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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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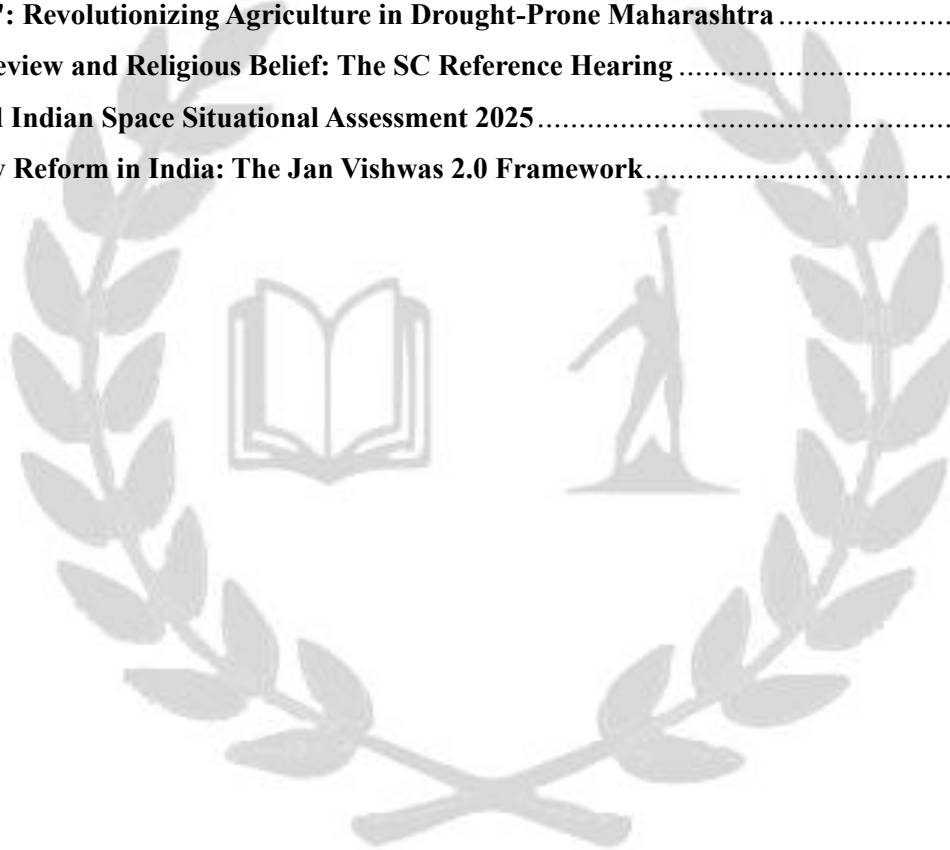
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VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Milestone in India's Nuclear Energy: The PFBR Criticality

The achievement of "criticality" by the 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam marks a decisive shift in India's energy security. By transitioning into the second stage of its three-stage nuclear program, India is moving toward utilizing its vast thorium reserves, aiming for a 100GW capacity by 2047.

Key Highlights of the Development

- **Achievement of Criticality:** On 6 April, the PFBR initiated a sustained nuclear chain reaction, a technical milestone that validates the indigenous design by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR).
- **Technological Sophistication:** India is now the second country globally, after Russia, to operate a commercial-scale fast breeder reactor, surpassing many Western nations in this specific technology.
- **The "Breeder" Mechanism:** Unlike conventional reactors, a FBR produces more fissile material than it consumes by converting "fertile" isotopes (like Uranium-238 or Thorium-232) into "fissile" fuel (Plutonium-239 or Uranium-233).
- **Resource Independence:** This milestone facilitates the transition to Stage 3, where India can leverage its thorium deposits—representing nearly 25% of global reserves—reducing reliance on imported uranium.
- **Strategic Expansion:** The government has accelerated the sector via the Nuclear Energy Mission and a ₹20,000 crore allocation for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) to reach 22.38GW capacity by FY32.
- **Policy Liberalization:** Recent legislative shifts aim to integrate private sector participation to scale up generation and meet the nation's "Net Zero" commitments.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Criticality:** The state of a nuclear reactor when the fission chain reaction is self-sustaining, meaning each fission event releases enough neutrons to cause exactly one subsequent fission.
- **Transmutation:** The process of changing one chemical element or isotope into another through nuclear reactions; specifically, converting Thorium-232 into fissile Uranium-233.
- **Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR):** A nuclear reactor that uses "fast" neutrons (unmoderated) to generate power while simultaneously breeding new fuel from fertile material.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Entry 6, Union List (Seventh Schedule):** Atomic Energy and mineral resources necessary for its production fall exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Central Government.
- **Atomic Energy Act, 1962:** The primary legislation providing the legal framework for the development, control, and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.
- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLND):** Dictates the compensation regime in case of a nuclear accident; recent amendments seek to clarify supplier liability to encourage private investment.





- **SHANTI Bill, 2025:** The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India Bill facilitates private entry into a previously state-monopolized sector and streamlines regulatory clearances.

India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

1. **Stage 1:** Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) using natural Uranium to produce electricity and Plutonium-239 as a byproduct.
2. **Stage 2:** Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) using Plutonium-239 and Uranium-238 to produce energy and more Plutonium, while also initiating Thorium transmutation.
3. **Stage 3:** Advanced Heavy Water Reactors (AHWRs) using Uranium-233 (bred from Thorium) and Thorium to provide an inexhaustible energy supply.

Conclusion

The PFBR's success at Kalpakkam is not merely a technical triumph but a strategic necessity. By mastering the closed fuel cycle, India ensures long-term energy sovereignty while aligning with global decarbonization goals. The integration of private players and the focus on SMRs signal a mature, multi-pronged approach to achieving the "Viksit Bharat" vision of 100GW nuclear capacity.

UPSC Relevance

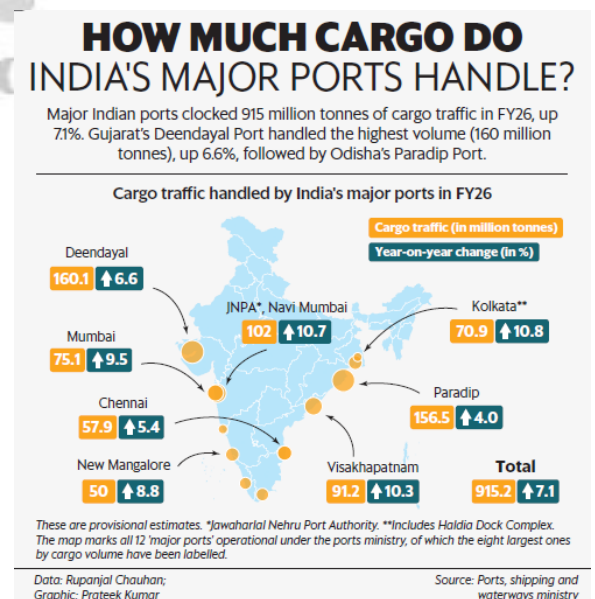
- **Prelims:** Awareness of PFBR, IGCAR, the three-stage nuclear program, difference between fissile/fertile materials, and recent legislation like the SHANTI Bill.
- **Mains (GS Paper III):** "Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology," and "Infrastructure: Energy." Discussing nuclear energy as a clean transition fuel and the strategic importance of thorium-based reactors for India's energy security.

2. Performance of India's Major Ports: FY26 Analysis

The maritime sector remains the backbone of India's international trade, with major ports achieving a historic milestone in the Financial Year 2025-26. This performance underscores the success of infrastructure modernization under the Sagarmala Programme and the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.

Key Highlights of Cargo Traffic (FY26)

- **Record Throughput:** India's 12 major ports handled a cumulative cargo of **915.17 million tonnes (MT)** in FY26, surpassing the annual target of 904 MT.
- **Growth Trajectory:** The sector registered a robust year-on-year (YoY) growth of **7.06%**, reflecting increased efficiency and rising demand in global trade.
- **Leading Performers:** **Deendayal Port (Gujarat)** maintained its top position by handling 160.11 MT, followed closely by **Paradip Port (Odisha)** at 156.45 MT.
- **Container Hub:** Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) handled 102.01 MT, remaining the primary





gateway for containerized trade with a growth rate of 10.74%.

- **High-Growth Zones:** Mormugao Port recorded the highest individual growth at **15.91%**, followed by the Kolkata Dock System at 14.28%, indicating a revival in eastern and western mineral corridors.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Improvements in vessel turnaround time and increased mechanization have been pivotal in supporting this 915 MT milestone.

Key Definitions

- **Major Ports:** Ports characterized by high volume and strategic importance, governed by the Central Government under the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021.
- **Non-Major Ports:** Also known as intermediate or minor ports, these are governed by State Maritime Boards under the Indian Ports Act.
- **Cargo Throughput:** The total volume of cargo (exports and imports) that passes through a port within a specific timeframe, usually measured in million tonnes (MT).
- **Transshipment:** The shipment of goods or containers to an intermediate destination, then to another destination; a key focus for ports like Vizhinjam and JNPA.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Constitutional Status:** Under the **Seventh Schedule** (Article 246), 'Major Ports' are listed in the **Union List (Entry 27)**, while 'Other Ports' fall under the **Concurrent List (Entry 31)**.
- **Major Port Authorities Act, 2021:** This act replaced the 1963 version, providing greater autonomy to the Boards of Major Ports in decision-making and tariff fixing.
- **Indian Ports Act, 2025:** Recently enacted to replace the 1908 Act, it modernizes port governance, gives statutory status to the Maritime State Development Council (MSDC), and strengthens environmental compliance.
- **Sagarmala Programme:** A flagship initiative for port-led development, focusing on port modernization, connectivity, and coastal community development.

Status of India's Port Sector

Port Name	Cargo Handled (FY26)	Significance
Deendayal (Kandla)	160.11 MT	Highest volume; primarily handles crude, liquids, and dry bulk.
Paradip	156.45 MT	Second highest; crucial for iron ore and coal exports on the East Coast.
JNPA (Nhava Sheva)	102.01 MT	India's premier container port; focuses on high-value EXIM trade.
Visakhapatnam	91.20 MT	Natural harbor; major terminal for petroleum and iron ore.
Mumbai Port	75.10 MT	One of the oldest ports; handles a variety of break-bulk and liquid cargo.



Conclusion

The achievement of handling over 915 million tonnes of cargo signals India's transition toward becoming a global maritime powerhouse. Strategic shifts like the **Indian Ports Act, 2025** and the push for **Small Modular Reactors** for green port power are aligning the sector with the 2047 target of 100GW nuclear capacity and enhanced logistics efficiency. As port-linked industrialization gains pace, these gateways will be instrumental in reducing logistics costs from 14% to 8% of GDP.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Location of major ports, recent legislative changes (Major Port Authorities Act 2021, Indian Ports Act 2025), and top-performing ports by volume.
- **Mains (GS Paper III):** Infrastructure (Ports), Logistics Efficiency, and the Sagarmala Project. Understanding the role of the maritime sector in achieving the \$5 trillion economy goal and the strategic importance of the "Blue Economy."

3. RBI Monetary Policy Review: Stability Amid Global Volatility

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India, led by Governor Sanjay Malhotra, opted for a status quo in its recent review. Despite the looming shadows of the West Asia conflict and fluctuating energy prices, the central bank has prioritized domestic growth stability while maintaining a "neutral" stance.

Key Highlights of the Policy Announcement

- **Policy Rate Maintenance:** The MPC kept the repo rate unchanged at **5.25%**, following a cumulative reduction of 125 basis points in the preceding year (2025).
- **Neutral Stance Sustained:** The RBI retained its "neutral" monetary policy stance, signaling flexibility to move in either direction depending on evolving macroeconomic data and global cues.
- **Growth Projections:** The RBI revised the FY26 GDP growth forecast upward to **7.6%** (new series). However, for FY27, the projection is a more conservative **6.9%** due to potential supply chain disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Bond Market Reaction:** Following the announcement, the 10-year benchmark government bond yield softened to **6.89%**, indicating market relief over the absence of a "hawkish" (aggressive) tilt.
- **Currency Dynamics:** The Indian Rupee showed resilience, appreciating to **92.58** against the US Dollar, despite persistent FPI outflows and high global crude oil prices.
- **Focus on Sustained Low Rates:** The Governor indicated that benchmark rates could remain low for an extended period to support the medium-term growth trajectory, defying expectations of an immediate hike due to "war jitters."

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Repo Rate:** The fixed rate at which the RBI lends short-term money to commercial banks against the collateral of government and other approved securities.
- **Monetary Policy Stance:** The RBI's stated leaning regarding future rate actions. A "neutral" stance





implies that the central bank is open to either increasing or decreasing rates based on inflation and growth dynamics.

- **Hawkish Bias:** A policy direction that prioritizes controlling inflation over growth, often signaling an inclination toward raising interest rates.
- **Basis Points (bps):** A standard unit of measure for interest rates and other percentages in finance. One basis point is equal to **1/100th** of 1%, or **0.01%**.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A strategic waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; it is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **RBI Act, 1934:** This is the primary legislation governing the central bank. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) was given statutory backing through an amendment to this Act in 2016.
- **Section 45ZB:** Under the RBI Act, the Central Government is empowered to constitute a six-member MPC to determine the Policy Rate required to achieve the inflation target.
- **Composition of MPC:** It consists of six members: the RBI Governor (Chairperson, ex-officio), the Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, one officer of the RBI, and three external members appointed by the Government.
- **Inflation Targeting:** The RBI operates under a "Flexible Inflation Targeting" (FIT) framework, where the target is set by the Government in consultation with the RBI every five years (currently 4% with a +/-2% tolerance band).

Conclusion

The RBI's decision to shun a hawkish signal reflects a "calibrated caution" approach. By holding rates steady at 5.25%, the central bank is shielding the domestic recovery from external geopolitical shocks while keeping its toolkit ready for any inflationary spikes caused by energy price volatility. This balance of optimism in growth (7.6%) and realism regarding trade bottlenecks (Strait of Hormuz) defines India's current economic management strategy.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding of the MPC structure, Repo/Reverse Repo rates, impact of bond yields, and the geography of global oil chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Mains (GS Paper III):** "Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment." Candidates should be prepared to discuss the challenges of managing monetary policy in a "polycrisis" environment—balancing imported inflation with domestic growth requirements.

4. Fertilizer Subsidy Revision: Securing India's Kharif Season

The Union Cabinet has approved a substantial Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) outlay of ₹41,533.81 crore for Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers for the Kharif 2026 season. This move is strategically designed to insulate the agricultural sector from volatile international prices and geopolitical uncertainties in West Asia, ensuring that essential inputs remain affordable for the Indian farming community.

Key Highlights of the Cabinet Decision

- **Increased Allocation:** The subsidy for Kharif 2026 is approximately ₹4,317 crore higher than the previous year, reflecting the government's commitment to absorbing rising global costs.



- **Price Shielding:** By increasing the NBS rates, the government prevents the pass-through of elevated international prices of Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Muriate of Potash (MOP) to farmers.
- **Import Dependency Management:** India currently imports 60% of its DAP and 100% of its MOP requirements; the subsidy acts as a critical buffer against supply chain disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and West Asia.
- **Total Fiscal Outlay:** While the Kharif-specific subsidy has increased, the total projected fertilizer subsidy for FY27 is pegged at ₹1.71 trillion, a slight reduction from the FY26 revised estimates of ₹1.86 trillion, indicating a move toward fiscal consolidation.
- **Broad Scope:** The subsidy covers 28 grades of P&K fertilizers, providing farmers with a variety of nutrient options to maintain soil health and productivity.
- **Energy Linkage:** Since West Asia provides 50% of India's LNG (a key feedstock for fertilizer production), the subsidy also accounts for the rising costs of energy inputs used in domestic manufacturing.



Definitions of Key Terms

- **Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS):** A scheme where a fixed amount of subsidy is decided on an annual/bi-annual basis for each nutrient (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potash, and Sulphur) rather than on the product itself.
- **Kharif Season:** The autumn harvest season in India, typically spanning from June to October, coinciding with the Southwest Monsoon. Major crops include rice, maize, and cotton.
- **DAP (Diammonium Phosphate):** The world's most widely used phosphorus fertilizer; it is highly soluble and quickly releases plant-available phosphate and ammonium.
- **Fiscal Consolidation:** Policies aimed at reducing government deficits and debt accumulation, as seen in the reduction of the total subsidy cap for FY27.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 39 (b) & (c):** Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) mandate the state to ensure that the ownership and control of material resources are distributed to subserve the common good and prevent concentration of wealth.
- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Fertilizers are declared as an essential commodity under this Act, allowing the government to regulate their production, supply, and distribution to ensure fair pricing.
- **Fertilizer Control Order (FCO), 1985:** Issued under the Essential Commodities Act, it regulates the quality of fertilizers sold in India and mandates the registration of manufacturers and dealers.
- **Seventh Schedule (Entry 33, Concurrent List):** Agriculture, including the production and supply of fertilizers, falls under the Concurrent List, allowing both Centre and States to legislate, though the subsidy is primarily a Central mandate.

Infrastructure and Renewable Energy Add-ons

The Cabinet also cleared significant infrastructure projects:



- **Hydroelectric Power:** Approval of the Kamala (Arunachal Pradesh) and Kalai-II projects to bolster India's non-fossil capacity, which recently reached 250.52GW.
- **Rajasthan Refinery:** Revision of the HPCL Rajasthan Refinery cost to ₹79,459 crore to enhance domestic petroleum and petrochemical capacity.
- **Urban Transit:** Clearance of Jaipur Metro Phase-2 (41 km) to improve urban mobility and reduce carbon footprints.

Conclusion

The government's dual approach of increasing short-term agricultural subsidies while tightening the overall fiscal deficit reflects a "calibrated support" strategy. By ensuring the availability of P&K fertilizers at stabilized rates, the state secures national food security and protects rural incomes from external shocks. Simultaneously, investments in hydro-power and refineries align with the long-term vision of a self-reliant and "Net Zero" India.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding NBS vs. Urea subsidy, major fertilizer imports, Kharif crop requirements, and the geography of West Asian energy supply routes.
- **Mains (GS Paper III):** "Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies." Candidates should be able to analyze the impact of international geopolitics on domestic fiscal policy and the importance of nutrient balance for sustainable soil productivity (Soil Health Card Scheme linkage).

5. Operationalizing Women's Reservation: The 2029 Implementation Bill

The Union Cabinet has approved a draft amendment Bill to facilitate the implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (106th Constitutional Amendment Act) by the 2029 General Elections. This legislative move addresses the procedural prerequisites of delimitation and census data, which were previously identified as potential bottlenecks for the timely execution of women's reservation in India's legislative bodies.

Key Highlights of the Draft Amendment

- **Implementation Timeline:** The amendment ensures that the 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies will be active by the 2029 elections.
- **Expanded House Strength:** To accommodate the reservation without reducing the absolute number of seats available for general candidates, the Lok Sabha strength is proposed to increase from 543 to 816 seats.
- **Seat Distribution:** Out of the proposed 816 seats, 273 (exactly one-third) will be reserved for women, ensuring a substantial increase in female legislative representation.
- **Revised Delimitation Base:** In a strategic shift, the government plans to conduct the delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census data instead of waiting for the yet-to-be-concluded 2027 Census results.
- **Vertical Reservation:** The quota will include a "quota-within-a-quota," reserving seats for women within the existing Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories.





- **Sunset Clause Management:** While the original 106th Amendment has a 15-year validity period, this draft focuses on the mechanical triggers required to start the first cycle of reservation.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam:** The formal title of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, which mandates 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- **Delimitation:** The act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies based on recent population data to ensure "one vote, one value."
- **Criticality of Census:** Traditionally, delimitation follows a census to reflect demographic changes; using 2011 data is an exceptional measure to expedite the 2029 deadline.
- **Vertical Reservation:** A reservation system where the quota is applied within specific social categories (SC/ST) rather than being purely horizontal (general).

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 330A:** Inserted by the 106th Amendment to provide for the reservation of seats for women in the House of the People (Lok Sabha).
- **Article 332A:** Inserted to provide for the reservation of seats for women in every State Legislative Assembly.
- **Article 334A:** A crucial new article which stated that the reservation would come into effect after a delimitation exercise is conducted following the first census after the Act's commencement.
- **Article 82 & 170:** Relate to the readjustment of seats after each census; the new draft Bill seeks to decouple the current reservation cycle from the post-2026 freeze on seat increases.

Comparative Framework of Women's Reservation

Feature	Original 106th Amendment (2023)	Proposed Draft Amendment (2026)
Trigger Event	Post-Census Delimitation	Delimitation based on 2011 Census
Total LS Seats	543 (as of now)	816 (Projected)
Women's Seats	181 (approx.)	273 (Fixed 1/3rd)
Target Election	Uncertain (post-2029)	Guaranteed 2029

Conclusion

The decision to utilize 2011 Census data for delimitation marks a pragmatic turn in India's journey toward gender parity in politics. By expanding the total house strength to 816, the government aims to balance regional interests and existing political dynamics while fulfilling a long-standing democratic promise. This "fast-track" approach reflects an urgency to institutionalize women's leadership ahead of the 2029 electoral cycle.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Articles 330A, 332A, and 334A; history of the 106th Amendment; the role of the Delimitation Commission; and the significance of Census data in electoral politics.



- **Mains (GS Paper II):** "Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections." Discussion points include the impact of political reservation on gender-sensitive policymaking, the challenges of "proxy representation" (Panchayat Pati syndrome), and the federal implications of redrawing constituencies based on older census data.

6. Geopolitical Volatility: The Fragile U.S.-Iran Ceasefire

The announcement of a two-week "suspension of hostilities" between the United States and Iran, mediated by Pakistan, marks a precarious turning point in the West Asian conflict. While aimed at de-escalating regional tensions and reopening vital maritime corridors, the truce remains under immense pressure due to divergent interpretations of its terms and continued military operations in Lebanon.

Key Highlights of the Ceasefire Agreement

- **Truce Duration and Mediation:** A 14-day temporary ceasefire was brokered by Pakistan (specifically involving PM Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir), with direct talks scheduled in Islamabad for April 10, 2026.
- **The Strait of Hormuz Crisis:** A central condition involves the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz for safe passage; however, Tehran has already resumed stopping vessels, citing Israeli strikes in Lebanon as a violation of the "all-fronts" agreement.
- **Divergent Accounts:** Washington frames the truce as a "suspension of bombing" based on a 10-point proposal, while Tehran maintains that any halt in strikes is contingent upon the complete cessation of U.S.-Israeli attacks and the lifting of sanctions.
- **The Lebanon Factor:** The ceasefire's fragility is underscored by Israel's assertion that Lebanon is excluded from the deal, evidenced by heavy airstrikes in Lebanon that killed over 112 people shortly after the announcement.
- **Energy and Trade Security:** The suspension of maritime traffic through the Strait has stranded numerous vessels, including Indian-flagged ships, directly impacting global energy prices and India's EXIM trade.
- **India's Diplomatic Stance:** New Delhi has officially welcomed the move, emphasizing the need for "unimpeded" trade flows, reflecting India's high stakes in regional stability and energy security.



Definitions of Key Terms

- **Ceasefire (Truce):** A temporary suspension of fighting in which each side agrees with the other to halt aggressive actions; it is often a precursor to a formal peace treaty.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. It is the world's most important oil chokepoint, through which approximately one-fifth of the world's total oil consumption passes.
- **De-escalation:** The reduction of the intensity of a conflict or a potentially violent situation.
- **10-Point Proposal:** Tehran's counter-framework for peace, which reportedly demands the removal of economic sanctions and recognized sovereignty over maritime corridors.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** The Constitution of India mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security, maintain just and honorable relations between nations, and encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.
- **UN Charter (Chapter VI):** Deals with the "Pacific Settlement of Disputes," encouraging parties to any dispute likely to endanger international peace to seek a solution by negotiation, mediation, or other peaceful means.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea):** The legal framework governing the rights of "transit passage" through international straits, such as the Strait of Hormuz, which is currently a point of legal and military contention.

Strategic Impact on India

Sector	Impact of the Conflict	India's Requirement
Energy Security	Price volatility in Crude Oil & LNG.	Stable prices and diversified supply routes.
Maritime Trade	Stranded vessels; increased insurance/freight costs.	Freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.
Diaspora	Safety of Indian nationals in West Asia.	Rapid evacuation protocols and regional peace.
Diplomacy	Balancing relations with U.S., Iran, and Israel.	Strategic autonomy and mediation support.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Iran truce, while welcomed, is currently "fragile" at best. The exclusion of regional actors like Israel from the specific terms regarding Lebanon threatens to collapse the agreement before the Islamabad talks begin. For the global economy, and particularly for India, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz is not just a diplomatic goal but a mechanical necessity to prevent a localized conflict from becoming a global inflationary shock.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Mapping of the Strait of Hormuz and West Asia; understanding of UNCLOS; role of international mediators like Pakistan in the current context.
- **Mains (GS Paper II):** "Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests." Candidates should focus on "India's Energy Security" and the "Strategic Balance" New Delhi maintains in the West Asian Quad (India-Israel-UAE-USA) versus its traditional ties with Iran. Discussion on "Maritime Security" and the legalities of blockading international straits is also highly probable.



7. Judicial Scrutiny of Transgender Rights: The 2026 Amendment Challenge

The Delhi High Court has issued a notice to the Central Government following petitions challenging the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026. The legal challenge centers on the shift from "self-identified gender" to a "state-determined" identity, raising significant constitutional questions regarding the right to dignity, privacy, and the legislative implementation of judicial precedents.

Key Highlights of the Legal Challenge

- **Shift in Identity Recognition:** The 2026 Amendment replaces the principle of self-perceived gender identity with a mandatory regime of medical and administrative verification.
- **Administrative Oversight:** Under the new provisions, the District Magistrate and medical boards are empowered to scrutinize and certify an individual's gender identity, a move petitioners claim is intrusive.
- **Conflict with NALSA Judgment:** Petitioners argue the amendment rolls back the 2014 Supreme Court mandate which recognized gender identity as a core component of personal autonomy and self-determination.
- **Impact on Welfare Access:** Legal recognition is a prerequisite for obtaining identity documents; the new verification process could create barriers to accessing healthcare, education, and social security.
- **Constitutional Validity:** The High Court is examining whether the amendment violates Article 14 (Equality), Article 19 (Freedom of Expression), and Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity).
- **Legislative Timeline:** The Bill was passed on 25 March 2026 and received Presidential assent on 30 March, indicating a rapid legislative shift that has prompted immediate judicial oversight.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Self-Identified Gender:** The internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth.
- **Third Gender:** A legal category recognized by the Supreme Court in 2014 for transgender persons who do not identify as exclusively male or female.
- **Legislative Rollback:** A situation where a new law diminishes or removes rights that were previously granted by the judiciary or prior legislation.
- **Self-Determination:** The legal and human rights principle that individuals should have the power to make their own choices about their identity and life path.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law; petitioners argue that mandatory medical checks for only one community are discriminatory.
- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the Right to Dignity and Privacy. In the **K.S. Puttaswamy** case, privacy was declared a fundamental right, which includes bodily autonomy and identity.
- **NALSA vs. Union of India (2014):** The landmark judgment where the SC ruled that transgender persons have the right to self-identify their gender and directed the government to provide them legal recognition.





- **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:** The original parent Act which aimed to provide for the protection of rights of transgender persons and their welfare.
- **The 2026 Amendment Act:** The specific legislation currently under challenge for introducing "medical and administrative" filters to the identity process.

Comparison of Identity Frameworks

Feature	NALSA Judgment (2014)	2026 Amendment Act
Primary Basis	Self-Perception/Internal Identity	Medical/Administrative Verification
Authority	Individual Autonomy	District Magistrate/Medical Board
Legal Principle	Right to Privacy and Dignity	State Regulation of Identity
Psychological Impact	Empowering and Affirming	Potential Stigmatization/Exclusion

Conclusion

The friction between the 2026 Amendment and the NALSA guidelines highlights a fundamental debate on the limits of state intervention in personal identity. While the government may argue that administrative verification prevents fraud, the petitioners see it as a violation of bodily and psychological integrity. The Delhi High Court's eventual ruling will be a defining moment for "Transformative Constitutionalism" in India, determining whether legislative updates can override judicially established human rights frameworks.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Awareness of the Transgender Persons Act (2019/2026), the NALSA judgment, and fundamental rights under Articles 14, 19, and 21.
- **Mains (GS Paper II):** "Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections." Candidates should be able to discuss the concept of "Constitutional Morality" and the role of the judiciary in protecting minority rights against legislative overreach.

8. Odisha's Legislative Move Against Hate Speech and Hate Crime

The Odisha State Law Commission, headed by Justice Biswanath Rath, has recommended the enactment of the 'Hate Speech and Hate Crime (Prevention) Act, 2026'. This proactive measure follows a *suo motu* cognisance by the commission to address the proliferation of provocative content on social media and public forums, aiming to preserve communal harmony and individual dignity.

Key Highlights of the Proposed Legislation

- **Stiff Penalties:** The draft Bill proposes a prison term of one to five years and a fine of ₹10,000 for first-time offenders. Recurrence of the crime attracts a more stringent jail term of two to seven years with a fine of ₹50,000.
- **Comprehensive Definitions:** Hate speech is defined as any expression (spoken, written, or electronic) intended to cause injury, disharmony, or enmity. Hate crimes are categorized as acts intended to incite such hatred or promote hate speech.



- **Victim Centricity:** Unlike existing general criminal laws, the commission has mooted the award of mandatory compensation to victims of hate crimes to facilitate their rehabilitation.
- **Preventive Powers:** The legislation empowers magistrates and the police to take preventive action if there is a reasonable belief that a hate crime is likely to occur, allowing for early intervention.
- **Corporate and Organizational Liability:** If an organization is involved in the offense, the individuals in charge are deemed guilty unless they can prove the offense happened without their knowledge or consent.
- **Social Media Accountability:** The recommendation specifically targets the digital landscape, recognizing that electronic expressions are a primary medium for inciting disharmony in the contemporary era.



Definitions of Key Terms

- **Hate Speech:** Any form of communication in speech, writing, or behavior that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or other identity factor.
- **Hate Crime:** A criminal act motivated by bias or prejudice against a particular group, often triggered by or involving the promotion of hate speech.
- **Suo Motu Cognisance:** An act by a court or authority of taking up a case on its own motion without a formal complaint being filed by an affected party.
- **Preventive Action:** Legal measures taken by authorities to stop a crime before it is committed, often involving temporary detention or restraining orders.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(a) vs. Article 19(2):** While the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression, Article 19(2) allows the State to impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interests of public order, decency, or morality, and to prevent incitement to an offense.
- **Article 15 & 16:** Prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, which forms the bedrock of anti-hate speech philosophy.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):** Specifically Section 196 (promoting enmity between groups) and Section 197 (acts prejudicial to national integration), which are the primary existing tools against hate speech at the national level.
- **Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan v. Union of India (2014):** A landmark SC judgment where the court requested the Law Commission of India to define "hate speech" and provide recommendations to strengthen the law.
- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):** The SC emphasized the distinction between "advocacy" (legal) and "incitement" (illegal), which serves as a test for any new hate speech legislation.



Conclusion

Odisha's proposed Act represents a significant step toward filling the legal vacuum concerning specific definitions of "hate speech." By introducing graded punishments and victim compensation, the State seeks to create a deterrent effect that balances the fundamental right to expression with the necessity of maintaining social order. If enacted, it could serve as a model for other states grappling with digital-age communal tensions.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding the difference between BNS provisions and state-specific laws, the role of State Law Commissions, and the concept of "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(2).

9. 'Soil Sakhis': Revolutionizing Agriculture in Drought-Prone Maharashtra

The 'Soil Sakhi' initiative, spearheaded by the Mann Deshi Foundation in western Maharashtra, represents a paradigm shift in climate-resilient agriculture and rural women's empowerment. By training women from marginalized backgrounds to act as community agronomists, the project addresses the critical gap in scientific soil management across five drought-prone districts: Satara, Sangli, Solapur, Kolhapur, and Pune.

Key Highlights of the Initiative

- **Scientific Soil Management:** Soil Sakhis provide doorstep soil testing and actionable reports, enabling farmers to identify specific deficiencies (e.g., high limestone levels) and transition from erratic yields to scientific crop selection.
- **Empowerment and Identity:** The program transforms women once identified merely as "farmers' wives" into recognized agricultural experts and trainers, providing them with financial independence through monthly earnings of ₹8,000 to ₹10,000.
- **Environmental Impact:** By promoting data-driven fertilizer use, the initiative led to a reduction of 988.37 tonnes of CO₂e emissions between January 2024 and December 2025, aligning with India's "Net Zero" climate goals.
- **Boosting Productivity:** Case studies in the region indicate up to a 40% increase in yields for high-value crops like Keshar mangoes and pomegranates through the adoption of organic techniques and soil-specific interventions.
- **Community Agronomy:** These women serve as a bridge between scientific institutions like ICAR and the hinterland, fostering a culture of climate-resilient farming in regions historically plagued by drought and desperation.
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** Traveling up to 80 km daily, the Sakhis ensure that even remote, small-scale farmers gain access to laboratory testing and bio-input guidance that was previously inaccessible.



Definitions of Key Terms

- **Soil Health:** The continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans; evaluated via physical, chemical, and biological parameters.
- **Community Agronomist:** A grassroots practitioner who applies agricultural science to help local farmers improve crop production and soil management.



- **CO₂e (Carbon Dioxide Equivalent):** A standard unit for measuring carbon footprints, expressing the impact of different greenhouse gases in terms of the amount of CO₂ that would create the same global warming.
- **Bio-inputs:** Natural fertilizers or pesticides derived from biological sources (microbes, plants, or animal waste) that enhance soil fertility without chemical residues.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 39(I):** Directive Principles of State Policy mandate the state to ensure that both men and women have the right to an adequate means of livelihood, a goal directly served by the Soil Sakhi vocational training.
- **Article 14 & 15:** Guarantees equality and prohibits discrimination, supporting the legislative and social intent behind empowering marginalized women in traditionally male-dominated sectors like agricultural consultancy.
- **National Policy for Farmers, 2007:** Emphasizes the "feminization of agriculture" and the need to provide women farmers with access to land, water, credit, and technology.
- **Soil Health Card Scheme (2015):** A central government flagship program under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; the Soil Sakhi initiative acts as a private-sector force multiplier for the objectives of this national scheme.

Comparison of Traditional vs. Soil Sakhi-led Farming

Feature	Traditional Farming (Drought-prone)	Soil Sakhi-led Intervention
Fertilizer Use	Generalized/Excessive application	Precision application based on test reports
Crop Choice	Based on tradition or market rumors	Based on soil-type compatibility
Role of Women	Invisible labor/Supportive role	Primary advisor/Community agronomist
Carbon Footprint	Higher due to chemical run-off	Reduced through optimized input usage

Conclusion

The Soil Sakhi model demonstrates that climate resilience in agriculture is inextricably linked to social equity. By decentralizing scientific knowledge and placing it in the hands of rural women, the initiative not only revitalizes malnourished soil but also reconstructs the social fabric of drought-hit Maharashtra. It serves as a scalable template for integrating gender empowerment with sustainable food security and carbon sequestration.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Knowledge of the Soil Health Card Scheme, ICAR's role in extension services, and geographical distribution of drought-prone areas in Maharashtra.
- **Mains (GS Paper I & III):** "Role of women and women's organization," "Land reforms in India," and "Agriculture: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and MSP." This case study is ideal for answering questions on "Women in Agriculture" or "Climate Resilient Farming Systems." In GS Paper IV (Ethics), it serves as a powerful example of "Social Influence and Persuasion" and "Empathy toward marginalized sections."



10. Judicial Review and Religious Belief: The SC Reference Hearing

A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, is currently deliberating on the boundaries of judicial intervention in religious practices. This reference, stemming from the Sabarimala case, explores the tension between constitutional morality and the protection of pluralistic faith systems, questioning the applicability of "logic" and "science" to matters of deep-seated belief.

Key Highlights of the Judicial Observations

- **Limitations of Logic:** The Bench observed that logic and rationality may not be the appropriate tools to examine faith, as religious identity is often rooted in belief systems that transcend scientific scrutiny.
- **Identity vs. Reform:** Justice B.V. Nagarathna emphasized that in the pursuit of social reform, a religion must not be "hollowed out" or forced to lose its unique identity, echoing concerns about state overreach.
- **Internal Reform vs. Judicial Review:** The Central Government argued that genuine religious reform should ideally emerge from within the community rather than being mandated by the court through a lens of modern science.
- **Critique of the "Essentiality" Test:** The Chief Justice noted that the term "essential religious practice" is a judicial creation and is not found in the text of the Constitution, suggesting a need to re-evaluate this doctrine.
- **Plurality of Beliefs:** The Solicitor General highlighted that in a diverse faith like Hinduism, what appears as "superstition" to one may be a "fundamental belief" to another, making it difficult for courts to act as "theological censors."
- **Protection from "Reform out of Existence":** Citing the 1972 *Seshammal* case, the Centre cautioned that the State cannot use the pretext of social reform to fundamentally alter or eliminate religious traditions.



Definitions of Key Terms

- **Doctrine of Essentiality:** A judicial test invented by the SC in 1954 to determine which religious practices are integral to a faith and thus protected under Article 25, versus those that are secular or superstitious.
- **Judicial Review:** The power of the judiciary to examine the actions of the legislative, executive, and administrative arms of the government to ensure they align with the Constitution.
- **Theological Censor:** A term used to describe a court or state authority that presumes to decide the "correctness" or "validity" of a particular religious doctrine or practice.
- **Constitutional Morality:** The principle that the Constitution is not just a legal document but a source of values (justice, liberty, equality) that must guide the interpretation of law, even over traditional morality.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health.



- **Article 25(2)(b):** Empowers the State to make laws for "social welfare and reform" or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes of Hindus.
- **Article 26:** Grants every religious denomination the right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion, which is often at the center of the debate on institutional autonomy.
- **The Sabarimala Reference (2019):** A 5-judge Bench referred several questions to a larger 9-judge Bench, including whether a court can interfere in practices claimed to be "essential" by a religious denomination.

Evolution of Judicial Intervention

Case/Doctrine	Year	Judicial Standpoint
Shirur Mutt Case	1954	Birth of the 'Essential Religious Practices' test to distinguish core faith from secular acts.
Seshammal Case	1972	Ruled that the state can reform secular aspects (like appointment of priests) but not the religion itself.
Sabarimala Judgment	2018	Prioritized individual rights and equality (Art. 14/15) over denominational traditions.
9-Judge Reference	2026	Re-examining if "logic" can override "faith" and the validity of the Essentiality Test.

Conclusion

The current deliberations mark a potential shift in Indian secularism—from "proactive interventionist reform" to a more "pluralistic protectionist" approach. While the Constitution allows for social reform, the Court's recent skepticism toward using "logic" as a primary tool suggests a growing recognition that religious freedom includes the right to maintain practices that may not conform to modern scientific standards, provided they do not violate public order, morality, or health.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding Articles 25-28, the origin of the Essentiality Test (Shirur Mutt case), and the composition of Constitutional Benches.
- **Mains (GS Paper II):** "Salient features of the Representation of People's Act" and "Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary." This topic is vital for essays on "Secularism in India" or questions on the "Conflict between Fundamental Rights and Religious Rights." Candidates should analyze the balance between 'Social Reform' under Art. 25(2) and 'Religious Autonomy' under Art. 26.

11. Global and Indian Space Situational Assessment 2025

The Indian Space Situational Assessment Report (ISSAR) for 2025 highlights a significant surge in global space activity, with 315 successful launches deploying 4,651 objects into orbit. As the orbital environment becomes increasingly crowded, the report emphasizes the critical importance of Space Situational Awareness (SSA) to protect assets from collisions and manage space debris.



Key Highlights of the ISSAR 2025

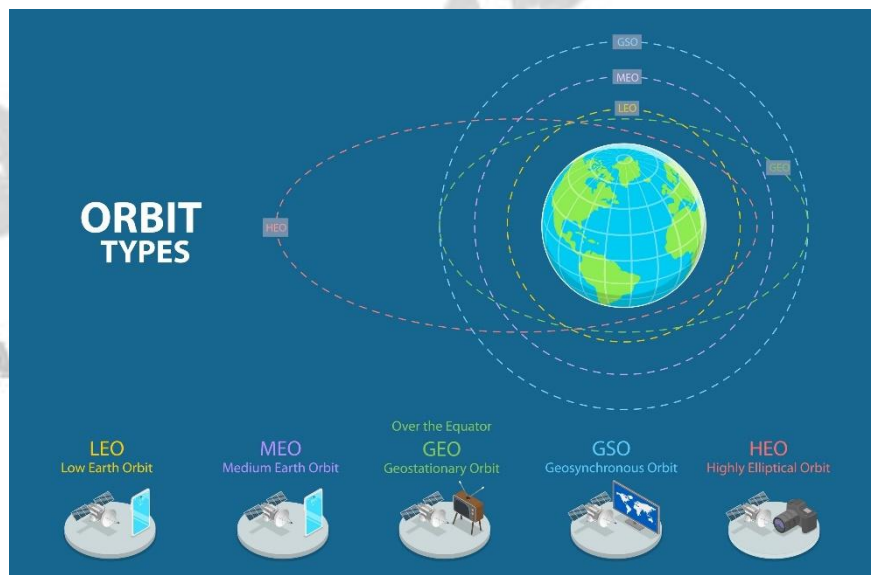
- **Global Launch Surge:** A record 315 successful launches occurred globally in 2025, placing 4,651 payloads in orbit, resulting in a net annual growth of 74.5% in orbital objects.
- **Indian Space Assets:** India launched eight satellites and four rocket bodies in 2025. Currently, India has 86 satellites in orbit, of which 27 are operational and 23 are defunct.
- **Orbital Maintenance:** Indian operators conducted 563 orbital manoeuvres in Low-Earth Orbit (LEO) and 519 in Geostationary Orbit (GEO) to maintain mission parameters and health.
- **Collision Avoidance:** To mitigate the risk of space debris, 14 Collision Avoidance Manoeuvres (CAMs) were executed in LEO and four in GEO during the assessment period.
- **Decommissioning Strategy:** The IRNSS-1D satellite was successfully decommissioned 600 km above the geosynchronous orbit, adhering to international guidelines for "graveyard orbits."
- **Launch Vehicle Residue:** The report tracks 42 PSLV and 4 GSLV rocket bodies currently remaining in orbit, highlighting the long-term presence of launch hardware in space.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Space Situational Awareness (SSA):** The tracking and monitoring of objects in orbit (satellites and debris) to predict and avoid collisions and understand the space environment.
- **Collision Avoidance Manoeuvres (CAM):** Intentional changes in a satellite's orbit to prevent it from colliding with another active satellite or a piece of space debris.
- **Graveyard Orbit:** A specific orbit, usually several hundred kilometers above the geostationary belt, where defunct satellites are moved at the end of their operational life to keep the functional belts clear.
- **Decayed Objects:** Space objects (satellites or rocket stages) that have lost altitude due to atmospheric drag and have re-entered the Earth's atmosphere, usually burning up in the process.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51:** While not explicitly mentioning space, this Directive Principle mandates the State to promote international peace and security, which underpins India's commitment to the peaceful and sustainable use of outer space.
- **Outer Space Treaty (1967):** India is a signatory to this foundational treaty, which stipulates that space exploration shall be for the benefit of all countries and that states are responsible for their national space activities.
- **Space Liability Convention (1972):** Establishes the rules for international liability for damage caused by space objects, a critical legal framework as orbital density increases.





- **Indian Space Policy 2023:** A comprehensive policy framework that encourages private sector participation (NGPEs) and emphasizes the sustainable management of space debris through ISRO's System for Safe and Sustainable Space Operations Management (IS4OM).

Status of Indian Launch Vehicle Objects in Orbit

Vehicle Type	Still in Orbit	Decayed (Re-entered)
PSLV	42	19
GSLV	4	10
LVM-3	3	5
SSLV	0	4

Conclusion

The ISSAR 2025 report serves as a stark reminder of the "Kessler Syndrome" risk—a scenario where space debris density leads to a cascade of collisions. India's proactive measures, such as the frequent CAMs and the strategic decommissioning of IRNSS-1D, demonstrate its role as a responsible spacefaring nation. However, the 74.5% growth in orbital objects necessitates a robust international regulatory framework to ensure that the final frontier remains accessible for future generations.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding different types of orbits (LEO, MEO, GEO), SSA concepts, IRNSS (NavIC) status, and the various launch vehicles (PSLV, GSLV, LVM-3, SSLV).
- **Mains (GS Paper III):** "Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nanotechnology, Biotechnology." Questions may focus on "Space Debris Management," the "Commercialization of Space," or "India's Space Situational Awareness capabilities (Project NETRA)." It is also relevant for GS Paper II in the context of "International Treaties and Agreements" governing outer space.

12. Regulatory Reform in India: The Jan Vishwas 2.0 Framework

The passage of the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, popularly known as Jan Vishwas 2.0, marks a significant milestone in India's journey toward trust-based governance. By scaling up the decriminalization efforts initiated in 2023, the government aims to reduce "compliance anxiety" and shift the regulatory focus from punitive criminal sanctions to proportionate administrative penalties, particularly for technical and procedural lapses.

Key Highlights of the Jan Vishwas 2.0 Reform

- **Decisive Scale-up:** The 2026 Bill amends 784 provisions across 79 Central Acts administered by 23 Ministries, significantly expanding the scope of the original 2023 Act which covered 42 Acts.
- **Mass Decriminalization:** It proposes the decriminalization of 717 provisions, converting criminal imprisonment for minor lapses into civil penalties or administrative measures like warnings.
- **Judicial Relief:** By moving minor cases out of the criminal justice system, the reform aims to reduce "court congestion" in a judiciary currently burdened with nearly 50 million pending cases.



- **Shift to Executive Adjudication:** The reform transitions from court-imposed "fines" to "penalties" administered by executive authorities, ensuring faster, time-bound, and predictable resolutions.
- **Proportionality and Gradation:** It introduces a graded enforcement mechanism, offering lower penalties or "improvement notices" for first-time or minor violations, which is a major boost for the MSME sector.
- **Economic Efficiency:** The Bill removes obsolete and redundant offenses from the statute book, strengthening the coherence of India's regulatory architecture and fostering an investor-friendly environment.

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Decriminalization:** The process of removing or reducing criminal penalties for an act, typically replacing imprisonment with civil fines or administrative sanctions.
- **Compounding of Offenses:** A mechanism where the offender pays a specified sum to the regulatory authority to avoid criminal prosecution for certain types of violations.
- **Mala Fide Intent:** A legal term meaning "in bad faith"; the reform recognizes that most procedural errors lack such intent and do not warrant criminal labels.
- **Adjudicating Officer:** An executive official empowered under the new framework to hear cases and impose civil penalties without the matter going to a criminal court.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(g):** The right to practice any profession or carry on any occupation, trade, or business. Decriminalizing minor lapses protects entrepreneurs from "regulatory harassment" that infringes on this right.
- **Article 21:** The Right to Liberty. The reform ensures that individuals are not deprived of their liberty for mere technical defaults or clerical errors.
- **Separation of Powers (Article 50):** While the executive gains adjudicatory powers for civil penalties, the judiciary retains oversight for serious offenses involving public safety, national security, or the environment.
- **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023:** The parent legislation that established the baseline for this reform by amending 183 provisions across 42 Central Acts.

Comparison: Jan Vishwas 1.0 vs. Jan Vishwas 2.0

Feature	Jan Vishwas Act, 2023	Jan Vishwas Bill, 2026
Central Acts Covered	42	79
Ministries Involved	19	23
Provisions Amended	183	784
Core Focus	Foundation of Decriminalization	Decisive scale-up & Executive Adjudication
Key Outcome	Ease of Doing Business	Trust-based Regulatory Culture

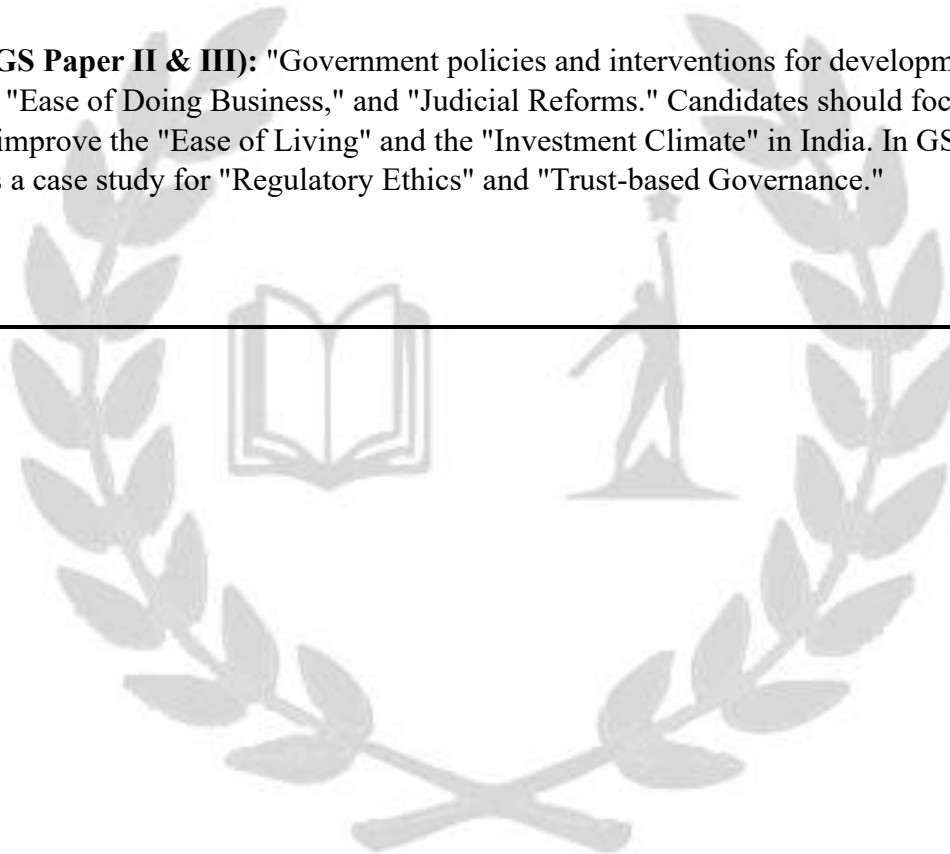


Conclusion

The Jan Vishwas 2.0 Bill represents a fundamental shift in India's regulatory philosophy—moving from a "command and control" model to one based on trust and proportionality. By differentiating between "technical lapses" and "serious crimes," the state ensures that the law remains a tool for facilitation rather than an instrument of fear. However, the ultimate success of this reform will hinge on the institutional capacity of administrative officers to adjudicate fairly and the uniform implementation of these changes across the 23 ministries involved.

UPSC Relevance

- **Prelims:** Understanding the difference between 'Fine' and 'Penalty', major Acts amended (Environment Protection Act, Post Office Act, etc.), and the role of the Cabinet in legislative drafting.
- **Mains (GS Paper II & III):** "Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors," "Ease of Doing Business," and "Judicial Reforms." Candidates should focus on how these reforms improve the "Ease of Living" and the "Investment Climate" in India. In GS IV (Ethics), this serves as a case study for "Regulatory Ethics" and "Trust-based Governance."



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