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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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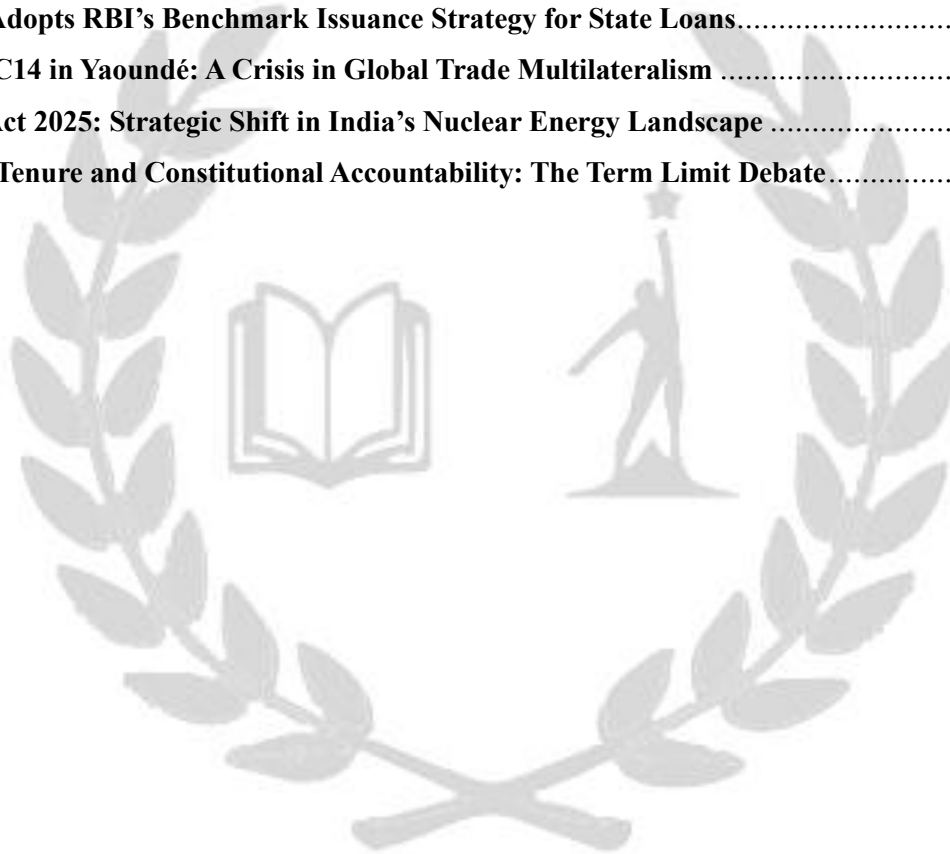
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1. Strategic Imperatives of India's Private Space Surveillance

- **Growth of Private Space Ecosystem:** Since the 2020 privatization of the space sector, Indian startups like Pixxel, Digantara, and GalaxEye have pioneered advanced surveillance technologies, including high-resolution imagery, satellite mapping, and ground-station analytics.
- **Revenue and Market Potential:** Satellite surveillance and communications represent the most significant commercial segments of India's space economy, projected to contribute nearly 20% of its annual revenue with a target of \$8 billion by 2033.
- **Evolution from ISRO to Commercial Models:** While ISRO's Cartosat and EOS series provide critical 3D data for domestic defense, their utility is restricted to sovereign use; private firms fill the gap by retailing high-cadence data to global markets.
- **Geopolitical Significance in Modern Warfare:** The shift toward unmanned warfare, ballistic missiles, and AI-integrated drone strikes has turned space-based intelligence into a decisive military asset, particularly in volatile regions like West Asia.
- **Regulatory Obstacles and Data Localization:** Current Indian frameworks mandate data localization at domestic ground stations, but the upcoming draft space law will be the final arbiter on the complexities of exporting sensitive geospatial intelligence.
- **Global Shutter Control and US Dominance:** Indian firms face "geospatial shutter control" risks where US regulations can restrict who they sell data to, forcing a strategic choice between lucrative US government contracts and emerging West Asian markets.

Key Definitions

- **Space-Based Surveillance:** The use of satellite constellations to monitor terrestrial activities, track orbital assets, and provide real-time geospatial intelligence (GEOINT).
- **Geospatial Shutter Control:** A regulatory mechanism, primarily used by the US, that allows the government to restrict the dissemination of commercial satellite imagery of specific areas during times of conflict or for national security reasons.
- **Data Localization:** The requirement that data collected or processed within a certain jurisdiction be stored on physical servers located within that country's borders.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Space Policy 2023:** Encourages end-to-end participation of Non-Government Entities (NGEs) in the space sector, moving ISRO toward R&D while startups handle commercial operations.
- **Article 51 of the Constitution:** Under Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), India strives to promote international peace and security; however, the commercialization of surveillance data must balance this with sovereign interests.
- **Geospatial Data Guidelines (2021):** Liberalized the acquisition and production of geospatial data and maps, removing the requirement for prior approvals for Indian entities, though exports remain subject to security vetting.





- **IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre):** The single-window nodal agency responsible for authorizing and regulating the space activities of private players in India.

Additional Key Points

- **Dual-Use Technology:** Space surveillance is inherently "dual-use," meaning it serves both civilian (disaster management, agriculture) and military (troop movement, missile guidance) purposes.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** By developing a robust private surveillance sector, India reduces its reliance on foreign constellations (like Maxar or Starlink) for critical intelligence.
- **The "West Asia" Opportunity:** The demand for tactical intelligence in the Middle East offers a testing ground for Indian startups to compete with global incumbents.

Conclusion

India stands at a pivotal junction where technological capability meets commercial opportunity. While the privatization of 2020 has birthed a competitive startup ecosystem, the lack of a finalized, comprehensive Space Act remains a hurdle. To capture the projected \$8 billion market, India must navigate the delicate balance between domestic security regulations and the restrictive global laws imposed by dominant space powers like the US.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (US Shutter Control and West Asia conflict).
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology—developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Indigenization of technology; Awareness in the field of Space.
- **Prelims:** ISRO missions (Cartosat, EOS), IN-SPACe, Space Policy 2023, and international treaties regarding outer space.

2. Economic Fallout of West Asia Conflict: Implications for India and Global Trade

- **Global Growth Contractions:** The escalation of conflict in West Asia has disrupted the earlier "oil glut" forecast for 2026, with energy infrastructure damage threatening a long-term supply crunch. High energy costs are expected to shave 0.3 percentage points off global GDP growth, directly dampening consumer demand for non-essential discretionary goods.
- **Impact on India's Macro-Stability:** India's GDP growth is highly sensitive to the "India Basket" crude prices. While a baseline of \$85/barrel supports 6.5% growth, a surge to \$125/barrel could plummet growth to 5.0% due to squeezed corporate margins and inflationary pressures on household consumption.
- **Services Sector as a Strategic Buffer:** Despite the gloom in goods trade, "digitally delivered services" (financial, computer, and professional services) remain resilient. India, as the world's fourth-largest exporter in this domain (\$328 billion in 2025), is poised to outpace global growth trends, provided it navigates the transition to AI-integrated delivery.

Global trade is expected to fall in 2026, more so in goods than in services



Data for goods trade is the average of exports and imports.
Data for 2026 are projections.

Source: Global Trade Outlook and Statistics,
World Trade Organization

mint



- **Shifting Global Trade Dynamics:** Net oil importers like Asia and Europe are facing slowing import growth, while oil-exporting regions (CIS, Africa, Middle East) are seeing increased revenues. Russia, in particular, has seen a "de-facto de-sanctioning" as global markets prioritize energy availability over geopolitical restrictions.
- **Post-War Reconstruction Opportunities:** A potential "silver lining" exists in the post-conflict phase; rebuilding energy and urban infrastructure in West Asia will likely trigger a surge in demand for engineering equipment, technical manpower, and labor, potentially boosting Indian remittances and project exports.

Key Definitions

- **Digitally Delivered Services:** Services provided remotely through cross-border computer networks, encompassing telecommunications, computer and information services, and other business services.
- **India Basket Crude:** A weighted average of Oman, Dubai (sour), and Brent (sweet) crude oil prices, representing the specific quality of oil typically processed by Indian refineries.
- **Discretionary Spending:** Household expenditure on non-essential items (luxury goods, vacations, electronics) that can be easily deferred or cancelled during economic downturns.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 297 of the Constitution:** Vests all lands, minerals, and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters, the continental shelf, or the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of India in the Union, highlighting the importance of domestic energy security.
- **Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023:** Aims to increase India's exports to \$2 trillion by 2030, emphasizing the digitalization of trade and the promotion of "Services Exports from India Scheme" equivalents to mitigate external shocks.
- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Empowers the government to regulate the supply and price of petroleum and its products to protect the domestic economy from global price volatility.

Additional Key Points

- **AI Wildcard:** While Indian IT firms have historically outpaced global growth (3.5 times since 2008), rapid AI adoption creates a "retooling" challenge that could disrupt traditional employment models.
- **Trade Deceleration:** World goods trade growth is projected to drop from 4.6% in 2025 to 1.4% in 2026 if energy prices remain elevated, indicating a sharp slowdown in global manufacturing.
- **Remittance Resilience:** India remains the top global recipient of remittances; stability in West Asia is crucial for the 8.5 million-strong Indian diaspora whose earnings support India's Current Account Balance.

Conclusion

The West Asia conflict underscores India's dual-track economic reality: a high vulnerability to commodity price shocks (oil) balanced by a robust, high-growth services export engine. While the immediate outlook for 2026 suggests a slowdown in GDP and goods trade, India's strategic pivot toward digital services and potential role in regional reconstruction offer paths for economic resilience. Navigating this period requires a cautious fiscal approach and accelerated AI adoption within the tech sector.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood-relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests and Indian diaspora.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Energy security and infrastructure.
- **Economic Survey/Prelims:** Understanding the "India Basket" of crude, WTO trade projections, and the composition of India's Balance of Payments (BoP).

3. Monetary Policy Challenges Amidst West Asia Conflict

- **Expected Rate Pause:** The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is widely anticipated to maintain the repo rate at 5.25% in its April 2026 meeting. This follows a cumulative 125 bps reduction in 2025, signaling a shift from an accommodative cycle to a "wait-and-watch" cautious stance due to geopolitical volatility.
- **Inflationary Pressures:** The West Asia war has triggered a significant surge in Brent crude prices, crossing \$100 per barrel. This has led economists to revise Consumer Price Index (CPI) projections upward from 4.1% to approximately 4.7%, driven primarily by "imported inflation" and supply chain disruptions.
- **Downward Growth Revisions:** While the RBI previously projected healthy growth, the impact of high energy costs on corporate margins and consumer demand has led private analysts to scale down FY27 GDP estimates from 7% to 6.5%-6.8%.
- **Currency Volatility:** The Indian Rupee has faced depreciation pressure since the conflict began. However, the RBI is expected to manage this through regulatory measures and external interventions rather than using the repo rate as a primary tool to shore up the currency.
- **Stance Neutrality:** The MPC is likely to retain its "neutral" stance, providing flexibility to respond to either an inflationary spike or a growth slowdown, while emphasizing that inflation remains within the statutory target band of 4(+/-2)%.
- **Global Market Disruption:** Comparison to the 1973 oil crisis highlights the severity of the current energy market disruption. With oil prices jumping nearly 35% in weeks, the primary challenge for the RBI is balancing the trade-off between price stability and supporting a recovery that is still absorbing the effects of the new GDP series.



Key Definitions

- **Repo Rate:** The interest rate at which the Reserve Bank of India lends money to commercial banks against government securities to manage short-term liquidity.
- **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):** A six-member statutory body under the RBI Act, 1934, responsible for fixing the benchmark interest rate to maintain price stability while keeping the growth objective in mind.



- **Imported Inflation:** A rise in domestic prices caused by an increase in the cost of imported goods, particularly essential commodities like crude oil, which raises production and transport costs across the economy.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **RBI Act, 1934 (Amended 2016):** Provides the legal framework for the MPC. Section 45ZB stipulates the constitution of the committee to determine the Policy Rate required to achieve the inflation target.
- **Inflation Targeting Framework:** A statutory requirement where the Central Government, in consultation with the RBI, sets a CPI inflation target every five years. Currently, it is set at 4% with an upper tolerance of 6% and a lower tolerance of 2%.
- **Article 246:** While not directly governing the RBI, the Union List (List I) gives Parliament the exclusive power to legislate on matters related to Currency, Coinage, Legal Tender, and the Reserve Bank of India.

Additional Key Points

- **Energy Infrastructure Damage:** Experts warn that even a short-lived war could have long-term effects as rebuilding destroyed energy hubs in West Asia may take years, keeping energy "risk premiums" high.
- **The 1973 Comparison:** The current surge is being likened to the first "Oil Shock," emphasizing that the impact on global trade and supply routes (like the Red Sea/Suez Canal) could be structural rather than transitory.
- **Fiscal-Monetary Coordination:** Elevated fuel prices may prompt the government to reduce excise duties to cool inflation, which would impact fiscal deficit targets, creating a complex environment for the RBI's April policy.

Conclusion

The upcoming RBI policy decision is a litmus test for India's macro-economic resilience. While domestic fundamentals were strong entering 2026, the exogenous shock of the West Asia war has reintroduced the twin threats of high inflation and stunted growth. A rate pause combined with a "hawkish" or cautious tone appears the most likely path to preserve financial stability without choking off the post-pandemic growth momentum.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment. Specifically, the role of the RBI, monetary policy tools, and the impact of global events on the domestic economy.
- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (Geopolitics of Oil).

4. CII Roadmap to Mitigate West Asia War Supply Chain Disruptions

- **Targeted Liquidity and Credit Facilitation:** The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has proposed a 20-point policy response focusing on collateral-free working capital through government-backed credit guarantees. This aims to insulate Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), exporters, and gas-dependent sectors from the financial stress caused by the regional conflict.



- **Regulatory Forbearance and Moratorium:** Industry leaders have pitched for a three-month moratorium and restructuring window for MSMEs. This includes calibrated flexibility in asset classification rules, specifically delaying Special Mention Account (SMA) and Non-Performing Asset (NPA) recognition for sectors with demonstrable war-related disruptions.
- **Operational Relief in Public Procurement:** To prevent liquidity drainage, the CII suggests extending delivery timelines for central and state public sector unit (PSU) contracts by 3-4 months without invoking "liquidated damages" clauses. It also recommends reducing performance bank guarantees and security deposits to minimal levels.
- **Mitigating Cascading Input Costs:** To counter rising energy and logistics expenses, the lobby group has sought a cut in import duties on energy inputs, specifically proposing a temporary waiver of the 2.5% customs duty on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports.
- **Systemic Importance of MSMEs:** The proposal underscores that MSMEs contribute roughly 36% of India's manufacturing output and 45% of its exports. Since large-scale industries rely on these units for raw materials, financial stress in the MSME segment threatens the stability of the entire industrial value chain.
- **Special Refinance Windows:** The CII has urged the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to institute a special refinance window for banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). This would enable financial institutions to continue extending credit at reasonable costs to productive sectors despite global volatile conditions.

Key Definitions

- **Liquidated Damages:** A pre-determined estimate of losses in a contract that one party must pay to the other if they breach specific terms, such as missing a delivery deadline.
- **Special Mention Account (SMA):** A classification used by banks to identify accounts that show signs of incipient stress, categorized by the number of days the principal or interest payment is overdue (SMA-0, SMA-1, and SMA-2).
- **Collateral-Free Working Capital:** Short-term loans provided to businesses for daily operations without the requirement of physical assets as security, often backed by government guarantees.



Confederation of Indian Industry

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(g):** Grants citizens the right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business; state interventions during crises aim to protect the viability of this fundamental right.
- **MSME Development (MSMED) Act, 2006:** The primary legal framework for the promotion, development, and enhancement of the competitiveness of MSMEs in India.
- **Disaster Management Act, 2005:** While primarily for natural disasters, its principles are often invoked for economic "shocks" to provide administrative relief and coordinated responses between the Centre and States.



Additional Key Points

- **Supply-Side Bottlenecks:** The West Asia war has placed energy and trade channels under immense pressure, leading to "imported inflation" that MSMEs struggle to pass on to consumers.
- **Employment Factor:** MSMEs are the second-largest employer in India after agriculture; any prolonged disruption in this sector has direct socio-economic implications for the labor market.
- **Trade Cost Management:** Beyond liquidity, the CII emphasizes the need for foreign exchange stability to protect exporters from the volatility of the Rupee against major global currencies.

Conclusion

The CII's appeal reflects the deepening anxiety within India's industrial core as the West Asia conflict transitions from a transient shock to a structural supply chain crisis. While the RBI and Government have stabilized initial market sentiments, the survival of the MSME sector—the backbone of Indian exports—now depends on "surgical" policy interventions such as duty waivers and regulatory forbearance. Proactive credit facilitation is not just an industry demand but a necessity to prevent a wider industrial slowdown.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (Role of RBI, Ministry of MSME, and Ministry of Finance).

5. Strategic Implications of Iranian Attacks on Gulf Energy Infrastructure

- **Escalation of Regional Conflict:** Following US and Israeli strikes on Iran in February 2026, the conflict has expanded into a systematic targeting of civilian and industrial assets across the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Kuwait. Iran justifies these strikes by accusing Gulf nations of facilitating US military operations from their soil.
- **Targeting Critical Energy Hubs:** Recent drone and missile salvos have caused "severe" material damage to Kuwaiti petrochemical facilities and the Ruwais Industrial City in the UAE. These attacks aim at the economic heart of the Gulf, disrupting oil processing, storage, and export capabilities that are vital to global energy stability.
- **Threat to Life-Sustainment Systems:** Beyond oil, Iran has targeted power plants and water desalination facilities. For desert-bound Gulf states, the shutdown of electricity generating units and desalination plants represents a transition from tactical warfare to a humanitarian crisis, as these nations rely almost entirely on such infrastructure for potable water.
- **Chokepoint Neutralization:** The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, combined with the physical destruction of storage tanks (such as Bapco Energies in Bahrain), has convulsed global markets. As a critical transit point for 1/5th of the world's liquid petroleum, any disruption here triggers immediate volatility in global crude prices.
- **Air Defence and Interception Challenges:** While the UAE has reported successful interceptions of several missiles, falling debris has still managed to ignite multiple fires at petrochemical plants. This





highlights the limitations of current air defence systems against high-volume, "swarming" drone and missile tactics in dense industrial zones.

- **Geopolitical Realignment:** The denial by Gulf states regarding US military usage of their territory suggests a breakdown in regional communication. The shift toward targeting "aluminium industries" and state-owned energy subsidiaries signals Iran's intent to inflict maximum financial pain on US allies in the region.

Key Definitions

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf; it is the world's most important oil chokepoint.
- **Desalination Plants:** Industrial facilities that remove salt and minerals from seawater to produce fresh water, essential for the survival of arid Gulf nations.
- **Petrochemical Hub:** An industrial complex where chemical products are derived from petroleum or natural gas for use in plastics, fertilizers, and synthetics.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **UN Charter Article 51:** Pertains to the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs; Iran and its neighbors are increasingly invoking this to justify their respective military postures.
- **UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea):** Specifically Part III, which governs "Straits Used for International Navigation." Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz challenges the "Right of Transit Passage" established under international maritime law.
- **Geneva Conventions (Protocol I):** Prohibits attacks on objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as drinking water installations and supplies (relevant to the targeting of desalination plants).

Additional Key Points

- **Economic Contagion:** The "material damage" reported by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation has a cascading effect on global supply chains, increasing the cost of raw materials for industries worldwide.
- **Environmental Risk:** Attacks on storage tanks and petrochemical plants create high risks of oil spills and toxic atmospheric pollution, affecting the delicate marine ecosystem of the Persian Gulf.
- **Asymmetric Warfare:** The use of low-cost drones to damage multi-billion dollar infrastructure demonstrates the effectiveness of asymmetric tactics in modern West Asian conflicts.

Conclusion

The targeted destruction of Gulf energy and water infrastructure marks a dangerous phase in the West Asia war. By moving beyond military targets to hit desalination plants and petrochemical hubs, the conflict threatens the fundamental survival mechanisms of Gulf states. The disruption of the Strait of Hormuz ensures that this is no longer a regional skirmish but a global economic crisis, demanding urgent international diplomatic intervention to prevent a total energy collapse.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood-relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (Energy Security and Diaspora in the Gulf).



- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, and Water; Security challenges and their management in border areas; Linkages of organized crime with terrorism.
- **Prelims:** Mapping of the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and locations like Ruwais (UAE); International maritime laws (UNCLOS); and India's energy import dependency.

6. Climate Cooperation: A Strategic Response to Global Energy Volatility

- **Fossil Fuel Dependency as a Security Threat:** The ongoing Middle East conflict has demonstrated that reliance on fossil fuels compromises national sovereignty and security. Global energy prices remain at the mercy of geopolitical shocks, leading to "energy price chaos" that triggers inflation, impacts household budgets, and threatens food security.
- **Economic Vulnerability of Asia:** Asia is particularly susceptible to disruptions in West Asia, as the region imports 40% of its oil through the Strait of Hormuz. Continued dependence on these vulnerable shipping straits leaves economies "lurching from crisis to crisis" with no long-term stability.
- **The "Clean Energy" Insulation:** Accelerating the transition to renewables (solar, wind) is presented as the only logical solution to insulate economies from global turmoil. Unlike fossil fuels, renewable energy sources are decentralized, do not depend on vulnerable trade routes, and are now the cheapest power options available globally.
- **Finance Gap in Developing Nations:** While over \$2 trillion flowed into clean energy last year (double that of fossil fuels), very little reached vulnerable developing economies. There is an urgent need for richer nations and global financial institutions to ensure affordable climate finance to facilitate a truly global energy shift.
- **Climate Change as an Inflation Driver:** Beyond energy costs, climate-induced disasters (floods, droughts, mega-storms) are hammering supply chains and becoming major drivers of global inflation. Strengthening "climate cooperation" is essential to build resilience and create an alternative to "strong-arm politics" dominating international affairs.
- **Focus on Grids and Storage:** Recent international commitments, such as the \$1 trillion pledged at COP30 in Brazil, focus on modernizing grids and storage. This infrastructure is critical to support the transition to modern, clean energy systems and ensure a "just transition" for communities historically dependent on fossil fuels.



Key Definitions

- **Just Transition:** A framework that ensures the shift to a low-carbon economy is fair and inclusive, providing alternative livelihoods and social protections for workers and communities reliant on the fossil fuel industry.
- **Climate Cooperation:** Collaborative international efforts, often under the UNFCCC, to mitigate global warming through shared technology, policy alignment, and financial support for developing nations.



- **Energy Sovereignty:** The right and ability of a nation to make its own decisions regarding energy production and consumption, utilizing domestic resources to reduce vulnerability to external supply shocks.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A of the Constitution:** A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) that mandates the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51(g):** A Fundamental Duty of Indian citizens to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Paris Agreement (2015):** A legally binding international treaty on climate change, aiming to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.
- **Energy Conservation Act, 2001 (Amended 2022):** Provides the regulatory framework for energy efficiency in India and introduced the concept of carbon markets to facilitate the transition to green energy.

Additional Key Points

- **Global Hunger Risk:** The World Food Programme (WFP) warns that current energy-led inflation could push global hunger to record levels this year due to the high cost of fuel-dependent agricultural inputs.
- **The COP Cycle:** Progress from COP30 (Brazil) to the upcoming COP31 (Türkiye) represents a crucial period for turning climate commitments into "real-world outcomes" through investments in EVs and modern storage technologies.
- **Subsidies Paradox:** Despite the climate crisis, fossil fuels continue to receive trillions of dollars in global subsidies, which often defies economic logic given the falling costs of renewable alternatives.

Conclusion

Climate cooperation is no longer just an environmental necessity; it is a strategic cure for the economic chaos caused by fossil fuel dependency. By shifting toward decentralized renewable energy, nations can reclaim their security and shield their populations from the volatile cycles of global politics. The urgency of this transition is underscored by the realization that clean energy and climate resilience are essential not despite global instability, but precisely because of it.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Energy security and infrastructure.

7. Strategic and Operational Feasibility of Reptile Deployment on the India-Bangladesh Border

- **Innovative Border Management Initiative:** The Border Security Force (BSF) is exploring the feasibility of using reptiles, specifically crocodiles and snakes, as a biological deterrent in vulnerable riverine gaps along the 4,096.7 km border with Bangladesh to curb infiltration and smuggling.



- **Addressing Gaps in Physical Fencing:** While 2,954.56 km of the sanctioned 3,326.14 km border has been fenced, approximately 371 km remains unfenced due to difficult terrain, including hills, valleys, and flood-prone riverine stretches where traditional physical barriers are technically unfeasible.
- **Strategic Shift to Non-Physical Barriers:** This move aligns with broader Home Ministry directives to seek unconventional and technological solutions (Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System - CIBMS) for areas where the topography prevents the construction of permanent structures.
- **Operational and Ethical Challenges:** Internal communications highlight significant hurdles, including the procurement of reptiles, the potential risk to local civilian populations residing along the riverine stretches, and the unpredictability of animal behavior during seasonal floods.
- **Terrain-Specific Security Risks:** The eastern border's topography makes it highly susceptible to illegal migration and anti-national activities. The "swim or sink" approach seeks to leverage the natural ecosystem to create a psychological and physical barrier in the absence of floodlit fences.
- **Comprehensive Border Illumination:** Alongside these feasibility studies, the Government of India continues the phase-wise construction of physical fences illuminated by floodlights to ensure 24/7 surveillance in accessible regions.

Key Definitions

- **Riverine Border:** A border defined by a river or passing through marshy, water-logged terrain where the boundary is often fluid and difficult to demarcate with permanent fences.
- **Infiltration:** The unauthorized entry of individuals or groups across a sovereign border for illegal migration, smuggling, or insurgent activities.
- **Non-Physical Barrier:** Security solutions that do not rely on fences or walls, instead utilizing technology (sensors, cameras, radars) or, in this experimental case, biological deterrents.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 355 of the Constitution:** Mandates the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance, providing the legal basis for central forces like the BSF to secure international borders.
- **Border Security Force Act, 1968:** Governs the constitution and regulation of the BSF, outlining its duties in ensuring the security of the borders of India and for matters connected therewith.
- **The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** This poses a significant legal challenge to the plan, as the capture, transport, and deployment of crocodiles and snakes (protected species) for security purposes must comply with strict conservation and ethical guidelines.
- **Seventh Schedule (List I - Union List):** Entry 2 (Naval, military and air forces; any other armed forces of the Union) gives the Central Government exclusive jurisdiction over border security.



Additional Key Points

- **Technological Integration:** The BSF is increasingly relying on the "Bold-QIT" (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) to monitor riverine areas where physical presence is difficult.



- **Human Rights Concerns:** Experts suggest that using biological deterrents could lead to international scrutiny regarding the treatment of migrants and the safety of innocent border-dwellers.
- **Ecological Impact:** Introducing high concentrations of predatory reptiles into specific riverine pockets could disrupt the local food chain and biodiversity balance.

Conclusion

The proposal to deploy crocodiles and snakes represents a desperate search for solutions in the face of India's most complex topographical border challenge. While the psychological deterrent value is high, the legal, ethical, and operational risks—particularly the safety of Indian citizens in border villages—remain substantial. A balanced approach would likely see these biological ideas remain experimental, with the ultimate focus shifting toward high-tech "Smart Fencing" and CIBMS.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (Role of the BSF and Ministry of Home Affairs).
- **Prelims:** Mapping of the India-Bangladesh border (West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram), Wildlife Protection Act schedules, and BSF jurisdictional updates.

8. Ladakh Tourism Resolution: Balancing Investment and Autonomy

- **Joint Resolution on External Investment:** The Ladakh Tourist Trade Alliance (LTTA), representing 14 Leh-based organizations, has passed a resolution calling for "restricted external investment" in the tourism sector, stipulating that any such entry must involve local participation.
- **Threat to Local Livelihoods:** Stakeholders have flagged increasing pressure from large external businesses and "vested interests" seeking to dominate the region's tourism. They argue this poses a dual threat to the fragile Himalayan environment and the limited economic opportunities available to the local population.
- **Call for Policy Protection:** The resolution emphasizes that the economic interests and entrepreneurial opportunities of residents must be prioritized through policy advocacy and community-led initiatives to ensure that tourism remains a sustainable and locally-owned asset.
- **Advocacy for Constitutional Safeguards:** Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, recently released after a six-month detention under the National Security Act, reiterated that Ladakh's demands for Statehood and Sixth Schedule status are rooted in a desire to protect the region's land, culture, and ecology.
- **Search for a "Middle-Path" Solution:** Wangchuk stressed the importance of unity between the Buddhist and Muslim communities of Leh and Kargil. He advocated for a constructive, open-minded dialogue with the Central Government to find a balanced solution that ensures development without compromising local autonomy.





- **Patriotism vs. Protests:** Addressing the labeling of protesters as "anti-national," the leadership clarified that the movement is a patriotic effort to secure constitutional protections for a sensitive border region rather than an opposition to the state.

Key Definitions

- **Sixth Schedule:** A provision under Article 244 of the Indian Constitution that provides for the administration of tribal areas in certain states through Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) with legislative and judicial powers.
- **Fragile Environment:** An ecosystem (like the high-altitude cold desert of Ladakh) that has low resilience to human interference, where even minor changes in land use or pollution can lead to permanent ecological damage.
- **Statehood:** The status of being a full-fledged state within the Indian Union, granting the region its own elected legislative assembly and greater control over domestic governance compared to a Union Territory.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 239A:** The provision under which certain Union Territories (like Puducherry or potentially a future Ladakh) can have a legislature; currently, Ladakh is a UT without a legislature.
- **Sixth Schedule (Article 244 & 275):** Provides for Autonomous District Councils which can make laws on land, forest, water, agriculture, and town management—protections currently sought by Ladakhi groups.
- **National Security Act (NSA), 1980:** An act that allows the government to detain a person for up to 12 months without a charge if they are deemed a threat to national security or public order.
- **Article 19(1)(g) vs. Reasonable Restrictions:** While the Constitution guarantees the right to practice any profession or trade, Article 19(6) allows the state to impose reasonable restrictions in the interest of the general public or for the protection of the interests of any Scheduled Tribe.

Additional Key Points

- **Tourism as an Economic Pillar:** Tourism is the backbone of Ladakh's economy; however, unregulated mass tourism can lead to water scarcity, waste management crises, and cultural erosion.
- **The Leh-Kargil Unity:** The joint struggle of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) marks a significant socio-political shift toward a unified regional identity.
- **Geopolitical Sensitivity:** As a border region sharing boundaries with China and Pakistan, the internal stability and satisfaction of the local population are considered vital for national security.

Conclusion

The resolution by Ladakh's tourism stakeholders reflects a growing global trend of "responsible tourism" where the focus shifts from volume to value and local benefit. The demand for restricted investment is not a rejection of development but a plea for "protective development" that aligns with the ecological and cultural realities of the plateau. A "middle-path" solution involving constitutional safeguards like the Sixth Schedule could potentially bridge the gap between central administrative goals and local aspirations for self-governance.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Federalism and challenges related to Union Territories; Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with others; Issues relating to the 5th and 6th Schedules.
- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Infrastructure and Tourism; Internal Security challenges.

9. Telangana Adopts RBI's Benchmark Issuance Strategy for State Loans

- **Inaugural Implementation of BIS:** Telangana has officially joined a pilot group of nine states adopting the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Benchmark Issuance Strategy (BIS) for State Development Loans (SDLs) starting in the 2026-27 financial year.
- **Objective of the Strategy:** The BIS framework is designed to enhance transparency and provide greater clarity to investors by issuing securities in specific, pre-announced "benchmark tenor buckets" rather than fragmented, irregular durations.
- **Enhancing Market Liquidity:** By standardizing bond tenors, the RBI aims to create larger, more liquid benchmark bonds. This reduces market fragmentation, improves price discovery, and allows investors better visibility into the supply of state-issued debt.
- **Tenure Diversification:** Under this strategy, Telangana has structured its first-quarter market borrowings of 18,900 crore across various tenures, ranging from mid-term (6-10 years) to long-term (over 25 years), to cater to different investor appetites.
- **Investor-Centric Reforms:** The transition toward standardized benchmark bonds is a significant reform in the sub-national debt market, aligning state borrowing practices more closely with the Central Government's "gilt" (government securities) market.
- **Fiscal Planning and Indent Submission:** The Telangana government has already submitted its borrowing indent to the RBI, with specific tranches (e.g., 3,900 crore) targeting long-term buckets of 16-25 years and above, reflecting a strategic move to lock in long-term capital.

Key Definitions

- **Benchmark Issuance Strategy (BIS):** A methodology where debt is issued in specific, standardized maturities to create large "benchmark" stocks that are easier to trade in the secondary market.
- **State Development Loans (SDLs):** Dated securities issued by State Governments through an auction conducted by the RBI; the interest is paid half-yearly and the principal is repaid on the maturity date.
- **Price Discovery:** The process by which the market determines the price of an asset (or the interest rate of a bond) through the interactions of buyers and sellers.
- **Market Fragmentation:** A condition where a large number of small, illiquid bond issues exist, making it difficult for investors to buy or sell without significantly impacting the price.





Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 293(3) of the Constitution:** Stipulates that a State may not raise any loan without the consent of the Government of India if there is still outstanding any part of a loan which has been made to the State by the Union.
- **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act:** Sets the institutional framework for state governments to limit their fiscal deficits and total outstanding debt as a percentage of GSDP.
- **RBI Act, 1934:** Empowers the Reserve Bank to manage the public debt of the Union and the State Governments.
- **SEBI (Issue and Listing of Municipal Debt Securities) Regulations:** While specifically for urban local bodies, these highlight the broader regulatory push toward transparent and liquid debt markets in India.

Additional Key Points

- **Secondary Market Impact:** Currently, SDLs often suffer from poor secondary market liquidity compared to Central Government Securities (G-Secs); BIS is the primary tool intended to bridge this gap.
- **Sensitivity and Consent:** Adoption is based on the voluntary concurrence of state governments, reflecting the "Cooperative Federalism" approach in managing the nation's internal debt.
- **Borrowing Costs:** Successful implementation of BIS can potentially lower the "spread" (the difference in interest rates) between G-Secs and SDLs, reducing the interest burden on state exchequers.

Conclusion

The adoption of the Benchmark Issuance Strategy by Telangana marks a sophisticated evolution in sub-national fiscal management. By moving toward standardized, liquid bond buckets, the state is likely to attract a more diverse investor base, including insurance companies and pension funds that seek long-term, transparent assets. As this pilot expands, it will likely lead to a more integrated and efficient sovereign debt market in India, providing states with more predictable access to capital.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to mobilization of resources; Government Budgeting; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (Role of RBI); Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure (Article 293).

10. WTO's MC14 in Yaoundé: A Crisis in Global Trade Multilateralism

- **Ministerial Deadlock and the "Yaoundé Package":** The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Cameroon (March 2026) concluded without a consensus ministerial declaration. To avoid a total collapse, the WTO Director General introduced a "Yaoundé Package" of draft decisions, deferring final negotiations to the General Council in Geneva.
- **Lapse of the E-commerce Moratorium:** For the first time since 1998, members failed to extend the moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions. The lapse on March 31, 2026, technically allows countries to impose tariffs on digital trade, though 66 members signed a separate E-Commerce Agreement (ECA) to maintain duty-free flows among themselves.



- **TRIPS and Non-Violation Complaints:** The long-standing moratorium barring "non-violation" complaints under the TRIPS Agreement also collapsed. This opens the door for developed nations to challenge the public health laws of developing countries, arguing that such laws nullify expected IP benefits even if no specific WTO rule is broken.
- **Standoff over Plurilateral Agreements:** India led the opposition against incorporating the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement into the WTO rulebook. India's stance highlights the lack of legal safeguards for "plurilateral" deals (supported by some, not all members) and the need for these agreements to be inclusive rather than exclusive.
- **Stalled Dispute Settlement Reforms:** The conference failed to provide a roadmap for reviving the WTO's Appellate Body, which has been non-functional due to US blocking of member appointments. This paralysis undermines the WTO's role as an impartial judge in trade disputes, allowing "might is right" unilateralism to resurface.
- **Rise of Coercive Unilateralism:** The failure of MC14 exacerbates the trend of major powers, particularly the US, bypassing multilateral rules. This mirrors the 1970s era of "Section 301" actions, where nations take unilateral trade measures against perceived unfair practices, threatening the Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) principle.



Key Definitions

- **Most-Favoured Nation (MFN):** A foundational WTO principle requiring a country to provide any trade concession offered to one member to all other WTO members equally.
- **Plurilateral Agreement:** An agreement between a subset of WTO members that is not binding on the entire 166-member body.
- **Non-Violation Complaint:** A claim that a country's legal action has "nullified or impaired" a benefit another member expected to receive, even if the action does not technically violate a WTO agreement.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253 of the Constitution:** Empowers Parliament to make laws for the whole or any part of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country or at international conferences (like the WTO).
- **Marrakesh Agreement (1994):** The treaty that established the WTO; Annex 4 specifically deals with Plurilateral Trade Agreements, which require consensus to be added to the WTO acquis.
- **Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT):** WTO provisions that give developing countries special rights, such as longer timeframes to implement agreements and technical assistance.

Additional Key Points

- **Digital Trade Bifurcation:** The end of the e-commerce moratorium creates two legal frameworks: the standard WTO rules (allowing tariffs) and the new ECA (prohibiting them), complicating global digital business compliance.



- **Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD):** Supported by 129 countries, this aims to simplify investment procedures but remains outside the WTO legal framework due to the "consensus" requirement for Annex 4.
- **US Trade Act of 1974 (Section 301):** A US law that allows for unilateral retaliation against trade partners; its resurgence is seen as a sign of declining faith in multilateral adjudication.

Conclusion

The MC14 will be remembered as the moment the "consensus-based" model of the WTO faced its most severe fracture. The lapse of moratoriums on e-commerce and TRIPS complaints marks a shift toward a more litigious and fragmented trade environment. For India, the challenge lies in balancing its role as a defender of multilateralism and "policy space" for developing nations while ensuring that the rise of plurilateralism does not leave it isolated from new global trade rules.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Important International institutions (WTO).
- **GS Paper III:** Issues relating to intellectual property rights; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy.

11. SHANTI Act 2025: Strategic Shift in India's Nuclear Energy Landscape

- **Ambitious Capacity Expansion:** The Union Budget 2025-26 set a target to increase India's nuclear power capacity from 8,180 MW to 100 GW (1,00,000 MW) by 2047. This is essential to meet the energy demands of a "Viksit Bharat" while achieving the "Net Zero" emission target by 2070.
- **Legislative Transformation via SHANTI Act:** The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025, repealed the 1962 Atomic Energy Act and the 2010 Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA). It ends the Department of Atomic Energy's (DAE) exclusive monopoly by allowing private companies to build, own, and operate nuclear plants.
- **Regulatory and Liability Reforms:** The Act grants statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) and revises the nuclear liability framework. These changes are designed to mitigate risks for private and foreign investors, addressing long-standing hurdles in the nuclear supply chain.
- **Nuclear as a Baseload Necessity:** While India aims for 500 GW of renewables by 2030, renewables face intermittency and land-intensity challenges. Nuclear power provides a steady, low-carbon "baseload" (currently 3% of generation from 1.8% capacity), making it the preferred alternative to coal-based thermal power.
- **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and PHWRs:** The government is focusing on indigenous SMRs (5 MW to 200 MW) for captive use in energy-intensive industries like steel and data centers. The





proven 220 MW Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR) is being positioned as a "workhorse" for modularization and rapid deployment.

- **Three-Front Strategy for 100 GW:** Realizing the target requires: (a) indigenizing foreign designs (EdF, Westinghouse) to lower costs; (b) accelerating R&D in Molten-Salt reactors and Thorium-HALEU cladding; and (c) establishing transparent rules for fuel ownership, waste management, and insurance.

Key Definitions

- **Baseload Power:** The minimum amount of electric power that a utility system must generate to meet the constant demand of its customers. Nuclear and thermal plants are typical baseload providers.
- **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** Advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 MW per unit, which is about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors.
- **Fissile Material:** Material capable of sustaining a nuclear fission chain reaction, such as Uranium-235 or Plutonium-239, used as fuel in nuclear reactors.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Seventh Schedule (List I - Union List):** Entry 6 gives the Central Government exclusive jurisdiction over "Atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production."
- **SHANTI Act, 2025:** The primary legal framework governing civilian nuclear energy, private participation, and regulatory oversight in India, replacing the Atomic Energy Act of 1962.
- **Article 51A (h):** Part of Fundamental Duties, which encourages the development of "scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform," aligning with advanced nuclear research.

Additional Key Points

- **Cost Competitiveness:** India's construction cost for 700 MW PHWRs is approximately \$2 million per MW, significantly lower than global averages, though unproven foreign designs may cost upwards of \$5 million per MW.
- **The Thorium Route:** India holds one of the world's largest Thorium reserves. Research into Thorium cladding with HALEU (High Assay Low Enriched Uranium) is a strategic alternative to the traditional Three-Stage Nuclear Power Programme.
- **Land Intensity:** Renewable farms require nearly 10 times more land than thermal or nuclear plants to produce the same amount of electricity, a major constraint for a land-scarce country like India.

Conclusion

The SHANTI Act 2025 marks a paradigm shift from a state-controlled, secretive nuclear regime to a transparent, market-linked civilian nuclear sector. While the legislative framework is in place, the success of the 100 GW mission depends on the notification of clear rules regarding land use (exclusion zones), nuclear waste disposal, and a robust insurance pool. Effectively separating strategic defense interests from civilian power will be the litmus test for attracting large-scale private investment.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology—developments and their applications; Indigenization of technology; Infrastructure (Energy); Environmental pollution and degradation (Net Zero).



- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

12. Executive Tenure and Constitutional Accountability: The Term Limit Debate

- **Historical Milestone and Context:** On March 22, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi completed 8,931 days as the head of an elected government (combined tenure as CM and PM), surpassing the previous record held by Pawan Kumar Chamling. This milestone has reignited the constitutional debate regarding the absence of executive term limits in India's parliamentary democracy.
- **Constituent Assembly's Rationale:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar argued against formal term limits, favoring a "daily assessment of responsibility" through parliamentary mechanisms (questions, no-confidence motions) over the "periodic assessment" of fixed-term elections. The framers believed the legislature's constant power to remove the executive served as a sufficient rolling check.
- **Impact of the Tenth Schedule (1985):** The 52nd Amendment introduced the Anti-Defection Law, which mandated disqualification for legislators voting against the party whip. This fundamentally altered the executive-legislative balance by making no-confidence motions nearly impossible to succeed against a majority government, effectively neutralizing the "daily assessment" Ambedkar relied upon.
- **Asymmetry with the Presidency:** India has established a strong constitutional convention against a third term for the President (a ceremonial head), yet no such convention or law exists for the Prime Minister, who wields actual executive power. This creates a structural irony where the less powerful office is more constrained than the most powerful one.
- **Comparative Global Standards:** Unlike India, many large democracies impose strict limits. The U.S. 22nd Amendment limits Presidents to two terms, and countries like Brazil, Indonesia, and South Korea follow similar constraints. In parliamentary systems, the lack of term limits is usually balanced by robust intra-party democracy, which is often cited as a missing "safety valve" in Indian political parties.
- **Risks of Prolonged Incumbency:** Extended tenures allow the executive to exert long-term influence over neutral institutions, including regulatory bodies, the Election Commission, and the higher judiciary. Critics argue that without term limits or parliamentary flexibility, elections alone may struggle to counter the compounding advantages of a decades-long incumbency.

Key Definitions

- **Executive Term Limit:** A legal restriction that limits the number of terms or years an individual can serve in a particular elected office.
- **Daily vs. Periodic Assessment:** A concept introduced by Ambedkar; daily assessment refers to parliamentary scrutiny (Question Hour, Motions), while periodic assessment refers to General Elections held every five years.
- **Constitutional Convention:** Unwritten rules of political practice that are considered binding by those who operate the constitution, despite not being legally enforceable by courts.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 75(3):** Stipulates that the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People (Lok Sabha).



- **Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law):** Added by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985; it provides for the disqualification of members on grounds of defection, which effectively enforces party discipline during floor votes.
- **Kihoto Hollohan vs. Zachillhu (1992):** The Supreme Court judgment that upheld the Tenth Schedule but noted the importance of balancing party discipline with the freedom of speech of legislators.
- **22nd Amendment (US Constitution):** A global benchmark that limits a person to two terms as President, enacted to prevent the emergence of "perpetual" executive leadership.

Additional Key Points

- **Intra-Party Democracy:** Unlike the UK, where parties frequently change leaders mid-term via internal ballots, Indian parties generally lack institutional mechanisms to challenge a sitting leader without triggering the Anti-Defection Law.
- **Proposed Reforms:** Potential solutions include exempting "Confidence/No-Confidence" votes from the Tenth Schedule or introducing a "Two-Plus-One" model (limiting consecutive terms but allowing a return after a cooling-off period).
- **State-Level Precedents:** The debate is equally relevant to State politics, where leaders like Jyoti Basu and Naveen Patnaik have served record tenures, shaping regional political landscapes for decades.

Conclusion

The 8,931-day milestone highlights a structural shift in the Indian Republic: the transition from a "Parliamentary Executive" to a "Prime Ministerial Executive." While the electorate's right to choose their leader is a cornerstone of democracy, the erosion of daily parliamentary accountability—largely due to the Tenth Schedule—raises questions about whether the Constitution needs new formal constraints to prevent the over-concentration of power in a single individual over multiple decades.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, and significant provisions; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions, and responsibilities.
- **GS Paper II:** Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.