The Bill grants sweeping authority to District Collectors to take possession of properties in "specified areas" if the transfer is deemed "objectionable" or "involuntary," aiming to protect the interests of legal owners.
- **Redefinition of Sensitive Zones:** The existing "Disturbed Areas" will now be referred to as "Specified Areas," with the criteria for declaration expanded to include regions where there is a "likelihood" of public order disturbance due to communal tensions.
- **Suo Motu Investigation:** The amendment allows Collectors to initiate investigations into property transfers on their own accord (suo motu) or based on applications from an expanded definition of "aggrieved parties" to prevent forced migration.



- **Monitoring and Advisory Committee:** A new specialized committee will be appointed to advise the State Government on areas prone to communal disturbances and "involuntary displacement," providing a structured mechanism for identifying specified areas.
- **Demographic Protection:** Proponents of the Bill argue it is a necessary measure to prevent "conspiracies" intended to alter the demographic character of specific neighborhoods and to stop the forced sale of properties under duress.
- **Financial Facilitation:** To reduce procedural hardships, the Bill proposes simplifying the approval process for mortgaging properties in specified areas to financial institutions for the purpose of obtaining loans.

Key Definitions

- **Specified Areas:** Regions officially notified by the State Government where property transfers are strictly regulated to prevent communal clustering or forced displacement (formerly "Disturbed Areas").
- **Involuntary Transfer:** The sale or transfer of immovable property conducted under pressure, fear, or coercion rather than the free will of the owner.
- **Suo Motu:** A Latin term meaning "on its own motion," referring to an action taken by a court or authority without a formal prompt or application from another party.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(f) and Article 300A:** While the right to property is no longer a Fundamental Right, Article 300A mandates that no person shall be deprived of their property save by authority of law.
- **Article 14 and Article 15:** Critics often scrutinize such Acts against the principles of Equality before Law and Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion or caste.
- **Article 25 and Article 26:** Relevant in discussions regarding the displacement of religious institutions (temples/mosques) and the right to manage religious affairs.
- **The Gujarat Disturbed Areas Act, 1991:** The parent legislation originally enacted to check the "ghettoisation" and illegal transfer of properties in riot-prone areas of Gujarat.

Additional Key Points

- **Scope of "Aggrieved Person":** The Bill broadens who can challenge a property transfer, moving beyond just the buyer or seller to include those affected by the changing nature of the neighborhood.
- **Legislative Debate:** Opposition members have questioned the necessity of adding 44 new areas under the Act if the state has remained peaceful, suggesting the Act might hinder natural urban mobility.
- **Urban Planning and Real Estate:** The Act significantly impacts real estate transactions in cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and Surat, requiring a mandatory "No Objection Certificate" (NOC) from the Collector for every sale in specified zones.



Conclusion

The 2026 Amendment to the Disturbed Areas Act reflects the Gujarat Government's stringent approach toward maintaining communal status quo in urban pockets. While the government frames it as a shield for vulnerable owners against "property mafias" and forced migration, it remains a point of intense legal and political debate regarding its impact on the secular fabric of urban spaces and the fundamental freedom of citizens to reside anywhere within the territory of India.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: State Legislations and their impact; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation. **GS Paper I:** Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism; Urbanization, their problems and their remedies. **Prelims:** Provisions of the Disturbed Areas Act; Powers of the District Collector; Constitutional Articles related to Property (300A) and Freedom of Residence (19(1)(e)).

7. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026

- **Narrowed Definition:** The 2026 Bill significantly restricts the definition of a "transgender person" to specific socio-cultural identities (e.g., Kinner, Hijra, Aravani) and intersex variations, explicitly excluding those with diverse sexual orientations or non-heteronormative gender fluid identities.
- **Removal of Self-Identification:** It repeals the right to "self-perceived gender identity" established in the 2019 Act, replacing a simplified administrative process with a mandatory medical board authority headed by a Chief Medical Officer (CMO).
- **Compulsory Reporting:** The Bill mandates that all hospitals must report every transgender-related surgery to the District Magistrate and the designated authority, raising significant concerns regarding the right to privacy and medical confidentiality.
- **Criminalization of Forced Presentation:** New clauses in Section 18 introduce rigorous imprisonment ranging from 5 to 14 years for those who force adults or children into "transgender presentation," begging, or bonded servitude.
- **Sex vs. Gender Conflation:** Critics argue the Bill erroneously uses "male" and "female" as gender identities rather than biological sex identities, further conflating innate intersex biological variations with the socio-psychological construct of transgender identity.
- **Lack of Intersectional and Civil Rights:** The amendment remains silent on civil rights such as marriage, adoption, and inheritance, and fails to address the compounded discrimination faced by transgender persons belonging to SC/ST or disabled backgrounds.

Key Definitions

- **Intersex Variations:** Innate biological sex characteristics (genitals, gonads, or chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.
- **SOGIESC:** An acronym for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics; a framework used internationally to ensure inclusive human rights.





- **Gender Identity vs. Sex Identity:** Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of their own gender (man, woman, non-binary), while sex identity refers to biological attributes assigned at birth.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 14 & 15:** Guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. The Supreme Court in the *NALSA vs. Union of India* (2014) case read "sex" to include gender identity.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty, which the Judiciary has interpreted to include the right to dignity, privacy, and bodily integrity (including the right to choose one's gender).
- **NALSA Judgement (2014):** A landmark SC ruling that recognized transgender persons as the "Third Gender" and upheld their right to self-identify their gender.
- **UN CRPD (2019):** Recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifically urged India to prioritize intersex welfare and ban non-consensual "normalizing" surgeries on infants.

Additional Key Points

- **Institutional Erasure:** The Bill retains the title "National Council for Transgender Persons," ignoring proposals to adopt the more scientifically accurate "National GIESC Welfare Council."
- **The Jamath System:** While the Bill penalizes external exploitation, critics argue it fails to regulate the internal "Hijra Jamath-Gharana" system, which some claim traps gender non-conforming children in exploitative structures.
- **Medical Gaps:** There is a notable absence of mandates for genetic counseling before surgeries or the prohibition of medically unnecessary, non-consensual surgeries on intersex infants.
- **International Standards:** The Bill's definitions diverge from WHO and UN standards, which categorize intersex as a distinct biological variation requiring specific legal protections separate from transgender identities.

Conclusion

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, represents a shift toward a more medicalized and restrictive regulatory framework. While it seeks to address exploitation through harsher penalties, the removal of self-identification and the continued conflation of sex and gender identities may hinder the social integration and biological autonomy of the community. A truly inclusive approach requires a scientific separation of biological characteristics from social identity, ensuring that legal protections extend to the full spectrum of the SOGIESC community without compromising their fundamental right to privacy.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population; Laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections; Important Supreme Court Judgements (NALSA, Puttaswamy). **GS Paper I:** Social Empowerment; Diversity of India; Issues related to Gender. **Prelims:** Provisions of the 2019 Act vs. 2026 Amendment; Definitions of Intersex and Transgender; Functions of the National Council for Transgender Persons.



8. Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026

- **Core Objective:** The Bill seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) to enhance transparency and ensure that foreign funds are utilized strictly for their declared purposes, preventing their diversion into activities that could undermine national interests.
- **Targeting Forced Conversions:** A primary focus of the 2026 Amendment is to curb the use of foreign funding for forced or induced religious conversions, with the government asserting that such activities will face stringent legal repercussions.
- **Enhanced Executive Oversight:** The legislation proposes to vest the Central Government with expanded powers to monitor, regulate, and investigate the receipt and utilization of foreign contributions by NGOs and individuals.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** By streamlining the reporting mechanisms, the Bill aims to prevent the misutilization of funds for personal gain or activities detrimental to public order and internal security.
- **Legislative Debate:** While the government justifies the Bill as a tool for national security, Opposition members have raised concerns regarding the potential for "centralization of authority" and the lack of specific constitutional safeguards against executive overreach.
- **Strategic Security Measure:** The Bill is framed as part of a broader crackdown on "foreign-funded disruptions," ensuring that international financial inflows do not interfere with India's socio-religious fabric or sovereign functions.



Key Definitions

- **Foreign Contribution:** Any donation, delivery, or transfer made by a foreign source (including individuals, companies, or international agencies) of any currency, security, or article.
- **Religious Conversion:** In the context of this Bill, it refers to the act of changing one's religious faith, specifically focusing on instances where foreign funds are used to facilitate such changes through force, fraud, or inducement.
- **Executive Power:** The authority vested in the government (Home Ministry) to implement laws and manage the administrative aspects of FCRA registrations and cancellations.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 25:** Guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, but this is subject to "public order, morality, and health."
- **Article 19(1)(c):** Grants the right to form associations or unions, which includes NGOs; however, reasonable restrictions can be imposed in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- **Seventh Schedule (Union List):** Foreign exchange and dealings with foreign countries fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Parliament.
- **FCRA, 2010:** The parent Act which regulates the acceptance and utilization of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or associations.



Additional Key Points

- **NGO Compliance:** The Bill is expected to introduce stricter audit requirements and may further limit the administrative expenses that can be met from foreign funds (building on the 2020 amendment which reduced it to 20%).
- **National Security Interface:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) remains the nodal agency, emphasizing that foreign funding is not a "fundamental right" but a regulated privilege.
- **Judicial Scrutiny:** Historically, the Supreme Court (notably in the *Noel Harper* case) has upheld the government's right to strictly regulate foreign contributions to protect national sovereignty.

Conclusion

The FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026, reinforces the state's role as a vigilant gatekeeper of foreign capital. By specifically linking foreign funding to religious conversions, the government has pivoted toward a security-centric model of NGO regulation. While this ensures that "charity" does not become a front for demographic or social engineering, the challenge remains in balancing national security with the operational autonomy of legitimate civil society organizations that provide essential social services.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation. **GS Paper III:** Internal Security; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security; Money laundering and its prevention. **Prelims:** Provisions of FCRA, definition of 'Foreign Source', and the Ministry responsible for its implementation (MHA).

9. SC Dismissal of Plea Against MHA Circular on Vande Mataram

- **Judicial Observation:** A three-judge bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, dismissed a petition challenging a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) circular regarding the singing of the national song, *Vande Mataram*, at official events and schools.
- **Nature of the Circular:** The Court clarified that the directive is in the nature of an "advisory" rather than a mandatory decree, noting that the language used in the circular (specifically Clause 5) employs the word "may," implying a directory rather than a compulsory nature.
- **Vague Apprehension:** The bench termed the plea "premature," stating it was based on a "vague apprehension of discrimination" since no penal action or legal sanction had been initiated against any individual for opting not to sing the song.
- **Constitutional Balance:** The Court reiterated that the freedom to sing is balanced by the freedom not to sing, and unless a specific notice of compulsion or penalty is issued to an individual, the advisory does not infringe upon fundamental legal rights.
- **Burden of Proof:** While the petitioner argued that such advisories create a "social burden of loyalty," the Court maintained that judicial intervention requires a concrete instance of rights violation or legal injury rather than a theoretical fear of social pressure.
- **Scope of Participation:** The bench noted that while disruption of the national song may invite penalties, the act of peaceful non-participation in singing—provided it does not disrespect the proceedings—remains within the ambit of individual liberty under the present circular.



Key Definitions

- **National Song:** *Vande Mataram*, composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, holds a unique status in India. While it does not have the same constitutional status as the National Anthem (*Jana Gana Mana*), it is traditionally accorded equal honor.
- **Directory vs. Mandatory:** A legal distinction where a 'mandatory' rule must be strictly followed under threat of penalty, whereas a 'directory' rule (often using "may") serves as a guideline or recommendation.
- **Vague Apprehension:** A legal term used when a petitioner approaches a court based on a fear of what might happen in the future, rather than an actual injury or specific threat already incurred.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Protects the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression, which includes the "right to remain silent" as established in the *Bijoe Emmanuel* case.
- **Article 51A(a):** Specifies the Fundamental Duty of every citizen to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag, and the National Anthem (notably, the National Song is not explicitly mentioned here).
- **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, often cited when religious beliefs conflict with state-led social demonstrations.
- **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971:** Primarily penalizes the intentional prevention of the singing of the National Anthem or causing disturbances to such an assembly; its application to the National Song is more nuanced and generally requires proof of active disrespect.

Additional Key Points

- **Historical Precedent:** The *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)* case remains the locus classicus, where the SC protected students of the Jehovah's Witnesses faith who stood respectfully but refused to sing the National Anthem due to religious convictions.
- **MHA Guidelines:** The specific circular suggested singing all six stanzas of *Vande Mataram* before the National Anthem in government events and schools to foster a sense of national unity.
- **Judicial Restraint:** The dismissal highlights the principle of judicial restraint, where courts avoid adjudicating on policy advisories unless they are converted into coercive state actions that violate Part III of the Constitution.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's refusal to entertain the plea underscores a pragmatic approach to the intersection of national symbolism and individual liberty. By categorizing the MHA circular as a non-mandatory advisory, the Court has avoided a direct conflict between state-promoted patriotism and the constitutional right to silence. This leaves the door open for future litigation only if the "advisory" is misused by local authorities to penalize or coerce individuals, thereby maintaining the delicate balance between national honor and personal conscience.



UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Government policies and interventions; Judiciary (Judicial Review and Restraint). **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface (Patriotism vs. Individual Liberty). **Prelims:** Difference between National Anthem and National Song; *Bijoe Emmanuel* Case; Fundamental Duties under Article 51A; Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.

10. Democracy, Dissent, and the National Image Debate

- **Protest and Perception:** The "shirtless" protests by the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) at the India AI Impact Summit have ignited a debate on whether public dissent during international events bolsters or tarnishes India's global reputation.
- **Government vs. State:** A critical theoretical distinction exists where the State is a permanent, sovereign entity, while the Government is a temporary executive organ; however, modern political narratives often blur this line, equating criticism of the ruling administration with an attack on the nation.
- **Dissent as a Safety Valve:** In democratic theory, dissent is viewed as a "safety valve" that prevents social unrest by allowing citizens to participate in governance through disapproval, whereas critics view it as a threat to a unified national identity.
- **Unitary vs. Federal Spirit:** The tension reflects two readings of the Constitution—one emphasizing a "strong center" to prevent centrifugal tendencies, and another highlighting a "pluralistic federalism" that celebrates diverse ideological currents.
- **Role of Media and Narrative:** The mass media often acts as a force multiplier for the state, framing policy protests (like CAA or Farmers' agitation) as "anti-national" acts by claiming they are manipulated by forces inimical to India's integrity.
- **Democratic Maturity:** The ultimate test of a democracy's strength lies in its ability to accommodate competing voices within the constitutional framework without conflating political opposition with disloyalty to the State.

Key Definitions

- **Dissent:** The expression of holding opinions that are at variance with those previously or officially expressed, serving as a tool for accountability in a democracy.
- **Sedition:** Conduct or speech inciting people to rebel against the authority of a state or monarch. In India, the legal boundary between dissent and sedition is a subject of frequent judicial scrutiny.
- **Centrifugal Tendencies:** Political or social forces that push segments of a population away from the central government, potentially threatening national unity.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(a) & (b):** Guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression and to assemble peaceably and without arms, which forms the legal basis for the right to protest.





- **Article 19(2):** Allows the State to impose "reasonable restrictions" on free speech in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, and public order.
- **The "Basic Structure" Doctrine:** Established in the *Kesavananda Bharati* case (1973), it affirms that federalism and democracy are essential features of the Constitution that cannot be abrogated by the government.
- **Section 124A of IPC:** Historically dealt with sedition; though currently under judicial stay/review, it remains central to debates regarding the criminalization of dissent.

Additional Key Points

- **Historical Precedent:** The phrase "India is Indira, Indira is India" from the 1970s serves as a historical reminder of the dangers of equating a single leader or government with the entire nation.
- **Institutional Design:** The distribution of power and the independence of the Judiciary and Legislature act as checks against the executive's tendency to monopolize the national narrative.
- **International Standards:** In many mature democracies, protests during summits (like the G20 or COP) are viewed as evidence of a vibrant, participatory political culture rather than a sign of instability.

Conclusion

The debate surrounding the IYC protests transcends the specific act of "shirtless" demonstration, touching upon the soul of Indian democracy. While the government must remain alert to genuine threats to national integrity, the health of the republic depends on its capacity to distinguish between a political opponent and a national enemy. True national cohesion is achieved not through forced uniformity or the labeling of critics, but through a robust engagement with diverse perspectives under the umbrella of the Constitution.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: Indian Constitution—significant provisions and basic structure; Separation of powers between various organs; Role of the Opposition in a democracy; Federal structure and its challenges. **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface; Values in Governance (Tolerance and Dissent). **Prelims:** Article 19, landmark SC judgements on speech and protest, and the distinction between the State and Government.

11. WTO 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé

- **Context of Retreating Multilateralism:** MC14 (March 26–29, 2026) convenes amidst a surge in global protectionism, geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China, and a growing trend of "weaponized" tariffs that bypass the WTO's non-discriminatory rules.
- **The Digital Trade Dilemma:** A central conflict at the summit is the e-commerce moratorium—a 1998 agreement banning customs duties on electronic transmissions (software, e-books, music). While developed nations push for a permanent ban to foster tech innovation, India and other developing nations argue it causes massive revenue losses (estimated at \$1.5 billion for India in 2020) and limits digital industrialization.
- **Crisis in Dispute Settlement:** The WTO's judicial function remains paralyzed due to the vacancy in its Appellate Body. This "highest judicial arm" has been rendered ineffective by the U.S. blocking member appointments, effectively allowing major economies to act outside the constraints of WTO law without legal consequences.
- **Plurilateral vs. Multilateral Agreements:** Tensions have risen over the inclusion of plurilateral deals (agreements between a subset of members, like the Investment Facilitation for Development)



into the formal WTO rulebook. India cautions that this could fragment the organization, creating a "two-tier" system that undermines inclusive multilateralism.

- **Agriculture and Food Security:**

India continues to champion a "permanent solution" for Public Stockholding (PSH). This would protect domestic procurement programs and Minimum Support Prices (MSP) from being labeled as trade-distorting, ensuring food security for millions of resource-constrained farmers.



14th WTO Ministerial
Conference
Yaoundé - Cameroon

- **Special and Differential Treatment (SDT):** A major reform issue involves the U.S. effort to weaken the SDT principle by excluding large developing economies—India, China, Brazil, and Indonesia—from receiving special rights and longer transition periods for trade compliance.

Key Definitions

- **Most Favoured Nation (MFN):** A foundational WTO principle requiring members to treat all other members equally; a trade concession given to one must be given to all.
- **Bound Rates:** The maximum tariff level a WTO member commits to for a specific product; exceeding this rate without negotiation is a violation of WTO commitments.
- **E-commerce Moratorium:** A long-standing, temporary agreement renewed every two years since 1998 that prohibits members from imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Marrakesh Agreement (1994):** The founding treaty of the WTO, which established the organization's legal framework and the Ministerial Conference as its supreme decision-making body.
- **Annex 4 of the WTO Treaty:** The specific section dedicated to "Plurilateral Trade Agreements," which only bind the members that have accepted them, unlike the "Multilateral" agreements in Annexes 1–3 which bind all members.
- **Article 253 of the Indian Constitution:** 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 or at an international conference.

Additional Key Points

- **India's Dual-Track Strategy:** While New Delhi remains a staunch defender of the WTO's core multilateral architecture, it has simultaneously accelerated bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)—such as the landmark 2026 India–EU FTA—to secure its economic interests in a fractured global market.
- **Fisheries Subsidies:** Negotiations focus on eliminating subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, with India advocating for a "balanced approach" that protects the livelihoods of traditional, small-scale, and artisanal fishers.
- **Technology Transfer:** India has submitted proposals to facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries, identifying gaps in TRIPS (Intellectual Property) that currently act as barriers to green industrialization.



Conclusion

The 14th Ministerial Conference in Yaoundé serves as a litmus test for the relevance of rules-based trade in the 21st century. As major powers increasingly lean toward unilateralism and coercion, the WTO faces a choice between stagnation and reform. For India, the challenge lies in balancing its traditional role as a leader of the Global South with the pragmatism required to navigate a world where digital trade, food security, and climate-related trade measures are redefining national sovereignty.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper II: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate. **GS Paper III:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; Issues of food security. **Prelims:** Locations of WTO Ministerials; Definitions of MFN, PSH, and SDT; The structure of the WTO Dispute Settlement Body and Appellate Body.

12. Microplastic Contamination in Chennai's Beach Sediments

- **Abundance vs. Risk Paradox:** New research from V.O. Chidambaram College indicates that while microplastic counts in Chennai's beach sediments are lower than global averages, the ecological risk remains high due to the nature of the polymers found.
- **Predominance of Nylon Fibres:** The study identifies nylon fibres (mostly under 1000 μm) as the dominant pollutant; these are considered more hazardous than other plastics due to their chemical additives and high capacity to adsorb pollutants.
- **Benthic Ecosystem Impact:** Fibre-shaped microplastics alter sediment structures, affecting benthic (bottom-layer) organisms such as worms, crabs, and shellfish, which ingest these particles, leading to digestive blockages or toxic poisoning.
- **Anthropogenic Sources:** Primary contributors include the shedding of synthetic fibres from laundry, degraded fishing nets and ropes, urban stormwater runoff, and tourism-related plastic waste.
- **Trophic Transfer:** Microplastics enter the human food chain through contaminated seafood, potentially causing tissue inflammation and disrupting hormonal and immune systems over long-term exposure.
- **Policy Imperatives:** The study advocates for a shift from simple "abundance-based" monitoring to "risk-based" evaluations that consider polymer type, shape, and aging characteristics for effective coastal management.

Key Definitions

- **Microplastics:** Plastic particles less than 5mm in diameter, categorized as primary (manufactured small, like microbeads) or secondary (resulting from the breakdown of larger plastic items).
- **Benthic Zone:** The lowest ecological region of a body of water, including the sediment surface and some sub-surface layers, home to organisms critical for nutrient cycling.





- **Adsorption:** The process by which liquid or gas molecules adhere to the surface of a solid; microplastics "adsorb" persistent organic pollutants (POPs) from seawater, becoming highly toxic.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It shall be the duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 (Amended 2022):** Provides the statutory framework for managing plastic waste, including the ban on identified single-use plastics and the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).
- **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** An umbrella legislation that empowers the Central Government to coordinate actions of State Governments and authorities for environmental protection.

Additional Key Points

- **Transboundary Nature:** Microplastics are subject to long-distance transport via ocean currents, making coastal pollution a regional and international issue rather than a localized one.
- **Biological Impacts:** Beyond physical injury, microplastics serve as "rafts" for disease-causing bacteria and invasive species, facilitating their spread across marine ecosystems.
- **The "Viksit Bharat" Link:** Sustainable coastal management is essential for India's "Blue Economy" goals, ensuring that economic growth from marine resources does not compromise ecological health.

Conclusion

The Chennai beach study highlights a critical gap in traditional environmental monitoring: low quantity does not equate to safety. As microplastics become a permanent feature of the geological record, the focus must move toward "polymer-specific" regulations and the promotion of biodegradable alternatives in the textile and fishing industries. Early intervention through improved urban drainage and fishing gear recycling can still prevent these "sparse" pollutants from escalating into an irreversible ecological crisis.

UPSC Relevance

GS Paper III: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life. **GS Paper I:** Changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes. **Prelims:** Definition of microplastics; Plastic Waste Management Rules; Blue Economy initiatives; and Marine Heatwaves/Coastal Ecology.