



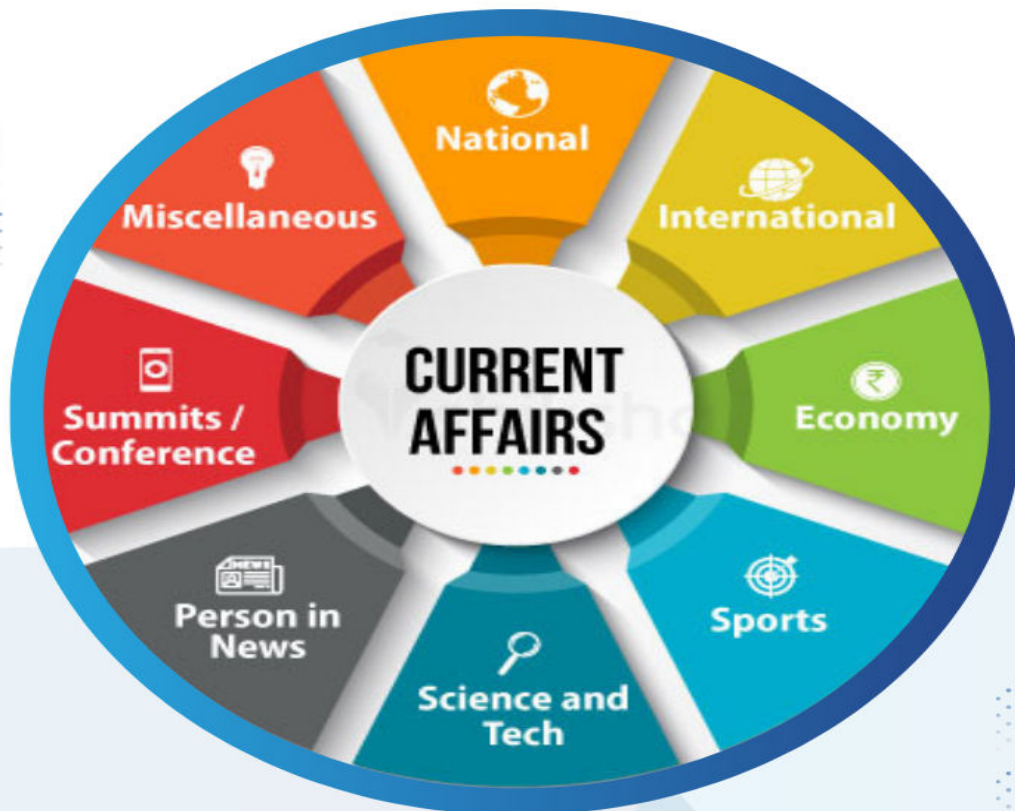
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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 21/04/2026 (TUESDAY)



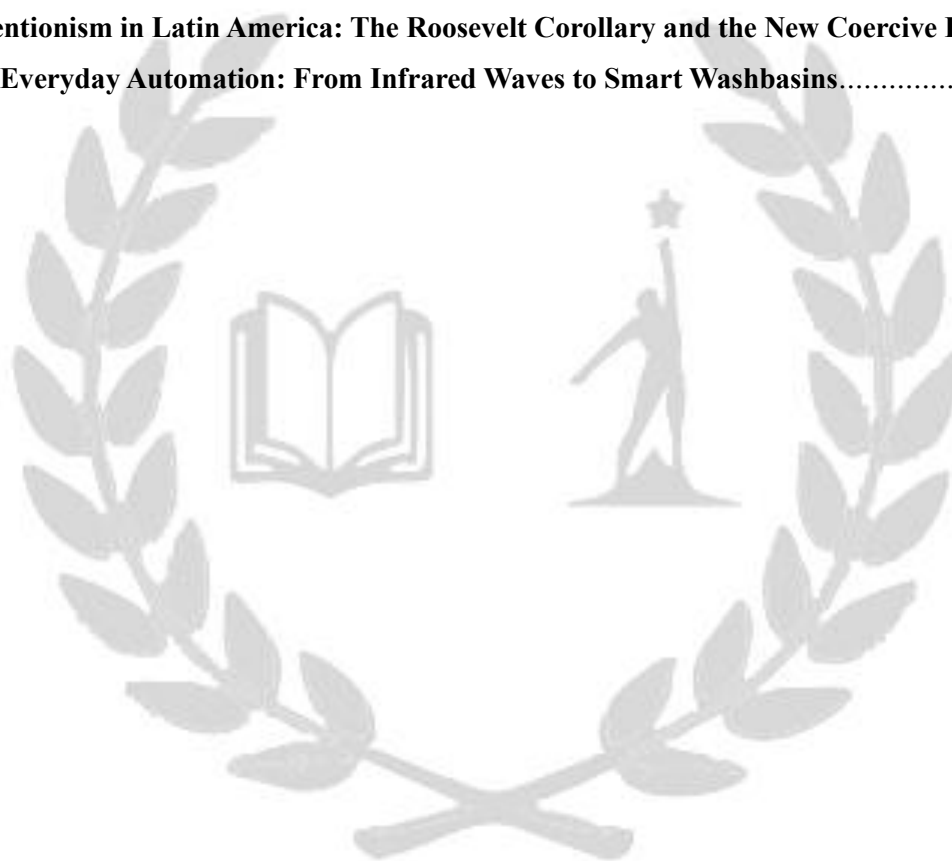
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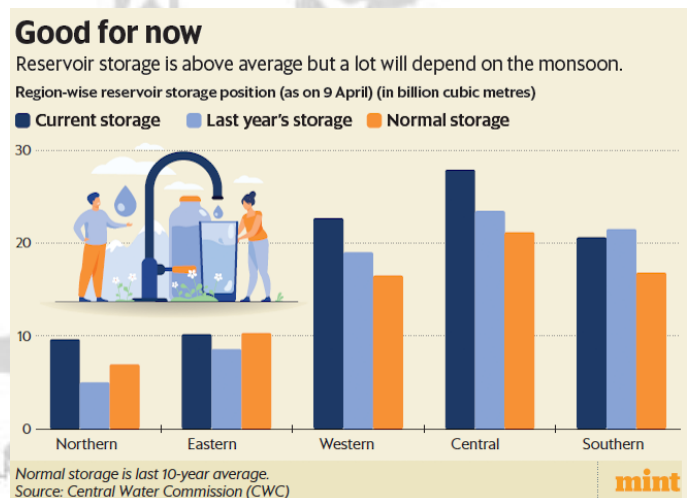


1. Impact of Monsoon Variability on India's Water Reservoirs and Agriculture

- **Current Storage Status:** As of April 2026, water levels in India's 166 primary reservoirs stand at 44.7% of their total live capacity (82.070 BCM). While this is technically higher than the previous year (38%) and the 10-year normal benchmark (35%), the stability of these levels is entirely contingent upon the timely arrival and intensity of the Southwest Monsoon.
- **Regional Disparities in Storage:** A significant geographical imbalance persists; while Northern, Western, and Central regions show improvement, the Southern region (comprising Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana) has seen a decline to 18.59 BCM. The Eastern region also remains slightly below its historical normal storage level at 42.2%.
- **Agricultural Vulnerability:** With only 55% of India's net sown area being irrigated, the remaining 45% relies exclusively on rainfed agriculture. A sub-normal monsoon (projected at 92% of the Long Period Average) threatens the sowing of Kharif crops, potentially reducing yield and squeezing rural cash flows.
- **Economic Implications and Inflation:** Agriculture contributes roughly 15.6% to the National Income and employs 46.1% of the workforce. Sub-par replenishment of reservoirs leads to reduced farm output, which historically triggers a spike in food inflation, complicating the monetary policy objectives of the RBI.
- **Hydropower Resilience vs. Risk:** Hydropower accounts for approximately 10% of India's total installed capacity (51,164.66 MW). While "run-of-the-river" projects are more susceptible to low snowfall than rain, reservoir-based projects face significant generation risks if dry spells exceed 10-15 days during the peak monsoon months.

Key Definitions

- **Live Storage Capacity:** The volume of water in a reservoir that can be utilized for specific purposes such as irrigation, power generation, and municipal water supply. It excludes "dead storage" (water at the bottom that cannot be evacuated by gravity).
- **Long Period Average (LPA):** The average rainfall recorded over a particular region for a long period (usually 30 or 50 years). It serves as the benchmark for "normal" monsoon rainfall.
- **Normal Storage:** Calculated by the Central Water Commission (CWC) as the average storage level of a reservoir over the last 10 years.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Entry 17 (State List):** Water, including water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankments, and water storage, falls primarily under the jurisdiction of State governments.
- **Entry 56 (Union List):** Gives the Central Government the power to regulate and develop inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.
- **Article 262:** Provides for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution, or control of the waters of any inter-state river or river valley.



- **Central Water Commission (CWC):** The apex technical organization in India for water resources, functioning under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, responsible for monitoring reservoir levels and coordinating flood control.

Conclusion

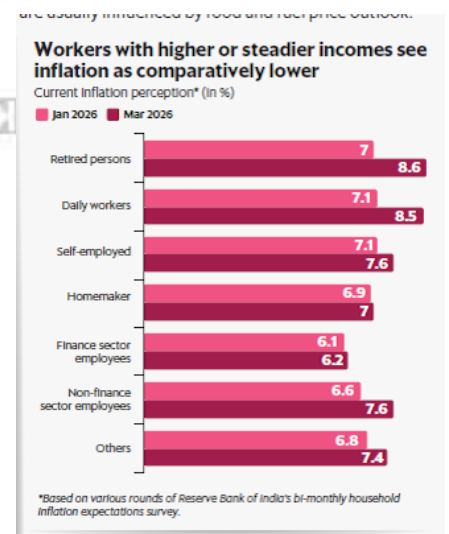
The current "buffer" in reservoir levels provides temporary relief but offers no long-term insurance against a failed monsoon. The concentration of water stress in the Southern region and the marginal deficit in the East highlight the need for localized water management. To mitigate the risks of food inflation and rural distress, policymakers must prioritize micro-irrigation efficiency and crop diversification toward less water-intensive varieties.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I (Geography):** Distribution of natural resources (water); critical geographical features and their changes.
- **GS Paper III (Economy & Environment):** Agriculture and irrigation patterns; food security and inflation; cropping patterns; and the impact of climate/monsoon on the Indian economy.

2. Inflation Anxiety and the Perception-Reality Gap in India

- **Divergence in Inflation Perception:** There exists a significant disconnect between "felt inflation" (perceived by households) and official inflation (measured by the Consumer Price Index). Despite the 2024 base year update and improved coverage, households consistently estimate inflation 4-6% higher than official figures, driven by the immediate cost of daily essentials.
- **Impact of Geopolitical Volatility:** The West Asia war has triggered a reversal in the three-year downward trend of inflation expectations. Median three-month-ahead expectations rose from 7.6% to 8.5% between November 2025 and March 2026, signaling deep-seated public anxiety regarding future price stability despite a lower official CPI print of 3.4%.
- **The Vulnerability Gradient:** Inflation anxiety is inversely proportional to income security. Daily wage workers and retirees report much higher "felt inflation" (jumping to 8.5-8.6%) compared to financial sector employees (6.2%), highlighting that price rises act as a regressive tax that disproportionately burdens the socio-economically marginalized.
- **Role of Administered Prices:** While government interventions—such as capping domestic airfare and slashing excise duties on petrol/diesel—have cushioned the immediate blow, they have not quelled anxiety. Households factor in the "eventuality" of price hikes post-elections, leading to a pessimistic outlook where nearly 40-45% of respondents expect double-digit inflation in the future.
- **Asymmetric Influence of Food and Fuel:** Household perceptions are highly sensitive to food and fuel prices. While price spikes in these sectors lead to an immediate jump in inflation expectations, it takes a significantly longer period of sustained price stability to bring those perceptions back down.
- **Policy Challenges and Dissonance:** Monetary policy, primarily targeting "core" inflation, often struggles to influence felt inflation which is driven by supply-side shocks (food/fuel). This





dissonance can lead to sub-optimal economic behavior, such as panic buying or reduced savings, which may run counter to the RBI's macroeconomic objectives.

Key Definitions

- **Felt Inflation:** The qualitative perception of price rises by consumers based on daily out-of-pocket expenses rather than statistical indices.
- **Consumer Price Index (CPI):** A measure that examines the weighted average of prices of a basket of consumer goods and services; it is the primary tool used by the RBI for inflation targeting.
- **Inflation Expectations Survey (IES):** A bi-monthly survey conducted by the RBI to capture subjective assessments of price movements from households across major cities.
- **Second-order Effects:** Indirect consequences of inflation, such as changes in labor migration patterns or service providers altering business models (e.g., trimming menus) to cope with input costs.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Supreme Court has periodically interpreted the 'Right to Life' to include the right to basic subsistence; persistent high inflation can be viewed as an impediment to this right for the poor.
- **RBI Act, 1934 (2016 Amendment):** Provides the statutory basis for the Monetary Policy Framework. It mandates the RBI to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth, specifically targeting a CPI inflation of 4% with a tolerance band of +/-2%.
- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Empowering the government to control production, supply, and distribution of essential items to prevent hoarding and artificial price inflation.

Conclusion

Inflation is as much a psychological phenomenon as a financial one. While the official data may suggest stability, the rising "inflation anxiety" among the Indian public indicates a fragility in consumer confidence. The RBI's shift toward "clear communication" and monitoring every component of the CPI is a necessary step to bridge the gap between statistical reality and the lived experience of the citizenry, ensuring that household savings and spending remain aligned with national growth targets.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Inflationary trends and Monetary Policy.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

3. National Framework for First- and Last-Mile Mobility: NITI Aayog's Overhaul

- **Addressing the Public Transport Gap:** NITI Aayog is developing a national framework to formalize first- and last-mile connectivity, targeting the 200–300 million Indians who currently rely on informal transit. Official data indicates a stark deficit, with government-run transport systems available in only 66 out of 496 Indian cities with populations exceeding 100,000.
- **Focus on Informal Transit Integration:** The framework aims to bring oversight to the "informal" sector—comprising privately run rickshaws, tempos, and minibuses—which serves as the primary



mode of transport in Tier II, Tier III, and smaller towns where formal bus or metro networks are non-existent.

- **Inter-Ministerial Collaboration:** A nominated committee, including experts and officials from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), is tasked with finalizing a comprehensive report within three months to streamline urban mobility.
- **Urbanization and Economic Efficiency:** As per the latest economic trends, chaotic transportation acts as a bottleneck for economic productivity. By formalizing last-mile links, the government aims to reduce commuter wait times, lower transportation costs, and improve the overall ease of living in rapidly growing urban centers.
- **Regulatory Oversight and Safety:** A primary objective of the proposed framework is to establish an oversight mechanism for the unregulated transport networks. This is expected to standardize safety protocols, fare structures, and transition these informal vehicles toward cleaner energy platforms, such as electric three-wheelers.



Key Definitions

- **First- and Last-Mile Connectivity:** The beginning and end of an individual public transit trip. For example, the movement from home to a metro station (first mile) and from the destination station to the final office location (last mile).
- **Informal Transit:** Unorganized transport services operated by private individuals or small-scale entities that are not part of a government-owned municipal transport corporation.
- **Tier II and Tier III Cities:** Urban categorizations based on population size; Tier II cities typically have populations between 50,000 and 100,000, while Tier III refers to smaller urban centers with populations between 20,000 and 50,000.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 243W & 12th Schedule:** The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act empowers Municipalities to perform functions related to "Urban planning including town planning" and "Roads and bridges," which encompasses urban transport management.
- **Motor Vehicles Act, 1988:** Provides the legal framework for the regulation of all motor vehicles, including licensing, permits, and safety standards, which the new NITI Aayog framework will likely seek to harmonize with informal transit.
- **National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP), 2006:** A policy framework that encourages the integration of various modes of transport and prioritizes "people over vehicles."
- **State List (Schedule VII):** "Communications" (roads, bridges, ferries, etc.) is primarily a State subject, meaning the Central framework will likely serve as a guideline for States to adopt and implement.

Conclusion

The formalization of first- and last-mile mobility is no longer a luxury but a necessity for India's urban transformation. By bridging the gap between high-capacity trunk systems (like Metro Rail) and the commuter's doorstep, NITI Aayog's upcoming framework has the potential to unlock significant



economic value, reduce the carbon footprint of urban travel, and bring dignity and safety to the daily commute of millions.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Role of NITI Aayog in cooperative federalism and policy intervention; government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **GS Paper III (Infrastructure):** Transport and urban infrastructure; challenges of urbanization and their remedies; impact of informal economy on national growth.

4. India-South Korea Bilateral Relations: Towards a \$50 Billion Trade Goal

- **Ambitious Trade Targets:** India and South Korea have committed to nearly doubling their bilateral trade from the current \$27 billion to \$50 billion by 2030. This necessitates an estimated annual growth rate of approximately 18% over the next four years to achieve the "mission mode" objective set by the leadership of both nations.
- **CEPA Upgradation Timeline:** A significant breakthrough has been achieved with the agreement to upgrade the existing Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) within a one-year window. This is critical given that review negotiations have been ongoing for nearly a decade since 2016 across 11 rounds of talks.
- **Addressing the Trade Deficit:** A primary driver for the CEPA review is India's substantial trade deficit, which stood at \$15.24 billion in 2024-25 (Imports: \$21.06 billion; Exports: \$5.82 billion). The upgrade aims for a "more balanced" partnership by reducing India's reliance on Korean imports while expanding market access for Indian goods.
- **Focus on Non-Tariff Barriers and Market Access:** Beyond duty cuts, the new negotiations prioritize the removal of non-tariff barriers and the easing of "Rules of Origin." These measures are intended to prevent third-party countries from exploiting concessional duties and to simplify the ease of doing business for Indian exporters.
- **Strategic Economic Realignment:** The partnership is pivoting towards unlocking a "new chapter" in sectors beyond traditional trade. With India as the world's fourth-largest economy, South Korea views New Delhi as a vital pillar for global supply chain resilience, particularly in manufacturing and high-technology sectors.

Key Definitions

- **CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement):** A type of free trade pact that is broader than a standard Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as it covers negotiation on trade in services, investment, and other areas of economic partnership.
- **Rules of Origin:** The criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. Their importance is derived from the fact that duties and restrictions in several cases depend upon the source of imports.
- **Trade Deficit:** An economic measure of a negative balance of trade in which a country's imports exceed its exports.





- **Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** Trade barriers that restrict imports or exports of goods or services through mechanisms other than the simple imposition of tariffs (e.g., quotas, embargoes, sanctions, and levies).

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country or countries.
- **Article 73:** Specifies that the executive power of the Union extends to the exercise of rights, authority, and jurisdiction exercisable by the Government of India by virtue of any treaty or agreement.
- **Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:** The primary legal framework providing for the development and regulation of foreign trade by facilitating imports into and augmenting exports from India.

Conclusion

The decision to fast-track the CEPA upgrade reflects a pragmatic shift in India's trade policy, moving away from "one-sided" older agreements toward reciprocal and balanced arrangements. While the \$50 billion target is ambitious, success will depend on India's ability to integrate into Korean supply chains and Seoul's willingness to dismantle complex non-tariff barriers that have historically hindered Indian pharmaceutical and agricultural exports.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Effects of liberalization on the economy; changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; and External Sector/Foreign Trade.

5. India-US Bilateral Trade: Seeking Preferential Market Access

- **Negotiating Preferential Access:** A high-level Indian delegation is in Washington to negotiate the first phase of a bilateral trade agreement. The primary objective is to secure "preferential market access" for Indian domestic goods, ensuring they remain competitive against global rivals in the US market.
- **Review of Trade Framework:** Following the US Supreme Court's ruling against previous tariff structures, the US administration has implemented a 10% universal tariff on imports for a 150-day period starting February 24, 2026. This shift in the American tariff landscape has necessitated a re-evaluation of the trade agreement text originally released in early February.

- **The "First Tranche" Strategy:** Rather than a singular, exhaustive treaty, both nations are focusing on an incremental approach. This "first tranche" or mini-trade deal aims to resolve immediate friction points and establish a mechanism for preferential treatment before moving toward a larger, more comprehensive economic partnership.

- **Competitive Edge and Export Growth:** India's push for better-than-most-favored-nation status is vital for sectors like textiles, gems and jewelry, and





pharmaceuticals. Securing lower tariffs compared to other emerging economies is seen as essential for boosting India's export volumes and achieving its long-term trade targets.

- **Impact of US Domestic Policy:** Recent US judicial and executive decisions regarding universal tariffs have disrupted global supply chains. Indian negotiators are working to carve out specific exemptions or reduced duty structures for Indian products to mitigate the impact of the 10% blanket tariff.

Key Definitions

- **Preferential Market Access (PMA):** An economic policy where a country grants lower tariffs or better trade conditions to another specific country than it does to the general membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- **Bilateral Trade Agreement:** An exchange of goods between two nations that facilitates trade and investment by reducing or eliminating tariffs, import quotas, export restraints, and other trade barriers.
- **Most Favored Nation (MFN):** A WTO principle requiring a country to provide any trade concession made to one member to all other WTO members, unless a specific preferential agreement (like an FTA) exists.
- **Tariff Landscape:** The overall structure and level of duties or taxes imposed by a government on imported goods, which determines the cost-competitiveness of foreign products.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Grants the Parliament of India the power to make laws for implementing international treaties and agreements, even if the subject matter falls under the State List.
- **Article 51(c):** A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) that mandates the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another.
- **The Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992:** Provides the executive branch with the power to formulate and implement the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) and regulate the import/export of goods to maximize economic growth.
- **Section 25 of the Customs Act, 1962:** Empowers the Central Government to grant exemptions from customs duties in the public interest, often used to reciprocate benefits under trade agreements.

Conclusion

The current negotiations in Washington signify a critical pivot in India-US economic relations. By seeking a specialized mechanism for preferential access, India aims to insulate its exporters from the volatility of American trade protectionism. While the 10% universal tariff presents a challenge, it also provides an opportunity for India to negotiate a unique standing in the US market, potentially making it a preferred alternative to other global manufacturing hubs.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Bilateral groupings and agreements involving India and affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; External sector and international trade trends.



6. India's LPG Security: Addressing the Structural Import Mismatch

- **Deepening Import Dependence:** India's LPG crisis is a structural mismatch rather than a temporary shortage. With annual consumption reaching 33.15 million tonnes, domestic production covers only 40% of the demand. Consequently, India relies on imports for 60% of its needs, making total demand approximately 250% of indigenous production.
- **Household Vulnerability:** Unlike other major importers like China (petrochemical-led) or Japan (diversified energy mix), India's LPG consumption is overwhelmingly domestic. Household kitchens account for over 90% of national consumption, making the energy supply "inflexible" since residential cooking needs cannot be deferred or easily switched like industrial feedstock.
- **Geopolitical Chokepoint Risks:** Approximately 90% of India's LPG imports transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Recent tensions have highlighted that this corridor can no longer be treated as a routinely dependable route, necessitating a strategic recalculation of energy security for the "domestic kitchen" molecule.
- **Inadequate Strategic Storage:** While operational tankage covers about 15 days, India's underground cavern-based "reserve-style" storage (Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru) holds only 140,000 tonnes. This equates to a precarious 1.5 days of national demand, significantly lower than Japan's 108.3 days of combined reserves.
- **Market Tightness and Supply Competition:** India competes in a highly concentrated global market where just four Asian countries absorb over 50% of the exportable LPG pool. Any disruption in Gulf supplies leads to immediate market tightening, as most of the global supply is already tied to long-term petrochemical or heating contracts.
- **Strategic Roadmap for Resilience:** To mitigate vulnerability, India must prioritize domestic LPG for households over industrial use, expand cavern storage to at least a 21-day buffer (1.9 million tonnes), and aggressively promote electric cooking (Induction) and Piped Natural Gas (PNG) to reduce the singular reliance on LPG cylinders.



Key Definitions

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A strategic waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, serving as the world's most important oil and gas transit chokepoint.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** Emergency fuel storage maintained by a country to ensure energy security during supply disruptions.
- **Fractions (C3/C4):** Propane (C3) and Butane (C4) are the primary chemical components of LPG; they are "fractionated" from natural gas or refined from crude oil.
- **Operational Tankage:** The volume of fuel stored within the active distribution system (refineries, bottling plants) used for daily supply chain management.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Entry 53 (Union List):** Regulation and development of oilfields and mineral oil resources; petroleum and petroleum products fall under the exclusive legislative domain of the Central Government.



- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Allows the government to regulate the delivery and pricing of LPG to prevent hoarding and ensure equitable distribution to households.
- **The Petroleum Act, 1934:** Provides the legal framework for the import, transport, and storage of petroleum products, including the safety standards for LPG bottling and caverns.
- **Article 39(b):** Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) mandating that the ownership and control of material resources are distributed to best subserve the common good, justifying government intervention in fuel subsidies and distribution.

Conclusion

India's LPG insecurity stems from an "asymmetric demand" where a critical, non-deferrable need (cooking) is tied to a volatile, concentrated import route. Achieving energy sovereignty requires moving beyond procurement strategies to a fundamental redesign of the energy basket. By decoupling industrial demand from the household pool and scaling up electric cooking, India can transform the kitchen from a point of strategic vulnerability into a pillar of resilient domestic energy policy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy & Energy):** Infrastructure: Energy; Issues related to mobilization of resources; Government budgeting and subsidies (PM Ujjwala Yojana).
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Diaspora and West Asia geopolitics.

7. Cross-Border and Group Insolvency: Strengthening India's Debt Resolution

- **Comprehensive Overhaul of IBC:** The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has undergone its most significant amendment since 2016, following presidential assent on 6 April 2026. While most provisions are slated for immediate notification, the government has deferred the rollout of "Group Insolvency" and "Cross-Border Insolvency" frameworks to conduct wider consultations.
- **Adopting UNCITRAL Standards:** India is actively consulting with the United Nations to adapt the UN Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency and Group Insolvency to the domestic legal landscape. This ensures that the new rules are globally synchronized while remaining tailored to the specific requirements of the Indian corporate ecosystem.
- **Procedural Coordination in Group Insolvency:** Unlike "substantive consolidation," which merges the assets of all group firms, the proposed regime focuses on "procedural coordination." This allows multiple entities within a corporate group to undergo synchronized resolution, protecting the overall business value without compromising the distinct legal identity of individual companies.
- **Efficiency and Preventing Contradictions:**
The primary objective of the group mechanism is to prevent contradictory judicial orders across different benches of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and to ensure a unified strategy for firms under the same parentage, thereby maximizing the "insolvency estate" value.
- **Cross-Border Jurisdictional Challenges:** The framework addresses cases where a debtor's assets are located abroad or where foreign creditors have claims in India. By establishing a formal





mechanism, the government aims to provide legal certainty for foreign investors and streamline the repatriation of assets in global bankruptcy cases.

- **Parliamentary Oversight:** To ensure transparency and address complexity, the rules for these two specific schemes will be notified only after being tabled in both houses of Parliament, allowing for legislative scrutiny and final tweaks based on expert recommendations.

Key Definitions

- **Cross-Border Insolvency:** A situation where the insolvent debtor has assets in more than one country or where some of the creditors are not from the country where the insolvency proceeding is taking place.
- **Group Insolvency:** A framework that deals with the insolvency of several companies belonging to the same corporate group, facilitating a coordinated resolution process.
- **Insolvency Estate:** The collective pool of a corporate debtor's assets and interests that are used by the Resolution Professional to satisfy the claims of creditors during liquidation or reorganization.
- **Substantive Consolidation:** A legal doctrine where the assets and liabilities of different entities are pooled together as if they belonged to a single entity, often controversial as it can hurt creditors of stronger subsidiaries.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make laws for implementing international treaties or agreements, which is the basis for adopting UN Model Laws into the IBC framework.
- **The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016:** The parent legislation that consolidated the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms, and individuals.
- **Presidential Assent (Article 111):** The current amendments became law following the President's signature on 6 April, moving the IBC toward a more mature "second generation" of insolvency reforms.
- **UNCITRAL Model Law:** The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law provides a standardized framework that countries can adopt to handle cross-border insolvencies, emphasizing cooperation between courts.

Conclusion

The government's cautious approach toward group and cross-border insolvency reflects the complexity of modern corporate structures. By prioritizing procedural coordination over asset pooling, India aims to provide a sophisticated resolution mechanism that respects corporate "separateness" while ensuring economic efficiency. If implemented successfully, these reforms will significantly elevate India's standing in the "Ease of Doing Business" rankings and provide a much-needed safety net for global trade and investment.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Recovery of stressed assets; impact of IBC on the banking sector; Ease of Doing Business; and corporate governance.



- **GS Paper II (Governance & International Relations):** Regulatory bodies like the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI); adoption of international laws (UN Model Law); and legislative processes in Parliament.

8. The Salience Gap: Addressing India's Foundational Learning Crisis

- **The Paradox of Policy vs. Practice:** Despite robust policy frameworks like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and missions such as NIPUN Bharat, India faces a persistent "learning crisis." The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) consistently highlights that a significant percentage of Grade 5 students struggle to read Grade 2 level texts, indicating that high enrollment has not translated into actual learning outcomes.
- **The Concept of Salience:** Systems change effectively only when a problem achieves "salience"—a shared social recognition that the issue is urgent. While Vietnam achieved superior learning outcomes by prioritizing the "will to learn," in India, the administrative and social focus remains on "observable" inputs like infrastructure (toilets, buildings) rather than the "intangible" metric of student reading fluency.
- **Visibility and Perception Barriers:** Learning is inherently difficult to observe compared to physical infrastructure. The "illusion of learning," where children copy from blackboards without comprehension, masks the crisis. Furthermore, oral reading fluency—the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn"—is poorly understood by parents and local stakeholders, leading to the dismissal of alarming survey data.
- **Power Asymmetry and Accountability:** A lack of bottom-up pressure persists because children have no voice, and parents often lack the assessment tools to challenge authority. The "exit" of the middle class from the public school system to private alternatives has further reduced the social capital necessary to demand accountability from state-run educational institutions.
- **Systemic Fatalism and Risk Aversion:** Acknowledging that millions are in school but not learning is professionally unsettling for educators and politically risky for administrators. This leads to a "disconnect in responsibility," where schooling is viewed as the state's job, but learning is wrongly attributed solely to the child's innate ability or home environment.
- **Pathways to Transformation:** Building salience through direct evidence is key. Village-level assessments that allow parents to witness a child's struggle firsthand can turn an abstract statistic into an immediate priority. Structured pedagogy and "Teaching at the Right Level" (TaRL) have proven that significant gains in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) are both possible and cost-effective.



Key Definitions

- **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN):** The ability of a child to read with meaning and perform basic math calculations by the end of Grade 3. It is considered the gateway to all future learning.
- **Salience:** In public policy, it refers to the prominence or importance of an issue in the minds of the public and policymakers, which compels collective action.



- **Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL):** An educational approach that evaluates children's actual learning levels and groups them accordingly for instruction, rather than following a rigid age-grade curriculum.
- **NIPUN Bharat:** (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) A government mission aimed at ensuring every child in the country necessarily attains foundational literacy and numeracy by the end of Grade 3 by 2026-27.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21A:** Inserted via the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, it makes free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right for all children in the age group of six to fourteen years.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:** Provides the legal framework for Article 21A, emphasizing not just access, but the quality of education and the prohibition of physical punishment and mental harassment.
- **Article 45 (DPSP):** Directs the State to endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.
- **Article 51A(k):** A Fundamental Duty for parents or guardians to provide opportunities for education to their child or ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

Conclusion

The "learning crisis" in India is less a failure of funding and more a failure of "felt urgency." To move from schooling to learning, the invisibility of the crisis must be dismantled. By making learning outcomes measurable at the community level and shifting the administrative focus from enrollment metrics to reading fluency, India can bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom reality.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Social Justice/Governance):** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education; Human Resources; and Government policies and interventions.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** Accountability and ethical governance in the delivery of public services; empathy toward the vulnerable sections (children/rural poor).

9. U.S. Interventionism in Latin America: The Roosevelt Corollary and the New Coercive Era

- **Resurgence of "Gunboat Diplomacy":** The second Trump administration's policies in Latin America—ranging from drone strikes and fuel blockades in Cuba to military incursions in Venezuela—mark a pivot toward a more aggressive, coercive posture. This shift is characterized by a departure from diplomatic soft power toward "Gunboat Diplomacy," where military and economic threats are used to enforce hemispheric compliance.
- **The Roosevelt Corollary Reborn:** Contemporary U.S. actions mirror the early 20th-century "international police power" doctrine established by the Roosevelt Corollary (1904) to the Monroe Doctrine. This historical precedent justified U.S. intervention in cases of "chronic wrongdoing" in Latin American nations to protect American economic and strategic interests, effectively disregarding local sovereignty.





- **Historical Echoes of Intervention:** The current geopolitical climate evokes past U.S. maneuvers, such as the 1989 capture of Manuel Noriega in Panama and the Cold War-era support for the 1973 Chilean coup. These events underscore a long-standing pattern where Washington perceives the Western Hemisphere as its exclusive sphere of influence, often referred to as its "backyard."
- **Anti-Imperialism as a Regional Identity:** Historical U.S. aggression has consistently catalyzed Pan-Latin American resistance. In the 1920s, this gave rise to the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas and movements inspired by the Mexican and Russian Revolutions. These movements redefined Latin American nations as "dependent countries," formally sovereign but economically subordinated to Wall Street and Washington.
- **Socio-Political Fragmentation:** While anti-imperialism serves as a unifying cry against external pressure, it historically created deep internal rifts within Latin American politics. Disagreements over radical revolution versus democratic reform, and nationalism versus internationalism, laid the groundwork for the ideological conflicts that defined the region during the Cold War.
- **Future Strategic Implications:** Analysts suggest that the current U.S. "assertive" stance is likely to rejuvenate anti-imperialist sentiment among a new generation of activists. Despite the current rightward political tilt in several Latin American nations, the perception of U.S. overreach remains a powerful organizing principle for nationalist and leftist movements across the continent.

Key Definitions

- **Monroe Doctrine (1823):** A U.S. policy opposing European colonialism in the Americas, stating that any intervention in the politics of the Americas by foreign powers was a potentially hostile act against the U.S.
- **Roosevelt Corollary (1904):** An addition to the Monroe Doctrine asserting that the U.S. has the right to intervene in the internal affairs of Latin American nations to maintain stability and protect U.S. economic interests.
- **Gunboat Diplomacy:** The pursuit of foreign policy objectives through the conspicuous display of naval or military power, implying a direct threat of warfare should terms not be met.
- **Formal vs. Substantive Sovereignty:** A state's legal recognition as independent (formal) versus its actual ability to exercise control over its economy and policy without external dictate (substantive).

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **UN Charter, Article 2(4):** Explicitly prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, which is the primary international legal argument against unilateral incursions.
- **The OAS Charter (Organization of American States):** A regional treaty aimed at fostering solidarity; Article 19 specifically states that "No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State."
- **The Drago Doctrine (1902):** A Latin American legal principle (named after Argentine Jurist Luis Drago) stating that international law does not allow a foreign power to use force against an American nation to collect public debt—a direct response to the era of U.S. interventions.

Conclusion

The return to a more coercive U.S. policy in Latin America represents a "past as prologue" scenario. While the immediate goal may be the containment of perceived threats or the securing of trade advantages, the



long-term historical consequence is often the strengthening of anti-U.S. coalitions. As Washington increasingly relies on its "international police power," it risks alienating regional partners and fueling a nationalist resurgence that could reshape the geopolitical alignment of the Western Hemisphere for decades.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Global groupings and agreements involving major powers.
- **GS Paper I (World History):** 20th-century world history, including decolonization, political philosophies like communism and capitalism, and their effect on society.

10. Physics in Everyday Automation: From Infrared Waves to Smart Washbasins

- **Harnessing the Electromagnetic Spectrum:** Smart washbasins and remote controls operate using Infrared (IR) radiation. IR waves are electromagnetic waves with frequencies slightly lower than red visible light (below 400 terahertz). While invisible to the human eye, these waves are "seen" by specialized electronic components, bridging the gap between invisible energy and mechanical action.
- **The Mechanism of Detection:** In an automated washbasin, an IR Light Emitting Diode (LED) and a photodiode (sensor) are placed in proximity. Under normal conditions, the emitted IR light travels into open space. When a hand is placed under the tap, it acts as a reflective surface, bouncing the IR waves back toward the sensor.
- **Sensors as Electronic Switches:** The photodiode acts as a "crossing manager" or a light-controlled switch. Utilizing principles of condensed matter physics, the sensor remains non-conductive until it detects specific IR frequencies. Once the reflected light hits the photodiode, it allows an electric current to flow, completing the circuit that triggers the water valve.
- **The Role of LEDs and Photodiodes:** An IR-LED converts electrical energy into invisible light via electron movement near an atom's nucleus. Conversely, the photodiode captures these photons and converts them back into electrical signals. This "handshake" between the emitter and the receiver is the fundamental basis for most proximity-based automation.
- **Quantum and Condensed Matter Foundations:** The functionality of these devices is rooted in quantum mechanics and optics. The specific behavior of electrons within semiconductor materials (material science) allows engineers to create sensors that respond only to specific wavelengths, preventing interference (e.g., ensuring a TV remote doesn't accidentally trigger a washbasin).



Key Definitions

- **Electromagnetic (EM) Waves:** Waves consisting of oscillating electric and magnetic fields that can travel through a vacuum at the speed of light.
- **Infrared (IR):** A region of the EM spectrum with wavelengths longer than visible light but shorter than microwaves; commonly associated with heat radiation.
- **Photodiode:** A semiconductor device that converts light into an electrical current. It serves as the primary "eye" for automated systems.

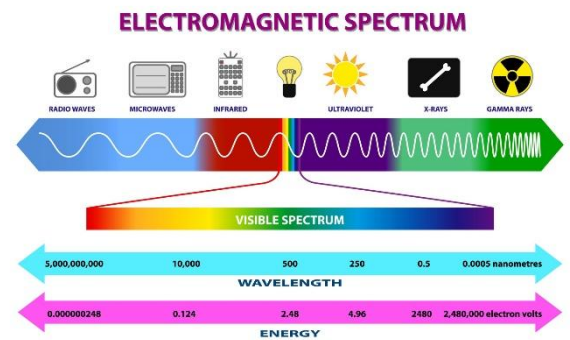


- **Hertz (Hz):** The unit of frequency, representing one cycle per second. Terahertz (10^{12} Hz) is the scale at which light waves oscillate.

set of electromagnetic spectrum diagram or radio waves spectrum or ultraviolet light diagram. eps 10 vector, easy to modify

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A(h):** A Fundamental Duty of Indian citizens "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform." Understanding the science behind daily technology aligns with this duty.
- **Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP):** A framework by the Government of India aimed at positioning India among the top scientific powers and promoting indigenous technological development in electronics and semiconductors.
- **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act, 2016:** Provides the legal framework for the "Standardization, Marking, and Quality Certification" of goods, ensuring that automated sensors and electronic appliances meet safety and efficiency benchmarks.



Conclusion

The "magic" of a self-aware washbasin is a practical application of four centuries of physics, specifically optics and condensed matter physics. By utilizing the invisible IR spectrum, these systems provide hygienic, touchless solutions that conserve water and energy. This technology exemplifies how quantum-level electron behavior is harnessed to solve macroscopic engineering challenges in urban infrastructure.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Science and Technology):** Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Indigenization of technology; Basics of Physics (Electromagnetic waves, Optics).
- **GS Paper I (Geography):** Understanding the electromagnetic spectrum is vital for Remote Sensing and Satellite technology topics.