



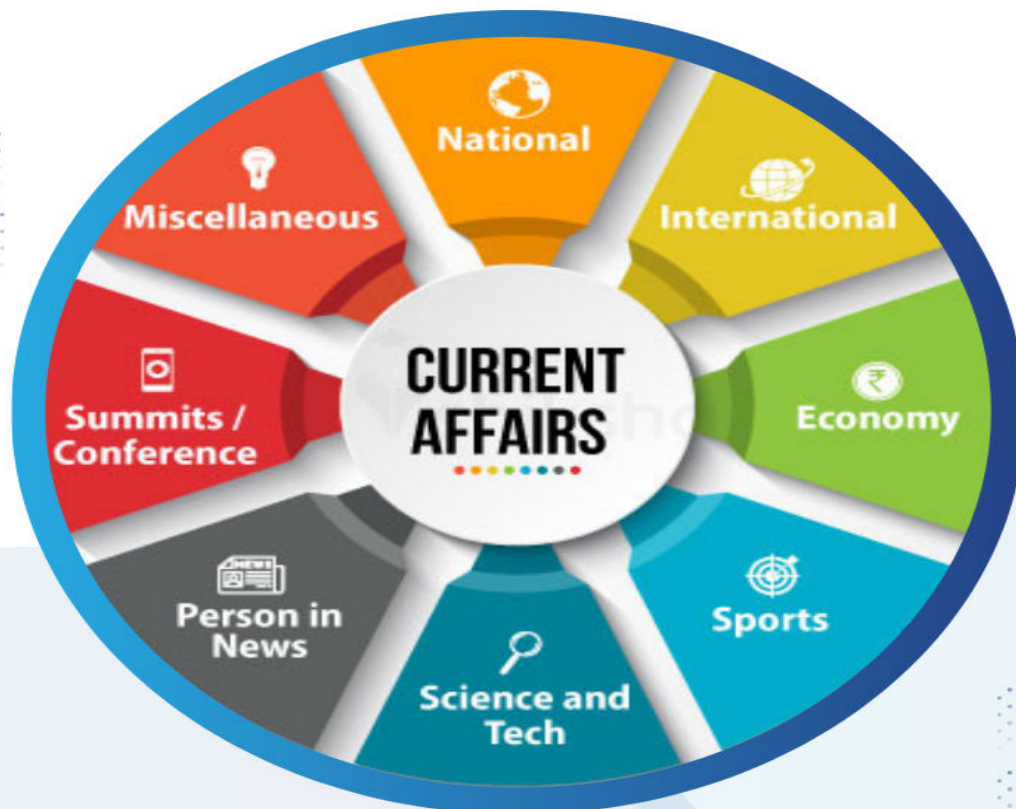
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY
&
STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 07/04/2026 (TUESDAY)



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Table of Contents

1. OPEC+ Output Hike and Persistent Oil Price Volatility	2
2. Moody's Credit Rating for India: Economic Stability Amidst Geopolitical Volatility	3
3. Impact of West Asian Geopolitical Tensions on India's Services Sector	4
4. Trends in Summer Crop Sowing: Shifting Patterns Amidst Global Volatility.....	6
5. Government Ramps Up Natural Gas Allocation for Urea Production	7
6. RBI Proposes Tighter Regulatory Framework for Business Correspondents.....	9
7. Transition to Biodegradable Sachets: Addressing the Crisis of Small-Format Plastic Waste.....	10
8. India Achieves Record Wind Energy Capacity Addition in FY2025-26	12
9. Supreme Court Declines Interference in Kozhikode-Wayanad Tunnel Project	13
10. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026: Critical Analysis	15
11. Climate Change as a Public Health Emergency: The Indian Context	16
12. India's Internet Censorship Regime: Governance and Implementation Challenges	18



VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. OPEC+ Output Hike and Persistent Oil Price Volatility

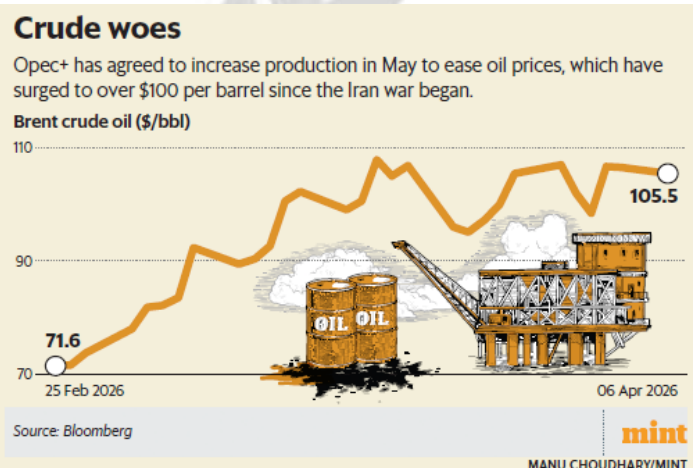
Context: Following the geopolitical instability triggered by the Iran conflict and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, OPEC+ has announced a production adjustment to stabilize markets. However, structural supply deficits and maritime bottlenecks continue to keep Brent crude above the \$100 per barrel threshold.

Summary of Key Developments

- **Inadequate Supply Response:** The OPEC+ decision to hike output by 206,000 barrels per day (bpd) in May is viewed as insufficient to offset the 20% global supply deficit caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Maritime Security Risks:** The blockade of critical chokepoints has effectively stranded nearly 10 million bpd of Gulf production, making the "paper" increase in production quotas physically impossible to deliver to global markets.
- **Geopolitical Premium:** Ongoing attacks on Russian energy infrastructure have compromised approximately 40% of its export capacity, forcing major consumers to buy at a premium despite the presence of temporary sanction waivers.
- **Emergency Reserve Liquidation:** The International Energy Agency (IEA) has authorized the release of 400 million barrels from emergency reserves—the largest in its history—to bridge the gap, yet market sentiment remains bullish due to prolonged war prospects.
- **Impact on India:** As the world's third-largest oil consumer, India faces a dual challenge: maintaining energy security through diverse sourcing and managing fiscal deficits after slashing excise duties by ₹10/litre to insulate domestic retail prices.

Key Definitions

- **OPEC+:** A grouping of the 13 OPEC members and 10 non-OPEC members (led by Russia) that coordinate production levels to influence global oil prices.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between Oman and Iran connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea; it is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- **Brent Crude:** A major trading classification of sweet light crude oil that serves as a benchmark price for purchases of oil worldwide.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions (India)

- **Article 265:** No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law. This governs the Centre's power to levy and subsequently slash Excise Duty on petroleum products.
- **Seventh Schedule (List I, Entry 53):** The Union List empowers the Parliament to legislate on "Regulation and development of oilfields and mineral oil resources; petroleum and petroleum products."
- **Petroleum Act, 1934:** The primary legal framework governing the import, transport, storage, and production of petroleum in India.



- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** Managed by ISPRL (Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd), these are federally mandated stockpiles to ensure energy security during supply disruptions.

Conclusion

The marginal output hike by OPEC+ serves more as a symbolic gesture of market stewardship than a functional solution to the current energy crisis. As long as the Strait of Hormuz remains a flashpoint and infrastructure damage persists in Eastern Europe, the "security premium" will continue to outweigh production quotas. For net importers like India, the focus must shift from price-taking to long-term strategic hedging and accelerated energy transition to mitigate the "imported inflation" inherent in fossil fuel dependency.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** International Relations, Effect of policies of developed/developing countries on India's interests (Energy Diplomacy and West Asian Crisis).
- **General Studies III:** Indian Economy (Inflation, Fiscal Deficit, and Excise Duty), Infrastructure (Energy), and Security (Maritime security and chokepoints).
- **Prelims:** Locations of major chokepoints (Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb), OPEC+ composition, and IEA mandates.

2. Moody's Credit Rating for India: Economic Stability Amidst Geopolitical Volatility

Context: International rating agency Moody's Investors Service has affirmed India's sovereign credit rating at 'Baa3' with a stable outlook. While the rating reflects India's long-term growth potential and fiscal consolidation, the agency has flagged significant headwinds originating from the West Asian conflict, specifically regarding energy security and inflationary pressures.

Key Highlights of the Rating Affirmation

- **Retention of Investment Grade:** India continues to hold the 'Baa3' rating, which is the lowest investment-grade ranking. The "stable" outlook suggests that the risks to the country's credit profile are balanced, supported by a robust financial system and resilient domestic demand.
- **Geopolitical Growth Moderation:** Moody's anticipates a deceleration in real GDP growth to 6% for FY27. This projection is primarily attributed to the spillover effects of the Iran conflict, which has disrupted global supply chains and increased the "risk premium" on essential imports.
- **Fiscal Consolidation Path:** The agency noted a gradual improvement in India's fiscal metrics post-pandemic. Efforts by the government to narrow the fiscal deficit and improve the quality of public spending have bolstered the sovereign credit profile relative to other emerging market peers.
- **Inflationary Risks and External Shocks:** Prolonged instability in West Asia is identified as a primary driver for upside risks to inflation. High crude prices act as a "tax" on the Indian economy, potentially widening the Current Account Deficit (CAD) and stressing the rupee.
- **Structural Strengths:** India's high growth potential, compared to other Baa-rated sovereigns, remains a key rating driver. This is supported by physical and digital infrastructure developments and a diversifying manufacturing base under the 'Make in India' initiative.





Important Definitions

- **Sovereign Credit Rating:** An independent assessment of the creditworthiness of a country or sovereign entity. It provides investors with insights into the level of risk associated with investing in the debt of a particular country, including political and economic risks.
- **Baa3 Rating:** According to Moody's scale, obligations rated Baa3 are subject to moderate credit risk. They are considered medium-grade and as such may possess certain speculative characteristics, though they remain within the "Investment Grade" category.
- **Fiscal Metrics:** These are indicators used to measure a government's financial health, including the fiscal deficit, debt-to-GDP ratio, and tax-to-GDP ratio.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 292:** Governs the borrowing powers of the Union Government. It stipulates that the executive power of the Union extends to borrowing upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of India within limits fixed by Parliament.
- **Article 293:** Pertains to borrowing by States. It limits the ability of States to raise loans without the consent of the Union if there is still an outstanding part of a previous loan made to the State by the Union.
- **FRBM Act, 2003:** The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act aims to ensure institutional financial discipline by setting targets for the government to reduce fiscal deficits and eliminate revenue deficits.

Conclusion

The affirmation of the Baa3 rating serves as a testament to India's macroeconomic resilience; however, the warning regarding FY27 growth underscores the vulnerability of the Indian economy to external energy shocks. To maintain this "stable" outlook and move toward a rating upgrade, India must balance its capital expenditure needs with strict adherence to fiscal glide paths, while navigating the complexities of a volatile global energy market.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment. The impact of external shocks on domestic growth and the significance of credit ratings for Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) inflows.
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Impact of global conflicts (West Asia) on India's economic interests and the role of international agencies in shaping global economic perception.

3. Impact of West Asian Geopolitical Tensions on India's Services Sector

Context: India's services sector, a critical pillar of its GDP, experienced a 14-month growth low in March 2026. Data from the HSBC India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) indicates that while the sector remains in expansion mode, the ongoing conflict in West Asia has begun to dampen domestic demand and escalate operational costs.

Analysis of Services Sector Performance

- **PMI Growth Deceleration:** The Services PMI moderated to 57.5 in March from 58.1 in February. Although this represents the weakest expansion since early 2025, the figure remains significantly above the long-term average of 54.4, signaling continued resilience despite external shocks.



- **Dual Impact of Conflict:** The West Asia war has acted as a double-edged sword; it has constrained domestic demand and tourism due to market uncertainty, while simultaneously driving input cost inflation to its highest level since mid-2022 due to surging fuel and logistics expenses.
- **Divergence in Demand:** A notable "de-coupling" was observed between domestic and international markets. While domestic new business intakes slowed, export orders approached a series peak, with robust demand surfacing from regions including Africa, Europe, and the Americas.
- **Sectoral Vulnerability:** Three out of four broad service areas—Finance & Insurance, Real Estate, and Transport/Information & Communication—reported softer sales. Consumer services, however, faced the brunt of the quickest increases in input costs.
- **Employment and Optimism:** Despite the slowdown, job creation reached its strongest pace since mid-2025. Business confidence remains at a 12-year high, underpinned by aggressive advertising and expectations of long-term demand recovery once geopolitical tensions subside.



Key Definitions

- **Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI):** An economic indicator derived from monthly surveys of private sector companies. A reading above 50 indicates expansion, while below 50 indicates contraction. It is a "lead indicator" that predicts economic trends before official GDP data is released.
- **Input Cost Inflation:** The rise in the price of raw materials and services (like fuel, electricity, and labor) used by a company to produce its final output.
- **Composite PMI Output Index:** A weighted average of the Manufacturing and Services PMI, providing a holistic view of the private sector's health.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 301:** Guarantees Freedom of Trade, Commerce, and Intercourse throughout the territory of India, which is essential for the seamless operation of the transport and communication services sectors during crises.
- **Entry 92C of Union List (List I):** Provides the Union government the power to levy taxes on services. The health of the services sector directly impacts the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) and Central GST (CGST) collections.
- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019:** Relevant as consumer services face high output charges; it ensures that inflationary pricing does not lead to unfair trade practices or exploitation of domestic consumers.

Conclusion

The cooling of the services sector highlights India's sensitivity to global supply chain disruptions and energy price volatility. While record-high export orders and strong employment figures provide a safety net, the sustained rise in input costs poses a risk of "cost-push inflation." Maintaining growth momentum will require a delicate balance of monetary policy by the RBI to manage inflation without stifling the nascent recovery in domestic business sentiment.



UPSC Relevance

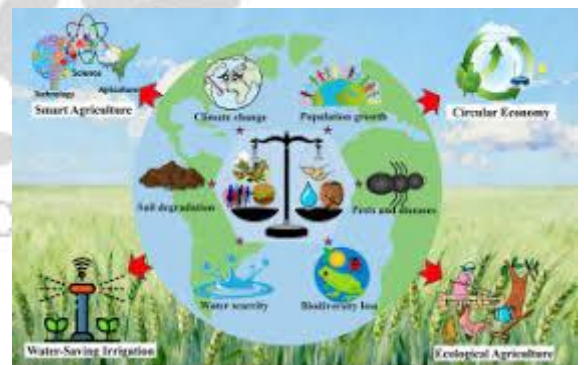
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Role of the services sector in Indian economy; lead indicators like PMI vs. lag indicators like GDP; impact of global supply chains on domestic inflation.
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Impact of West Asian instability on India's "Extended Neighborhood" policy and its economic fallout on the domestic service industry and tourism.
- **Prelims:** Definition and calculation of PMI, components of the services sector (finance, insurance, real estate), and the difference between headline and core inflation in the context of input costs.

4. Trends in Summer Crop Sowing: Shifting Patterns Amidst Global Volatility

Context: Data released by the Ministry of Agriculture as of 3 April 2026 indicates a marginal increase in the total area under summer crops (Zaid season), reaching 5.82 million hectares. While pulses and coarse cereals have seen an uptick in acreage, rice cultivation has witnessed a notable decline, reflecting farmer concerns over input costs and supply chain disruptions caused by the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

Analysis of Sowing Patterns and Challenges

- **Marginal Growth in Acreage:** The total area under summer crops has edged up from 5.78 million hectares last year to 5.82 million hectares. This growth is driven primarily by a shift toward climate-resilient and low-water-intensive crops like pulses and coarse cereals.
- **Decline in Rice Cultivation:** Rice acreage has seen a sharp contraction. This is largely attributed to its high dependency on fertilizers and irrigation, both of which have been impacted by rising energy costs and potential shortages in the supply of phosphoric and potassic (P&K) fertilizers due to the Iran war.
- **Growth in Nutri-Cereals and Pulses:** There is a significant increase in the sowing of coarse cereals (millets) and oilseeds. These crops are often favored during the summer window as they require less water and have shorter gestation periods, providing a "safety net" for farmers against market volatility.
- **Input Supply Constraints:** The West Asian conflict has sparked fears of a disruption in the import of raw materials for fertilizer production. Since India is a net importer of such inputs, the resulting price hike is influencing crop selection toward those requiring fewer chemical interventions.
- **Regional Water Stress:** The decline in rice also reflects localized water availability issues. As summer temperatures rise, the reliance on groundwater for water-intensive paddy becomes economically unviable for small and marginal farmers, leading to a natural diversification of the cropping pattern.



Key Definitions

- **Zaid Season:** The short cropping season between the Kharif (monsoon) and Rabi (winter) seasons, typically from March to June. Common crops include watermelon, muskmelon, cucumber, vegetables, and fodder crops.
- **Acreage:** The total area of land, measured in acres or hectares, used for agricultural purposes or specifically for sowing a particular crop.



- **Coarse Cereals:** A group of broad-leaved, short-duration grasses used for food, such as Jowar (Sorghum), Bajra (Pearl Millet), and Ragi (Finger Millet). They are nutritionally superior and drought-resistant.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Entry 14 of State List (List II):** "Agriculture, including agricultural education and research, protection against pests and prevention of plant diseases" falls under the primary jurisdiction of State Governments.
- **Article 48 (DPSP):** Directs the State to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines, which includes supporting crop diversification and soil health.
- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Used by the Union to regulate the supply and distribution of fertilizers and seeds, ensuring that geopolitical shocks do not lead to hoarding or black marketing of agricultural inputs.
- **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:** While primarily about distribution, the production of pulses and cereals is vital for maintaining the nutritional buffer stocks required under this Act.

Conclusion

The marginal rise in summer crop sowing, despite the decline in rice, indicates a tactical shift in Indian agriculture toward resilience. However, the sensitivity of Indian farming to West Asian geopolitical stability—specifically regarding fertilizer inputs and fuel costs—underscores a structural vulnerability. To sustain food security, the focus must remain on promoting "Per Drop More Crop" through micro-irrigation and incentivizing the production of oilseeds and pulses to reduce import dependency.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Agriculture):** Cropping patterns in various parts of the country; different types of irrigation and irrigation systems; issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices.
- **GS Paper I (Geography):** Major crops and cropping patterns; impact of climate and geography on seasonal agriculture (Rabi, Kharif, Zaid).

5. Government Ramps Up Natural Gas Allocation for Urea Production

Context: In a strategic move to ensure agricultural stability, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has significantly increased the allocation of natural gas to domestic fertilizer plants. This decision follows a period of acute supply constraints triggered by the Iran war and the subsequent disruption of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) maritime routes, which had previously forced several urea manufacturing units to suspend operations.

Key Analysis of Gas Allocation and Fertilizer Security

- **Strategic Supply Restoration:** The government has enhanced the gas supply to fertilizer units from a low of 70%-75% to approximately 90% of their average consumption. This recalibration is based on improved domestic inventory levels and the scheduled arrival of fresh LNG shipments despite ongoing regional volatility.





- **Impact of Geopolitical Disruption:** The West Asian conflict had led to a severe shortage of LNG—a critical feedstock for urea—threatening the production cycle just before the crucial monsoon sowing season for staples like rice, corn, and soybeans.
- **Urea Import Dependency:** Despite being a major producer, India remains the world's largest importer of urea. To bridge the current domestic production gap, Indian Potash Ltd (IPL) has issued a global tender for 2.5 million tonnes of urea to secure the nutrient for the upcoming Kharif season.
- **Inter-Ministerial Coordination:** The hike in allocation reflects a high level of coordination between the Oil and Fertilizer Ministries to prioritize "food-energy security," ensuring that industrial gas shortages do not translate into a localized food crisis or agricultural distress.
- **Logistical Resilience:** By scheduling LNG arrivals and managing inventories, the government aims to insulate the agrarian economy from the "risk premium" associated with energy imports from conflict-prone zones.

Essential Definitions

- **Urea:** A nitrogenous fertilizer critical for crop growth. In India, it is highly subsidized and serves as the primary nutrient for cereal and commercial crops.
- **LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas):** Natural gas that has been cooled to a liquid state (about -162°C) for shipping and storage. It is the primary feedstock for ammonia production, which is subsequently converted to urea.
- **Feedstock:** Raw material used in an industrial process to be converted into a finished product. For the fertilizer industry, natural gas accounts for nearly 70%-80% of the cost of producing urea.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 39(b) (DPSP):** Mandates the State to direct its policy toward ensuring that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good, justifying the prioritization of gas for fertilizers over other industries.
- **The Fertiliser (Inorganic, Organic or Mixed) (Control) Order, 1985:** Issued under the Essential Commodities Act, this order empowers the government to regulate the price, quality, and distribution of fertilizers across the country.
- **New Urea Policy (NUP), 2015:** Aims to maximize indigenous urea production, promote energy efficiency in urea units, and rationalize the subsidy burden on the exchequer.

Conclusion

The restoration of gas supply to 90% capacity is a vital intervention to safeguard India's food security ahead of the monsoon. While short-term tenders and increased gas allocation provide immediate relief, the situation underscores the urgent need for India to diversify its energy sources and accelerate the adoption of "Green Urea" (produced using green hydrogen) to decouple the agricultural sector from the volatile global fossil fuel market.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy & Agriculture):** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies; Minimum Support Prices; Public Distribution System; Food security; Economics of animal-rearing.
- **GS Paper II (Governance & IR):** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Impact of global conflicts on India's domestic policy and energy diplomacy.



- **Prelims:** Understanding the role of LNG in urea production, the concept of Zaid/Kharif sowing cycles, and the geography of West Asian energy transit routes.

6. RBI Proposes Tighter Regulatory Framework for Business Correspondents

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued a draft proposal aimed at strengthening the Business Correspondent (BC) network. Recognizing the critical role of these agents in achieving last-mile financial inclusion, the central bank seeks to mitigate operational risks and enhance consumer protection through stricter oversight and revised structural models.

Key Analysis of Proposed BC Reforms

- **Dual Classification Model:** The RBI proposes reclassifying BCs into two distinct categories to better manage scale and complexity. This allows for differentiated regulatory requirements based on the volume of transactions and the geographic spread of the agent's operations.
- **Enhanced Due Diligence:** The proposal mandates more rigorous background checks and continuous monitoring of agents. This is designed to prevent financial fraud, mis-selling of products, and unauthorized fee collections in rural and underbanked regions.
- **Revision of Compensation Structures:** To ensure the sustainability of the BC model and reduce predatory practices, the RBI suggests a more transparent and equitable pay structure. This aims to reduce high attrition rates among agents and improve the quality of service delivery.
- **Technological and Operational Oversight:** Banks will be required to implement stronger real-time monitoring systems for transactions conducted through BCs. This ensures that the "last-mile" link remains as secure as a traditional bank branch.
- **Consumer Grievance Redressal:** The tighter rules emphasize the accountability of the parent bank for the actions of its agents. This includes making the Internal Ombudsman mechanism more accessible to rural customers who interact solely with BCs.
- **Focus on Financial Inclusion Integrity:** By tightening these rules, the RBI intends to shift the focus from mere "account opening" to "active usage" of banking services, ensuring that the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity functions without systemic leakage.



Essential Definitions

- **Business Correspondent (BC):** Retail agents engaged by banks for providing banking services at locations other than a bank branch/ATM. They represent the bank and enable transactions like deposits, withdrawals, and remittances.
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** In the financial context, it refers to the final leg of the service delivery chain, reaching the end-user in remote or marginalized areas where physical infrastructure is absent.
- **Due Diligence:** The comprehensive appraisal of a business or person to establish their assets and liabilities and evaluate their commercial potential and integrity.



Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 38 (DPSP):** Directs the State to promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order in which social, economic, and political justice informs all institutions. Financial inclusion via BCs is a tool for economic justice.
- **Banking Regulation Act, 1949:** Provides the RBI with the statutory power to regulate and supervise the banking system, including the appointment and conduct of agents like BCs.
- **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934:** Specifically Section 45L, which gives the RBI power to call for information from financial institutions and give directions to protect the interest of the public.
- **Section 25 of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007:** Relevant for the oversight of electronic transactions and remittances handled by the BC network.

Conclusion

The RBI's move to tighten BC rules is a timely intervention to safeguard the integrity of India's digital financial infrastructure. While BCs have been instrumental in bridging the rural-urban divide, the "agent-led" model is inherently prone to operational risks. Strengthening oversight and rationalizing compensation will ensure that financial inclusion remains both inclusive and safe, preventing the exploitation of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

UPSC Relevance

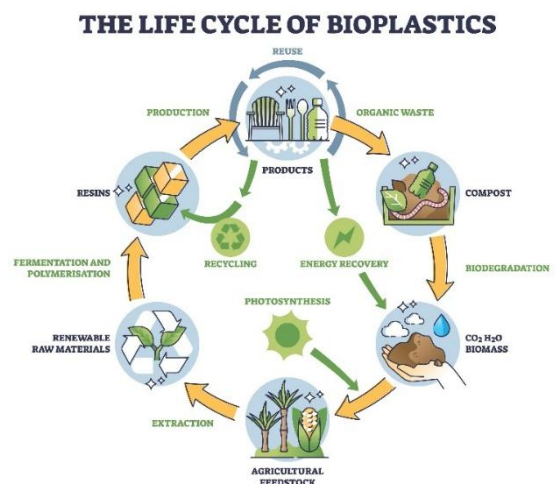
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Inclusive growth and issues arising from it; Banking sector reforms; Role of technology in financial inclusion.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Government policies and interventions for development; Regulatory bodies (RBI) and their mandates.

7. Transition to Biodegradable Sachets: Addressing the Crisis of Small-Format Plastic Waste

Context: The Department of Consumer Affairs is formulating an ambitious roadmap to replace conventional plastic sachets with biodegradable alternatives. This initiative targets one of the most pervasive sources of environmental litter, starting with high-volume categories like pan masala and gutkha, to mitigate soil pollution and urban drainage systemic failures.

Analysis of the Sachet-Waste Challenge and Government Strategy

- **The "Small Format" Crisis:** While sachets offer affordability and convenience, they represent a significant portion of annual plastic waste. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), nearly 40% of these small packs remain uncollected due to their size, leading to the choking of urban drainage systems and long-term soil degradation.
- **Failure of Multi-layered Laminates:** Current shifts to paper-based laminates have proven insufficient as they often utilize plastic-based adhesives and mixed materials that are neither truly biodegradable nor economically viable for recyclers to collect and process.





- **Targeted Pilot Phase:** The government plans a phased transition, identifying pan masala and gutkha sachets as the primary targets for the pilot. These products contribute disproportionately to litter in both rural and urban landscapes due to their high consumption volume (tens of billions annually).
- **Broad Industry Impact:** The plan extends beyond tobacco products to include the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, encompassing personal care (shampoos, detergents) and food products (spices, coffee, dairy whiteners) that rely on sub-10g packaging.
- **Economic Viability Concerns:** Leading FMCG players have flagged the "cost-premium" of biodegradable materials compared to traditional polymers. Success will depend on the government's ability to facilitate the development of cost-effective, scalable, and durable plastic-free alternatives.
- **Tackling the Informal Sector:** A significant hurdle remains the widespread use of non-compliant plastic packaging in the informal sector, where enforcement of the Plastic Waste Management Rules is historically weak.

Essential Definitions

- **Biodegradable Plastic:** Plastics that can be decomposed by the action of living organisms, usually bacteria, into water, carbon dioxide, and biomass under specific environmental conditions.
- **Multi-layered Packaging (MLP):** Packaging material which has at least one layer of plastic as the main ingredient in combination with one or more layers of other materials such as aluminium foil or paper.
- **Single-Use Plastic (SUP):** Plastic items intended to be used once for the same purpose before being disposed of or recycled.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor 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 of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021:** This framework provides the legal basis for the ban on identified single-use plastic items and sets the stage for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).
- **Environment Protection Act, 1986:** The umbrella legislation under which the central government issues notifications to regulate or prohibit the use of hazardous substances, including specific types of plastic packaging.

Conclusion

The shift toward biodegradable sachets is a necessary evolution in India's "Circular Economy" journey. However, the transition must be supported by robust Research & Development (R&D) to bring down costs and a stringent enforcement mechanism that holds both the formal and informal sectors accountable. Moving from "recyclability" to "biodegradability" for small-format packaging may be the only viable solution to the persistent problem of uncollectible plastic litter.



UPSC Relevance

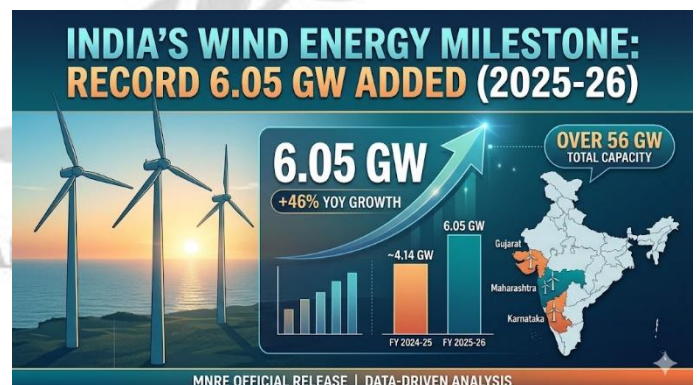
- **GS Paper III (Environment & Economy):** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Government budgeting and subsidies for green technology; Challenges of waste management in the FMCG sector.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Policy intervention for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

8. India Achieves Record Wind Energy Capacity Addition in FY2025-26

Context: The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has announced that India added a historic 6.05GW of wind energy capacity during the 2025-26 fiscal year. This achievement surpasses the previous record of 5.5GW set in 2016-17, signaling a major revival in the wind power sector and reinforcing India's commitment to its "Panchamrit" climate targets.

Analysis of Wind Energy Growth and Strategic Drivers

- **Historic Milestone:** The addition of 6.05GW in a single fiscal year has pushed India's cumulative installed wind power capacity beyond 56GW. This represents a significant acceleration in deployment compared to the stagnant growth observed over the past decade.
- **Policy and Regulatory Tailwinds:** The surge is attributed to improved policy clarity, including the transition from physical e-auctions to a closed-envelope bidding system in certain segments, and the implementation of a defined bidding trajectory of 50GW of renewable energy capacity annually.
- **Infrastructure Readiness:** Enhanced transmission readiness and the development of Green Energy Corridors have reduced "curtailment" risks, encouraging independent power producers (IPPs) to execute a strong pipeline of pending projects.
- **Competitive Tariff Discovery:** Technological advancements in turbine efficiency (higher hub heights and larger rotors) have allowed for competitive tariff discovery, making wind-solar hybrid projects more commercially viable for Discoms.
- **Repowering Potential:** A significant portion of the momentum also stems from the government's focus on "Repowering" older, low-capacity wind turbines at prime sites with modern, high-capacity versions to maximize land-use efficiency.
- **Global Standing:** With this addition, India continues to solidify its position as one of the global leaders in wind energy, trailing only behind China, the USA, and Germany in total installed capacity.



Essential Definitions

- **Installed Capacity:** The maximum theoretical electric output a power plant can produce under ideal conditions.
- **Repowering:** The process of replacing older wind turbines with newer, more efficient ones to increase the energy yield from the same site.



- **Transmission Readiness:** The availability of high-voltage power lines and sub-stations required to carry electricity from the point of generation (wind farms) to the national grid.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Directs the State to protect and improve the environment. Promoting renewable energy is a core strategy to fulfill this constitutional mandate.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **Electricity Act, 2003:** The primary legislation governing the power sector, which mandates State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) to specify a percentage of electricity purchase from renewable sources (Renewable Purchase Obligation - RPO).
- **National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy, 2018:** Provides a framework for the promotion of large grid-connected wind-solar PV hybrid systems for optimal utilization of transmission infrastructure and land.

Conclusion

The record-breaking addition of 6.05GW marks a turning point for India's wind energy sector, which had long been overshadowed by the rapid growth of solar power. To maintain this momentum, the focus must now shift toward harnessing the vast offshore wind potential along the coasts of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Addressing land acquisition hurdles and ensuring timely payments by Discoms will be crucial for achieving the 2030 target of 500GW of non-fossil fuel capacity.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy & Infrastructure):** Energy sector, renewable energy targets, and the role of infrastructure in economic growth.
- **GS Paper III (Environment):** Climate change mitigation, COP26/COP28 commitments, and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

9. Supreme Court Declines Interference in Kozhikode-Wayanad Tunnel Project

Context: The Supreme Court of India has refused to stay the environmental clearance granted to the twin-tube tunnel corridor in the Western Ghats. Despite petitions citing the 2024 Wayanad landslides and ecological fragility, the Court categorized the project as one of "national importance" aimed at resolving severe traffic congestion in land-starved Kerala.

Key Analysis of the Judicial Ruling and Environmental Concerns

- **Recognition of National Importance:** The Bench, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, emphasized that the tunnel project is vital for connectivity in a state characterized by high population density, limited land availability, and extreme road bottlenecks.
- **Ecological Fragility vs. Infrastructure:** The petitioner (Wayanad Prakrithi Samrakshana Samithi) argued that the project lies deep within the ecologically fragile Western Ghats and near the Nilgiri Biosphere, asserting that such projects require Category 'A' central-level appraisal rather than state-level clearance.





- **Landslide Risks:** Significant concerns were raised regarding the impact of blasting and vibrations in a region that witnessed devastating landslides in 2024, resulting in over 420 deaths. The petitioners alleged that the environmental clearance was a "cut-paste job" without proper scientific application of mind.
- **Expertise and Safety Protocols:** The Apex Court noted that the Central Expert Appraisal Committee (CEAC) had accorded approval subject to rigorous safety and structural conditions. The Court maintained that engineers and experts are better equipped to handle technical safety aspects.
- **Judicial Recourse and Oversight:** While disposing of the petition, the Court allowed the petitioners to approach the National Green Tribunal (NGT) if any environmental conditions are violated or if there is a "cause for alarm" during execution.
- **Federal and Technical Balance:** The ruling highlights the judicial tendency to defer to executive and expert wisdom in infrastructure projects deemed critical for public interest, provided a regulatory framework for compliance is in place.

Essential Definitions

- **Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ):** Areas notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) around Protected Areas, National Parks, and Wildlife Sanctuaries to create "shock absorbers" for the ecosystem.
- **Category 'A' Project:** High-impact projects that require mandatory Environmental Clearing from the Central Government (MoEFCC) based on the recommendations of an Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC).
- **Twin-Tube Tunnel:** A design involving two separate tunnels for traffic moving in opposite directions, enhancing safety by providing emergency egress and better ventilation.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 21:** While usually interpreted as the Right to Life, the Court here balanced the right to a safe environment against the right to infrastructure and development essential for the state's survival.
- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Directs the State to protect and improve the environment. The project proponent is constitutionally bound to ensure "meticulous compliance" with safety norms to satisfy this mandate.
- **Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986:** The parent legislation under which the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notifications are issued, governing the grant of clearances for infrastructure projects.
- **The Precautionary Principle:** A core tenet of Indian Environmental Law (Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum case) which suggests that where there are threats of serious damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's decision underscores the complex trade-off between infrastructure development and environmental preservation in biodiversity hotspots like the Western Ghats. While the "national importance" tag provides the project legal momentum, the 2024 disaster serves as a grim reminder that engineering solutions must be subordinate to geological realities. The oversight of the NGT will be crucial in ensuring that "national importance" does not come at the cost of "ecological catastrophe."



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Disaster Management):** Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Conservation of Western Ghats (Gadgil and Kasturirangan Committee reports); Landslide vulnerability and mitigation.
- **GS Paper II (Judiciary & Governance):** Judicial review of executive decisions; Balancing Development vs. Environment; Role of the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

10. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026: Critical Analysis

Context: The recently notified Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, has sparked intense national debate. Critics and mental health practitioners argue that the Bill reverses a decade of judicial and legislative progress by replacing the principle of "self-identification" with "bureaucratic gatekeeping," potentially triggering a public mental health crisis.

Key Concerns and Implications of the 2026 Amendment

- **Reversal of Self-Identification:** The Amendment fundamentally departs from the "self-identification" cornerstone established by the NALSA judgment. It mandates that individuals appear before a medical board to "prove" their gender identity to obtain a legal certificate from a District Magistrate.
- **Medical and Bureaucratic Gatekeeping:** By requiring a medical assessment, the Bill introduces "evaluative biomarkers" for gender identity—a concept rejected by global medical standards, which recognize gender as a deeply held personal experience rather than a biological certainty to be verified by strangers.
- **Violation of Bodily Autonomy:** Experts fear that in the absence of standardized criteria, medical boards may resort to invasive physical or genital examinations. Such scrutiny is viewed as a direct violation of the right to privacy and dignity enshrined under the Constitution.
- **Criminalization of Support:** The Bill introduces a controversial clause penalizing "undue influence" in helping someone identify as transgender, with prison terms up to 15 years. This creates significant legal risks for mental health practitioners, NGOs, and allies who provide gender-affirming care.
- **Erosion of Welfare Access:** The added layers of scrutiny and potential humiliation are expected to deter vulnerable individuals from approaching the state for welfare schemes, effectively shrinking access to education, housing, and healthcare provided under the 2019 Act.
- **Erasure of Diversity:** The Amendment is criticized for collapsing distinct identities—Transgender, Intersex, and Hijra—into a single category, thereby erasing the unique cultural and biological nuances of these diverse communities.



Essential Definitions

- **Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned to them at birth.



- **Self-Identification:** The legal principle that an individual is the sole authority on their own gender identity, requiring no external medical or state validation.
- **Gender-Affirming Practices:** Healthcare and social interventions (psychological, medical, or surgical) designed to support and affirm an individual's gender identity when it conflicts with the sex assigned at birth.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **NALSA vs. Union of India (2014):** The landmark Supreme Court ruling that recognized transgender persons as a "Third Gender" and upheld the right to self-identify one's gender as part of personal autonomy.
- **Article 14 & 15:** Guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (interpreted by the SC to include gender identity).
- **Article 19(1)(a):** Protects freedom of expression, which includes the right to express one's self-identified gender through dress, words, or action.
- **Article 21:** The Right to Life and Personal Liberty, which the SC has ruled includes the right to live with dignity and the right to privacy regarding one's identity.
- **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:** The parent legislation that sought to provide a welfare framework, now being significantly altered by the 2026 Amendment.

Conclusion

The 2026 Amendment represents a significant shift from a rights-based approach to a policing-based model of gender identity. While the government cites the prevention of misuse as a motive, the resulting "medicalization" of identity risks marginalizing an already vulnerable community. True progress lies in administrative audits and sensitization rather than mandating intrusive physical verifications that compromise constitutional morality.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance & Social Justice):** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Laws and institutions constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.
- **GS Paper II (Polity):** Fundamental Rights (Articles 14, 15, 19, 21); Judicial overreach vs. Legislative intent; Constitutional Morality.

11. Climate Change as a Public Health Emergency: The Indian Context

Context: While climate change is often debated through the lens of ecology and economics, its manifestation as a broad-spectrum medical crisis is becoming a present reality in India. From shifting vector-borne disease windows to heat-induced organ failure, changing planetary patterns are intensifying known illnesses and creating new healthcare vulnerabilities.

Multidimensional Health Risks of Climate Change

- **Waterborne and Scarcity Diseases:** Increasingly frequent urban waterlogging in cities like Mumbai creates breeding grounds for cholera, typhoid, and leptospirosis by overwhelming sanitation infrastructure. Conversely, drought-stricken regions face a surge in diarrheal diseases and chronic dehydration due to reliance on unsafe water sources.



- **Expanding Vector-Borne Windows:** Rising temperatures have extended the transmission cycle of diseases like Dengue and Malaria. In Delhi-NCR, the Dengue peak has shifted from September to November, while Malaria is now being reported in historically cooler regions like Himachal Pradesh due to the widening geographic reach of mosquitoes.
- **The Feedback Loop of Air Pollution:** Increased reliance on air conditioning during intense heatwaves drives higher energy consumption and PM2.5 emissions. These microscopic pollutants penetrate the lungs and bloodstream, causing systemic inflammation and exacerbating Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), hypertension, and kidney impairment.
- **Cardiovascular and Heat Stress:** Elevated night-time temperatures in urban heat islands like Vidarbha and Delhi-NCR eliminate the body's critical recovery window. This forces the cardiovascular system to overwork for thermoregulation, disproportionately affecting manual laborers and leading to a rise in heat-stroke-related fatalities.
- **Maternal and Neonatal Vulnerability:** Exposure to extreme heat and pollutants is increasingly linked to adverse birth outcomes, including preterm births and low birth weight. Furthermore, heat stress in livestock leads to declining milk production, directly compromising infant and child nutrition.
- **Nutritional Insecurity:** Unseasonal rains and extreme weather disrupt agricultural cycles, leading to micronutrient deficiencies. The declining nutritional quality of staple crops under high CO2 conditions creates a "hidden hunger" that weakens community immunity against infectious diseases.



Key Definitions

- **PM2.5:** Fine particulate matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometers. These particles are small enough to enter the alveolar region of the lungs and the vascular system, causing multi-organ damage.
- **Vector-Borne Diseases:** Illnesses caused by pathogens and parasites in human populations, transmitted by vectors such as mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas.
- **Urban Heat Island (UHI):** A phenomenon where urban areas experience significantly higher temperatures than surrounding rural areas due to human activities, concrete surfaces, and lack of vegetation.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to a healthy environment and healthcare. The medical crisis triggered by climate change is a direct challenge to this fundamental right.
- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Mandates the State to regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- **Article 48A:** Directs the State to protect and improve the environment, which is now intrinsically linked to preserving public health.



- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** Specifically the "National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change" and the "National Health Mission," which must now integrate climate-resilient healthcare infrastructure.

Conclusion

Treating climate change as a purely environmental issue overlooks the profound human cost. India must transition its healthcare strategy from reactive treatment to climate-resilient preventive care. Recognizing this as a "Medical Emergency" is essential for mobilizing the urgency required to upgrade urban sanitation, secure food systems, and protect the most vulnerable workers from an escalating biological and thermal crisis.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Environment & Disaster Management):** Impact of climate change on health; Environmental pollution and degradation; Disaster-resilient infrastructure.
- **GS Paper II (Social Justice):** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health and Nutrition.
- **GS Paper I (Geography):** Changes in critical geographical features and their effects on flora and fauna (vector migration).

12. India's Internet Censorship Regime: Governance and Implementation Challenges

Context: Recent studies conducted in 2025 across major Indian Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have highlighted a lack of uniformity in how website blocking orders are implemented. While the legal framework provides the state with significant powers to restrict content, the actual user experience remains fragmented due to technical inconsistencies and a lack of standardized guidelines for ISPs.

Key Analysis of Internet Censorship and ISP Protocols

- **Legal Empowerment and Mandate:** Under Sections 69A and 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Central Government possesses the authority to issue blocking orders to intermediaries and ISPs. These entities are contractually bound by their licensing agreements to comply with directives from the "Licensor" (Department of Telecommunications).
- **Technical Mechanism of Blocking:** Most Indian ISPs primarily utilize "DNS Poisoning" or DNS-layer blocking. This method is favored as it is cost-effective and does not require complex deep packet inspection. By configuring servers to return false addresses for specific domains, ISPs redirect users away from restricted content.
- **Inconsistency in Enforcement:** Data indicates a significant divergence in blocked content across different ISPs. Out of over 43,000 blocked domains identified in a 2025 study, only about 3.3% were consistently blocked across all surveyed providers, highlighting a haphazard implementation of government orders.
- **Priority-Based Consensus:** Consistency in blocking increases dramatically for content related to terrorism, militancy, or sensitive geopolitical matters (e.g., the blocking of Weibo or specific regional publications). In contrast, blocks on piracy, gambling, and pornography show high levels of variance.
- **Opaque Regulatory Environment:** The current regime is characterized by confidentiality. Blocking orders are often not made public, leaving users and content creators in a state of "informational asymmetry." There is no standardized framework to guide ISPs on how to apply these restrictions uniformly.



- **Arbitrary Restrictions:** The study suggests that in the absence of strict oversight, some ISPs engage in arbitrary blocking, leading to a "postcode lottery" of internet freedom where a user's access to information depends entirely on their choice of service provider.

Essential Definitions

- **DNS Poisoning:** A cyber-tactic (used here for censorship) where an ISP's Domain Name System (DNS) server is manipulated to provide a wrong IP address for a website name, effectively preventing the user from reaching the intended destination.
- **Intermediary:** Under the IT Act, this includes any person/entity who on behalf of another person receives, stores or transmits electronic records (e.g., ISPs, Social Media platforms, Search Engines).
- **Deep Packet Inspection (DPI):** An advanced method of examining and managing network traffic where the data part of a packet is inspected to filter out specific content.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Guarantees the Freedom of Speech and Expression, which the Supreme Court has ruled includes the right to access the internet as a medium for this freedom (Anuradha Bhasin Case).
- **Article 19(2):** Provides "reasonable restrictions" on free speech in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, and public order.
- **Section 69A of IT Act, 2000:** Specifically allows the government to block public access to any information through any computer resource if it is deemed necessary in the interest of national security or public order.
- **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** Sets the compliance standards for platforms and provides the procedural framework for content takedowns.
- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):** A landmark judgment where the SC upheld Section 69A but struck down Section 66A, emphasizing that any restriction on online speech must be narrowly tailored and subject to judicial safeguards.

Conclusion

India's internet censorship landscape suffers from a "transparency deficit" and technical fragmentation. While the state has a legitimate interest in curbing terrorism and illegal content, the current non-uniformity across ISPs creates an arbitrary digital environment. Moving forward, a standardized, transparent framework—where blocked domains are disclosed with specific legal justifications—is essential to balance national security with the fundamental right to information.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):** Fundamental Rights (Article 19); Regulatory bodies and their mandates; Impact of government policies on individual liberties.
- **GS Paper III (Internal Security & Tech):** Challenges to internal security through communication networks; Role of social media and internet in militancy; Cyber-security protocols.