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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. World Earth Day 2026: Our Power, Our Planet

- **Theme and Significance:** World Earth Day 2026 is observed under the theme 'Our Power, Our Planet,' emphasizing a shift toward renewable energy transitions and collective civic action to mitigate the escalating impacts of climate change.
- **Antarctic Research Frontier:** Recent discourse led by ISRO experts highlights Antarctica as a 'Global Commons' and a critical laboratory for understanding Earth's paleoclimate, ozone depletion, and the global impact of melting ice sheets on sea levels.
- **India's Polar Footprint:** India's scientific interest in the White Continent is institutionalized through the Indian Antarctic Programme, maintaining permanent research stations—Maitri and Bharati—under the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR).
- **Technological Synergy:** The Department of Space (ISRO) plays a pivotal role in environmental monitoring by utilizing Earth Observation Satellites (EOS) to track glacial retreat, deforestation patterns, and atmospheric carbon concentrations.
- **Public Engagement and Education:** Initiatives like the National Science Centre's Open House Quiz serve as vital tools for 'Science Communication,' aimed at bridging the gap between complex climate data and grassroots environmental awareness among the youth.
- **Global Environmental Governance:** The 2026 celebrations align with international milestones like the Paris Agreement goals, urging nations to transition from fossil-fuel dependency to sustainable, decentralized power systems.



Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Global Commons:** Resource domains that do not fall under the jurisdiction of any single nation, such as the High Seas, Atmosphere, Outer Space, and Antarctica.
- **Cryosphere:** The portions of Earth's surface where water is in solid form, including sea ice, lake ice, river ice, snow cover, glaciers, ice caps, and frozen ground.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Indian Antarctic Act, 2022:** A specialized domestic legislation enacted to provide a regulatory framework for India's scientific activities and protection of the Antarctic environment in accordance with the Antarctic Treaty.

Additional Important Points

- **The Antarctic Treaty (1959):** Sets aside Antarctica as a scientific preserve, establishes freedom of scientific investigation, and bans military activity on the continent.
- **Renewable Energy Transition:** The 2026 theme underscores the importance of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the push for Green Hydrogen to achieve Net Zero targets by 2070.



Conclusion

The observance of World Earth Day 2026 serves as a reminder that the preservation of the planet is inextricably linked to technological innovation and international legal cooperation. By integrating polar research and space technology into the mainstream environmental discourse, India reaffirms its commitment to sustainable development and the protection of the Global Commons.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geography (Physical geography of the Arctic/Antarctic region and climate change).
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Antarctic Treaty System and global environmental summits).
- **GS Paper III:** Environment, Science & Technology (Space-based monitoring and India's polar research programs).

2. Record Achievement in India's Seafood Exports (FY 2025-26)

- **Historic Milestone:** India's marine products exports achieved an all-time high of ₹72,325.82 crore (\$8.28 billion) in FY 2025-26, reflecting a robust volume of 19.32 lakh metric tonnes and reinforcing the sector's role in the 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047' vision.
- **Shrimp Dominance:** Frozen shrimp remains the cornerstone of the export basket, contributing approximately two-thirds of total earnings (₹47,973.13 crore), despite global trade headwinds and evolving international regulatory standards.
- **Market Diversification:** While the USA remains the top importer (\$2.32 billion), a strategic shift is visible as exports to China, the European Union, and Southeast Asia recorded double-digit growth, successfully offsetting declines in traditional markets caused by reciprocal tariffs.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** The sector has seen enhanced integration with global standards through the National Traceability Framework (2025), mandatory use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), and adherence to the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).
- **Infrastructure and Logistics:** Five major ports—Vizag, JNPT, Kochi, Kolkata, and Chennai—handle nearly 64% of the export value, highlighting the concentration of marine processing and logistical hubs along the eastern and western coasts.
- **Governmental Initiatives:** Focused diplomatic outreach, the notification of the EEZ Rules (2025), and 'Investors' Meets' in island territories like Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep are driving private investment and value addition in the blue economy.



Key Definitions & Concepts

- **EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone):** An area of the ocean extending up to 200 nautical miles from a country's coast, within which the state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources.
- **Turtle Excluder Device (TED):** A specialized device that allows a captured sea turtle to escape when caught in a fisherman's net, essential for meeting environmental compliance in international shrimp trade.



- **Surimi:** A paste made from minced fish or other meat, often used to create imitation seafood products like crab sticks, representing a high-value processed export.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 297:** Specifies that all lands, minerals, and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters, or the continental shelf, or the exclusive economic zone of India shall vest in the Union.
- **Seventh Schedule (State List, Entry 21):** Fisheries is primarily a State subject; however, "Fisheries beyond territorial waters" falls under the Union List (Entry 57).
- **Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) Act, 1972:** Statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry responsible for the promotion and regulation of marine product exports.

Additional Important Points

- **Viksit Bharat @ 2047:** The fisheries sector is identified as a high-growth "sunrise sector" critical for livelihood security and achieving a developed nation status.
- **Blue Economy 2.0:** Focuses on sustainable development of coastal resources, climate-resilient aquaculture, and enhancing the processing capacity of marine products.
- **Traceability:** The 2025 National Traceability Framework ensures the "catch-to-consumer" record, reducing rejections in stringent markets like the EU and USA due to antibiotic residues.

Conclusion

The unprecedented growth in seafood exports underscores India's emerging dominance in the global marine trade. By balancing market diversification with rigorous environmental and quality compliance, India is transitioning from a raw material exporter to a high-value processor. Sustaining this momentum will require continued focus on deep-sea fishing policy, cold-chain modernization, and navigating geopolitical trade barriers through proactive diplomacy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Economics (Agriculture and allied sectors, Infrastructure, Supply Chain Management); Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Marine ecology).
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Trade agreements, Market access, and Diplomatic outreach).
- **Prelims:** MPEDA, EEZ boundaries, PM Matsya Sampada Yojana, and geographical distribution of major ports and aquaculture hubs.

3. Review of Anti-Defection Law: Committee of Presiding Officers Meet

- **Context and Purpose:** A four-member committee of Presiding Officers, headed by Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, met in Puri to review the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution. The goal is to address procedural ambiguities and harmonize the disqualification process across all State Legislatures.
- **Evolution of the Panel:** Originally constituted in January 2020 by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, the committee examines the extensive powers vested in Presiding Officers and the subsequent legal challenges arising from their decisions.



- **Standardization of Procedures:** The committee aims to draft a uniform set of guidelines for all Legislative Assemblies to ensure that disqualification petitions are disposed of in a time-bound and legally robust manner, reducing judicial interference.
- **Expert Deliberations:** The meet involved constitutional experts and State Assembly secretaries who discussed the "procedural aspects" of defection, specifically focusing on the distinction between a legitimate 'split' or 'merger' and opportunistic defection.
- **Focus on Parliamentary Democracy:** Beyond technicalities, the session emphasized strengthening the moral fabric of legislative institutions and ensuring that the mandate of the electorate is not subverted by unethical floor-crossing.
- **Composition:** The panel includes Speakers from diverse regions (Karnataka, Nagaland, and Odisha), ensuring a federal perspective on the challenges faced by different legislative bodies under varying political scenarios.



Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Tenth Schedule:** Added by the 52nd Amendment Act (1985), it provides for the disqualification of Members of Parliament and State Legislatures on the ground of defection from one political party to another.
- **Whip:** A written order issued by a political party to its members in a legislative body to vote in a particular way or to be present for a vote. Violation of a whip is a primary ground for disqualification.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Articles 102(2) and 191(2):** These articles stipulate that a person shall be disqualified for being a member of either House of Parliament or State Legislative Assembly if they are so disqualified under the Tenth Schedule.
- **52nd Amendment Act, 1985:** The parent legislation that introduced the Anti-Defection Law to curb the "Aaya Ram Gaya Ram" culture in Indian politics.
- **91st Amendment Act, 2003:** Modified the Tenth Schedule to omit the provision recognizing a "split" (1/3rd members) and mandated that at least 2/3rd members of a party must agree to a "merger" to avoid disqualification.

Additional Important Points

- **Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992):** The Supreme Court ruled that the Speaker's decision under the Tenth Schedule is subject to judicial review on grounds of malafides and perversity, though only after the final order is passed.
- **Keisham Meghachandra Singh Case (2020):** The SC recommended that Parliament should amend the Constitution to substitute the Speaker with a permanent tribunal (headed by a retired Judge) to decide disqualification cases impartially.
- **Time-Bound Disposal:** A major point of contention is the lack of a specific timeframe for the Speaker to decide on petitions, leading to cases remaining pending for years.



Conclusion

The Puri meet signifies a proactive step by the legislative wing to reform the Anti-Defection framework from within. By creating uniform guidelines, the committee hopes to minimize the "partisan" allegations often leveled against the Speaker's office and protect the sanctity of the legislative process against unethical political maneuvers.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Significant amendments, Tenth Schedule); Governance (Role of the Speaker, Parliamentary procedures and conduct of business).
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface (Political ethics and the integrity of elected representatives).
- **Prelims:** Provisions of the 52nd and 91st Amendments, grounds for disqualification, and the role of the Election Commission versus the Speaker in disqualification matters.

4. India's Civilisational Openness & Global Leadership

- **Historical Intermediary:** Recent historical discourse challenges the "Silk Road" centric view, positioning ancient India as the primary nexus of global exchange, where Roman wealth was concentrated along Indian coasts, linking the Mediterranean to the East.
- **Diffusion of Ideas:** India's global reach was historically driven by "Soft Power"—the transmission of Buddhism, mathematical concepts like 'Zero,' and philosophical depth—rather than military conquest, shaping cultures from Central to Southeast Asia.
- **Cultural Reinterpretation:** A key civilisational strength identified is the capacity to absorb, adapt, and reinterpret ideas, allowing Indian thought to take root in diverse foreign contexts while maintaining its core intellectual identity.
- **Reimagining Governance:** On Civil Services Day, the discourse emphasized that modern administration should view history as a resource for "Context-Sensitive Policy," balancing institutional memory with the need for adaptive, open-ended governance.
- **Knowledge vs. Hard Power:** The dialogue suggests that in a fluctuating global order, a nation's leadership is defined by its ability to generate and allow the free travel of ideas, positioning intellectual openness as a template for future geopolitics.
- **Technological Integration:** The role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was highlighted as a potential tool to bring objectivity to historical narratives, helping administrators remove visible biases from policy-making processes.



Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Civilisational State:** A country that represents not just a historical territory or a particular language group, but an entire civilization with distinct cultural and philosophical continuity.
- **Soft Power:** The ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion, typically through cultural, ideological, or institutional influence.



- **Viksit Bharat @ 2047:** A vision to transform India into a developed nation by the centenary of its independence, necessitating a blend of historical wisdom and modern administrative excellence.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Article 51A(f) (Fundamental Duties):** It shall be the duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of the country's composite culture.
- **Civil Services Day (April 21):** Commemorates the day when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the probationers of Administrative Service Officers in 1947, referring to them as the "Steel Frame of India."

Additional Important Points

- **EPFO's RGDE Initiative:** The 'Reimagining Governance Discourse for Excellence' serves as a platform for public servants to engage with diverse intellectual perspectives beyond operational tasks.
- **Indo-Roman Trade:** Historical evidence of Roman coins found in Southern India underscores India's role as the "Sink of World Gold" during antiquity.
- **Mission Karmayogi:** The National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB) aligns with the idea of continuous learning and "reimagining governance" discussed in the session.

Conclusion

India's future leadership lies in reclaiming its historical identity as a global "idea-generator." By fostering civilisational openness and integrating historical insights into modern administration, the Indian civil services can move toward a governance model that is both culturally rooted and globally influential. The transition from a purely functional bureaucracy to a "thinking" institution is essential for navigating contemporary geopolitical shifts.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Indian Culture (Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times); History (Ancient trade routes and India's global influence).
- **GS Paper II:** Governance (Role of civil services in a democracy); International Relations (India's soft power and cultural diplomacy).
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics (Moral philosophy and civil service values).

5. Urban Infrastructure vs. Mangrove Ecosystems: The Versova-Bhayandar Conflict

- **Project Overview:** The 23-km Versova-Bhayandar Coastal Road (VBCR) aims to reduce travel time from 2 hours to 20 minutes, yet it necessitates the felling of 45,675 mangroves across 103.6 hectares of forest land in Mumbai.
- **Livelihood Crisis:** Over 400 fisher families across Versova, Charkop, and Gorai face displacement as mangroves serve as essential breeding grounds for fish and crabs, which constitute their primary source of income.



- **Ecological Homogenization:** Environmentalists warn that compensatory afforestation is flawed, as diverse native species like *Avicennia marina* and *Rhizophora mucronata* are being replaced by monocultures of *Ceriops tagal* in outskirts, failing to replicate the original ecosystem services.
- **Judicial and Regulatory Stance:** While the Supreme Court declined to interfere with the Bombay High Court's clearance—citing reforestation assurances—activists argue that public consultations remain a "formal façade" overlooking the Mumbai Climate Action Plan's warnings.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** The removal of mangroves increases Mumbai's risk of coastal erosion and storm surges; current projections suggest significant submergence risks for the city by 2050 due to sea-level rise.
- **Infrastructure Utility Debate:** Transport analysts suggest that while the road aids high-speed cars, the exclusion of two-wheelers and heavy vehicles means congestion on the Western Express Highway (WEH) may remain largely unaddressed.



Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Mangroves:** Salt-tolerant vegetation found in intertidal regions that act as "bioshields" against cyclones and serve as carbon sinks with high sequestration potential.
- **Compensatory Afforestation:** A legal requirement under the Forest (Conservation) Act where diverted forest land must be replaced by planting trees on non-forest land or degraded forest land.
- **Intergenerational Equity:** A concept of sustainable development stating that the current generation must manage natural resources so they are available in sufficient quality and quantity for future generations.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to a healthy environment and the right to livelihood, both of which are central to the fisherfolks' legal challenge.
- **Article 48A & 51A(g):** Constitutional mandates for both the State and citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests and wildlife.
- **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019:** Regulates activities in coastal areas to ensure conservation of ecologically sensitive zones like Mangroves (classified under CRZ-I).
- **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** Governs the diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes like road construction, requiring prior approval from the Central Government.

Additional Important Points

- **Mumbai Climate Action Plan (MCAP):** A policy document emphasizing "Nature-based Solutions" to mitigate urban heat and flooding, which contradicts large-scale mangrove removal.
- **Ecosystem Services:** Beyond fishing, mangroves provide nutrient cycling, water filtration, and act as a nursery for various marine species critical for the Arabian Sea's biodiversity.
- **Social Impact Assessment (SIA):** Critics highlight the lack of a robust SIA that accounts for the "invisible" economy of small-scale fishers and vendors who rely on the mangrove fringes.



Conclusion

The Versova-Bhayandar project highlights the perennial conflict between "Grey Infrastructure" (roads/bridges) and "Green Infrastructure" (ecosystems). While decongestion is a legitimate urban goal, the long-term ecological cost—specifically the loss of natural flood defenses and artisanal livelihoods—suggests a need for a more holistic "Blue-Green" urban planning approach that prioritizes ecological integrity over high-speed connectivity.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geography (Coastal geomorphology and distribution of mangroves in India).
- **GS Paper II:** Governance (Environmental impact assessment and the role of the judiciary in balancing development vs. environment).
- **GS Paper III:** Environment & Disaster Management (Climate change, loss of biodiversity, and flood mitigation in coastal cities).

6. Judicial Review of Religious Practices: The Sabarimala Review Case

- **Constitutional Query on Rationality:** The Supreme Court's nine-judge Bench has raised a fundamental question on whether modern believers can be expected to abandon rationality in favor of age-old religious practices, especially in an era of advanced education and global exposure.
- **Essential Religious Practices (ERP):** The deliberations center on whether the exclusion of women of menstruating age is an "essential" part of the faith or a practice that must yield to constitutional morality and the right to equality.
- **Naishtika Brahmachari Status:** The Sabarimala *tantri* (chief priest) maintains that the deity, Lord Ayyappa, is a "perennial celibate," and therefore, the temple's specific customs are inextricably linked to the unique characteristics of the deity.
- **Rationality vs. Faith:** The Bench explored the tension between "staunch belief"—which historically accepts tradition without question—and the evolving "sense of rationality" that characterizes the modern citizen under a democratic constitution.
- **Scope of the Nine-Judge Bench:** This reference goes beyond Sabarimala to examine broader issues, including the entry of women into mosques, the practice of female genital mutilation in the Dawoodi Bohra community, and the rights of Parsi women married to non-Parsis.
- **Constitutional Morality:** The court is evaluating if religious freedom under Article 25 is absolute or if it is subordinate to other fundamental rights, such as the Right to Equality (Article 14) and the Right to Dignity (Article 21).

Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Constitutional Morality:** The principle that the administration and the judiciary must be guided by the values enshrined in the Constitution (liberty, equality, fraternity) rather than traditional social or religious norms.
- **Doctrine of Essentiality:** A judicial test evolved by the SC (starting with the Shirur Mutt case) to determine which religious practices are integral to a religion and thus protected under Article 26.





- **Naishtika Brahmachari:** A person (or deity) who practices lifelong celibacy and strict mental and physical discipline.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, but subject to "public order, morality, and health."
- **Article 26:** Grants religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion, including maintaining institutions.
- **Article 14 & 15:** Prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, ensuring equal protection of the laws.
- **Article 25(2)(b):** Allows the State to make laws providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Additional Important Points

- **Reference to Nine-Judge Bench:** The 2018 Sabarimala verdict (allowing women's entry) was challenged via review petitions, leading the SC to frame seven broader questions regarding the intersection of religion and fundamental rights.
- **Judicial Review of Faith:** While the judiciary generally avoids theological debates, it intervenes when religious practices violate "individual dignity" or "gender justice."
- **Ambedkar's View:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar argued that religious conceptions should not be so vast as to cover every aspect of life, and that the State must be able to legislate on secular activities associated with religion.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's focus on "rationality" suggests a shift toward a more modern interpretation of religious freedom—one where tradition is not an absolute shield against constitutional scrutiny. The outcome of this nine-judge Bench will define the boundaries of secularism in India, determining whether the "identity of the deity" or the "identity of the citizen" takes precedence in the eyes of the law.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Fundamental Rights, Secularism, Judicial Review, and Significant Judgments).
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface (Conflict between traditional values and modern ethical frameworks; Gender justice).
- **Prelims:** Articles 25-28, the ERP Doctrine, and the composition of the Supreme Court Benches for constitutional matters.

7. Geopolitics of Energy and Sanctions: Challenges to India's Strategic Autonomy

- **Economic Fallout of West Asian War:** The 2026 U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, coupled with a "double blockade" of the Strait of Hormuz by both U.S. and IRGC forces, has triggered a surge in energy bills and a 7% slump in Indian exports as of March 2026.



- **Economic Ranking Reversal:** Due to sustained rupee depreciation and trade disruptions, India has slipped from a projected 4th position to the 6th largest economy globally (\$4.15 trillion), trailing behind the UK and Japan in the April 2026 IMF World Economic Outlook.



- **The "Short-Tether" Sanctions Regime:** India faces a "whack-a-mole" sanctions environment where the U.S. has enforced 25% penalty tariffs on Russian oil and revoked previous waivers for the strategic Chabahar Port, which is currently set to expire on April 26, 2026.
- **Strategic Autonomy Under Strain:** Critics argue that India's compliance with unilateral U.S. sanctions since 2019—including the "zeroing out" of sweeter Iranian and Venezuelan crude—has hindered its ability to build strategic energy reserves similar to those of China.
- **Infrastructural Stagnation:** Compliance with sanctions has curtailed India's progress on the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), leaving it over-dependent on the volatile Strait of Hormuz for energy security and connectivity to Central Asia.
- **De-dollarization and BRICS:** The U.S. has threatened sanctions against BRICS nations attempting to establish non-dollar payment mechanisms, challenging India's push for a "Rupee-Rial" trade system or intra-BRICS settlement arrangements.

Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Strategic Autonomy:** The ability of a state to pursue its national interests and adopt its preferred foreign policy without being constrained by other states.
- **Double Blockade:** A scenario in the Strait of Hormuz where both the regional power (Iran) and an external power (U.S.) restrict shipping, leading to a total cessation of commercial maritime traffic.
- **Unilateral Sanctions:** Economic penalties imposed by a single country (often the U.S.) without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
- **Secondary Sanctions:** Sanctions that target third-party countries or entities for doing business with a primary sanctioned nation (e.g., punishing India for buying Iranian oil).

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** Instructs the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations.
- **The UN Charter (Chapter VII):** Recognizes only those sanctions that are collectively agreed upon by the UNSC as legally binding on all member states.
- **CAATSA (2017):** A U.S. domestic law (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) that mandates sanctions on countries engaging in significant transactions with Russia's defense or intelligence sectors.

Additional Important Points

- **Historical Parallel (PL-480):** In 1966, the U.S. used "ship-to-mouth" grain shipments as leverage against India, eventually prompting the Green Revolution; analysts suggest a similar "Energy Independence" push is now required.



- **Chabahar Port Deadline:** The U.S. sanctions waiver for India's operation of the Shahid Beheshti Terminal at Chabahar expires on April 26, 2026, posing a risk to India's \$120 million investment.
- **Opportunity Cost:** Had India ignored unilateral sanctions (as it did with the S-400 deal), it could have potentially saved billions through discounted energy imports over the 2019-2025 period.

Conclusion

India's adherence to unilateral sanctions is increasingly viewed as a liability that undermines its economic growth and foreign policy independence. To reclaim its strategic space, New Delhi must draw a "red line" against extra-territorial laws, diversify its payment systems, and accelerate its transition to renewable energy to insulate the economy from the capricious nature of global energy geopolitics.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Bilateral, regional and global groupings; Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests; Strategic Autonomy).
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Energy security, inflation, and growth projections); Science & Technology (Alternative energy sources).

8. India's Energy Crisis 2026: The Strategic Shift Toward Compressed Biogas (CBG)

- **Structural Vulnerability:** India's crude oil import dependence has surged to 88.6%, with LNG imports projected at 28-29 MMT for 2026. The current gas crisis, marked by five-fold price spikes in major cities, exposes the high risk of over-reliance on volatile West Asian supply chains.
- **The CBG Potential:** India possesses an untapped potential of 62 MMT of Compressed Biogas (CBG) annually from agri-residue and municipal waste. However, current production remains negligible at 920 tonnes per day, highlighting a significant "execution failure" despite strong policy intent.
- **Feedstock and Land Strategy:** Achieving energy self-reliance requires a national feedstock security framework and the strategic promotion of dedicated energy crops like Napier grass. Allocating just 2%-3% of agricultural land to such crops could stabilize the biomass supply without threatening food security.
- **Infrastructure Utilization Mismatch:** While India has built a massive regasification capacity (50 MMT annually), utilization is stagnant at 50%-60% due to pipeline constraints and localized demand-supply mismatches.
- **Circular Economy Benefits:** Scaling CBG to 20 MMT by 2030 would simultaneously address three critical issues: reducing forest/stubble burning (air quality), enhancing rural farmer incomes, and creating a domestic "waste-to-wealth" ecosystem.
- **Regulatory and Financial Reform:** The transition requires a move from traditional subsidies toward modern financial tools like Viability Gap Funding (VGF), green bonds, carbon credit integration, and a non-negotiable single-window clearance system.





Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Compressed Biogas (CBG):** A purified form of biogas (containing over 90% methane) produced through anaerobic digestion of organic waste; it is chemically identical to natural gas and can be used in CNG vehicles.
- **Digestate:** The nutrient-rich solid or liquid material remaining after the anaerobic digestion process, which serves as a high-quality organic fertilizer.
- **Regasification:** The process of converting Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) back to its gaseous state by heating it, enabling its transport through domestic pipelines.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 39(b) (DPSP):** Directs the State to ensure that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good (Energy Justice).
- **Article 48A:** Mandates the State to protect and improve the environment, which aligns with the reduction of stubble burning through CBG conversion.
- **Energy Conservation Act, 2001 (Amended 2022):** Provides the legal framework for the carbon credit trading scheme and mandates the use of non-fossil sources for energy.

Additional Important Points

- **SATAT Initiative (2018):** 'Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation' aims to establish 5,000 CBG plants across India to promote green fuel.
- **GOBAR-DHAN Scheme:** Focuses on managing cattle dung and solid waste in villages to improve cleanliness and generate energy and organic manure.
- **Ethanol Blending Success:** The government views the success of the 20% ethanol blending target (E20) as a blueprint for the large-scale rollout of CBG.

Conclusion

India's 2026 energy reality dictates that incremental changes are no longer sufficient. The gas crisis serves as a strategic wake-up call to pivot from "imported dependence" to "domestic resilience." By streamlining the CBG ecosystem—fixing feedstock aggregation and financial bottlenecks—India can turn its environmental challenges into a rural economic engine, ensuring long-term energy security.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Economics (Energy, Infrastructure, and Mobilization of Resources); Environment (Pollution, Circular Economy); Science & Technology (Bio-fuels).
- **GS Paper II:** Governance (Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors).


9. Monetary Policy and the Sacrifice Ratio: Comparative Analysis (India, U.S., U.K.)

- **The Sacrifice Ratio Phenomenon:** Economists are evaluating the "cost" of taming the 2022-2025 inflation surge. The U.S. achieved a "near-zero" sacrifice ratio, reducing inflation without a recession, whereas the U.K. suffered a significant output contraction and a spike in unemployment to 5.2%.



- **India's Soft Landing:** India avoided a recession, with growth moderating from 8% to 6.5%. However, the RBI faces a unique "trilemma": balancing a slowing economy, a weakening rupee (hitting a record low of 95.22/USD), and a new inflationary shock as crude oil crosses \$120.
- **Divergent Monetary Paths:** Between 2022 and 2025, central banks underwent the fastest tightening cycle in four decades. While the U.S. Fed paused at 5.50% and the RBI at 6.5%, the transmission of these rates differed based on domestic supply chain resilience and labor market dynamics.
- **Structural Inflation Drivers:** In India, food constitutes nearly 46% of the CPI basket. Since food prices are influenced more by seasonal patterns and Minimum Support Prices (MSP) than interest rates, the RBI's repo rate hikes primarily dampen urban demand rather than rural supply-side inflation.
- **The Currency Bind:** Unlike the U.S., India's central bank is currently constrained by "imported inflation." A weakening rupee makes essential imports more expensive, forcing the RBI to pause rate cuts in April 2026 to prevent further capital flight and currency depreciation.
- **Geopolitical Reset:** The 2026 West Asian conflict has prematurely ended the global easing cycle. Central banks that were prepared to cut rates are now forced into a "higher for longer" stance to mitigate the secondary effects of \$120+ oil prices on logistics and manufacturing.

Cost of curbs



Data for the charts were sourced from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.K. Office for National Statistics, MoSPI, the Fed, Bank of England and Reserve Bank of India

1 In the process of curbing inflation, the U.S.'s Fed absorbed the shock with minimal damage, Britain paid heavily in lost growth and a recession, and India's currency took a hit

2 India's Monetary Policy Committee raised the repo rate to 6.5% in February 2023, and held it there until early 2025

Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Sacrifice Ratio:** A measure of the cost of reducing inflation; specifically, the percentage of a year's real GDP that must be foregone to reduce the inflation rate by one percentage point.
- **Repo Rate (Repurchase Rate):** The fixed rate at which the RBI lends overnight liquidity to banks against the collateral of government and other approved securities.
- **Monetary Policy Transmission:** The process through which changes in the central bank's policy rate affect the level of economic activity and inflation. In India, this is often delayed due to the prevalence of fixed-rate loans and informal credit.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **RBI Act, 1934 (Amended 2016):** Provides the statutory basis for the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). It mandates the RBI to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
- **Inflation Targeting Framework:** A legal agreement between the Government of India and the RBI to maintain retail inflation (CPI) within a target band of 4% (+/- 2%).
- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** While "Banking" is a Union List subject (Entry 45), the impacts of inflation and price control (Entry 34, Concurrent List) involve both Central and State interventions, especially regarding food supply.



Additional Important Points

- **CPI vs. WPI:** UPSC aspirants must note that the RBI uses Consumer Price Index (CPI-Combined) as its primary anchor for monetary policy, whereas the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) reflects producer-level price pressures.
- **External Sector Vulnerability:** The rupee's decline to 95.22 per dollar in March 2026 highlights India's vulnerability to "taper tantrums" or geopolitical shocks that drive investors toward the safe-haven U.S. dollar.
- **The U.K. Recession:** Britain's struggle illustrates "Stagflationary" tendencies—high inflation coupled with stagnant growth—driven by a heavy reliance on imported natural gas and post-Brexit labor shortages.

Conclusion

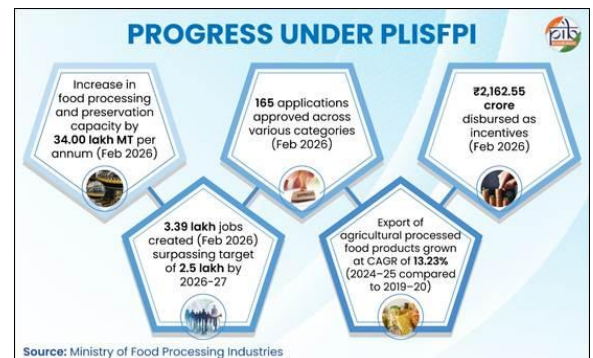
The global fight against inflation has revealed that economic resilience is not uniform. While the U.S. benefited from domestic energy production and robust demand, India's success in avoiding a downturn is now threatened by external currency pressures. The "sacrifice" in India is shifting from lost GDP to a lost value of the currency, necessitating a cautious and calibrated approach by the MPC in the face of \$120 oil.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Inflation, Monetary Policy, Growth and Development); External Sector (Exchange rate management and BoP).
- **GS Paper II:** Governance (Statutory bodies like the RBI and the efficacy of the MPC).
- **Prelims:** Definition of Sacrifice Ratio, components of CPI-Combined, the role of the MPC, and the impact of Fed rate hikes on emerging markets (Capital flight).

10. Strengthening India's Food Processing Ecosystem: PLISFPI Analysis

- **Strategic Growth and GVA:** India's food processing sector has transitioned into a core manufacturing pillar, with its Gross Value Added (GVA) rising significantly from ₹1.34 lakh crore (2014-15) to ₹2.24 lakh crore (2023-24). The share of processed products in agricultural exports has also surged to 20.4%, reflecting a shift from raw commodity exports to value-added goods.
- **PLISFPI Framework:** Launched with an outlay of ₹10,900 crore (2021-22 to 2026-27), the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme for Food Processing Industry (PLISFPI) incentivizes incremental sales across four categories: Ready-to-Cook/Eat (RTC/RTE), fruits and vegetables, marine products, and mozzarella cheese.
- **Exceeding Employment Targets:** As of February 2026, the scheme has generated approximately 3.39 lakh direct and indirect jobs, significantly outperforming the initial 2026-27 target of 2.5 lakh. This highlights the sector's high labor intensity and its role in rural-urban employment linkages.
- **Global Branding and MSME Support:** Unlike traditional subsidy models, PLISFPI includes a dedicated component (Category III) for "Branding and Marketing Abroad," reimbursing 50% of expenses to help Indian companies establish global





footprints. Furthermore, MSMEs represent over 40% of the approved applicants, ensuring inclusive industrial growth.

- **The "Millet Pivot":** A specialized sub-scheme, PLISMBP (outlay ₹800 crore), was carved out in 2022-23 to promote millet-based RTC/RTE products. This aligns with India's global leadership in the "International Year of Millets" initiative and addresses nutritional security through value addition.
- **Export Trajectory:** Beneficiaries under the scheme have recorded a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 13.23% in exports. Cumulative export sales reached ₹89,053.44 crore by late 2025, underscoring the improved global competitiveness of "Made in India" food brands.

Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Gross Value Added (GVA):** A measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry, or sector of an economy. In this context, it represents the value added to raw agricultural produce through processing.
- **Incremental Sales:** Sales achieved over and above the performance in a designated "base year" (2019-20). The PLI incentive is calculated specifically on this growth.
- **Expression of Interest (EOI):** A formal process used by the government to invite eligible entities to show interest in participating in a scheme before a full competitive bidding or appraisal process.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 39(b):** Directive Principle stating that the ownership and control of material resources should be distributed to subserve the common good; food processing ensures better price realization for farmers (resources).
- **Seventh Schedule (State List, Entry 14 & 27):** While Agriculture is a State subject, "Industries" and "Trade and Commerce" (including food processing) often fall under the Union or Concurrent List, requiring coordinated federal action.
- **FSSAI Act, 2006:** The primary legal framework governing food safety and standards, which all PLISFPI beneficiaries must strictly adhere to for domestic and export quality assurance.

Additional Important Points

- **Project Management Agency (PMA):** The Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI) serves as the PMA, ensuring a transparent, online-monitored appraisal and disbursement process.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Vision:** The PLI framework is a cornerstone of self-reliance, aiming to reduce "waste" (currently estimated at high percentages in perishables) by increasing processing levels.
- **Incentive Caps:** Category III incentives are capped at 3% of annual sales or ₹50 crore to ensure that branding support remains proportional to actual manufacturing output.

Conclusion

The PLISFPI represents a paradigm shift from traditional "input-based" subsidies to "output-oriented" incentives. By focusing on scale, branding, and MSME integration, the scheme is effectively transforming India from the "World's Orchard" into the "World's Food Factory." Sustaining this momentum will depend on bridging the remaining regasification and cold-chain infrastructure gaps to match the increased processing capacities.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Economics (Food processing and related industries in India—scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management); Investment Models (PLI).
- **GS Paper II:** Governance (Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors).

11. Judicial Accountability and the Resignation of Judges: A Legal Lacuna

- **The Emerging Dilemma:** The 2026 resignation of Justice Yashwant Varma mid-inquiry has revived a critical constitutional question: whether a statutory inquiry under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, survives if the judge resigns before the committee submits its findings.
- **Separation of Stages:** Under Article 124(5), judicial removal involves two distinct phases: a statutory investigation (fact-finding/judicial) and a parliamentary address (political). Jurists argue that the investigation is a "public good" meant to establish the truth, independent of the judge's continued tenure.
- **Precedential Gaps:** Historical precedents, such as the cases of Justice P.D. Dinakaran (2011) and Justice Soumitra Sen (2011), show a trend where proceedings were dropped post-resignation. However, legal experts criticize this as an "absurd situation" that allows a respondent to unilaterally abort a constitutional process.
- **Judicial Character of Inquiry:** In the *Sub-Committee on Judicial Accountability (1991)* case, the Supreme Court ruled that the investigative stage is judicial in character. Proponents of continuing the probe argue that like disciplinary proceedings against civil servants, the process should not collapse simply due to a resignation.
- **Risk of Strategic Exit:** If resignation effectively kills an inquiry, judges facing adverse findings can "read the room" and quit to preserve retirement benefits, seal the record, and avoid a formal dent in their reputation, rendering the Judges (Inquiry) Act toothless.
- **Need for Reform:** The current silence of the 1968 Act on the dissolution of committees suggests that the Speaker or Chairperson should allow inquiries to reach their logical conclusion to ensure transparency and accountability to the citizenry.

Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Removal vs. Impeachment:** While the Constitution uses the phrase "removal by an address," it is colloquially termed impeachment. It is the only way to remove a senior judge, ensuring the independence of the judiciary.
- **Statutory Inquiry:** A process mandated by a specific law (The Judges Inquiry Act, 1968) rather than the Constitution itself, meant to provide a fair trial before political action is taken.
- **Infructuous:** A legal term meaning "pointless" or "unproductive." In the past, removal motions were dropped as infructuous once the judge was no longer in office.





Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 124(4):** Outlines the grounds for removal (proved misbehavior or incapacity) and the requirement of a special majority in both Houses of Parliament.
- **Article 124(5):** Empowers Parliament to regulate by law the procedure for the presentation of an address and for the investigation and proof of the misbehavior or incapacity of a judge.
- **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968:** The primary legislation establishing the three-member committee (comprising a Supreme Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court, and a distinguished jurist) to investigate charges.
- **Rule 8, Judges (Inquiry) Rules, 1969:** Provides for *ex-parte* proceedings (proceeding in the absence of the judge), suggesting that the committee's work is not strictly dependent on the judge's active participation.

Additional Important Points

- **Sarojini Ramaswami vs. Union of India (1992):** The SC held that the investigative report is subject to judicial review only after it is found adverse and before Parliament takes it up for voting.
- **The "Zero Sum" Outcome:** If an inquiry ends without a report, evidence gathered (often involving voluminous records and witness testimonies) becomes legally unusable for any future accountability measures.
- **Global Precedents:** While the U.S. has seen judges resign to avoid Senate trials, the Indian context requires a unique interpretation to ensure that the "high constitutional functionary" status does not become a shield against accountability.

Conclusion

The resignation of Justice Varma presents a pivotal choice for the Speaker: follow the 2011 precedent of closure or set a new standard of "truth-seeking" accountability. Allowing inquiries to conclude despite resignations would prevent the strategic use of the exit door to bypass constitutional scrutiny and ensure that the judicial record reflects the facts of the case, regardless of the office held.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Provisions for removal of judges; Independence of Judiciary); Governance (Accountability and transparency in high offices).
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics and Human Interface (Accountability of the judiciary and the ethics of resignation under the shadow of guilt).
- **Prelims:** Provisions of the Judges (Inquiry) Act 1968, the role of the Speaker/Chairperson in the inquiry process, and the specific majority required for removal (Article 124(4)).

12. The Precariousness of Urban Labour: Challenges for India's Informal Workforce

- **Industrial Transformation:** Urban centers have transitioned from hubs of formal industrial production to centers of "social reproduction," where the workforce is increasingly fragmented and preoccupied with basic survival rather than organized collective bargaining.
- **Informalization Trap:** Approximately 90% of India's workforce is engaged in the informal sector. In cities, the decline of regular salaried employment means most workers face the "urban intersectionality" of low wages, high living costs, and zero job security.



- **Housing and Tenure Insecurity:** Nearly 40% of the urban poor reside in slums, often spending 30% to 50% of their income on informal rent. Moreover, 60% of these settlements are in hazardous, flood-prone zones, exacerbating vulnerability to climate change.
- **Erosion of Public Services:** Guided by the "Washington Consensus" framework, the state has shifted from a "rights-based" provider of water and health to a "market-based" enabler, leading to the privatization of essentials and the commodification of urban commons.
- **Financial Exclusion:** Per the RBI Bulletin 2025, the lack of collateral forces the urban poor into high-interest debt traps with local moneylenders, as formal banking remains inaccessible to those without documented land tenure or steady pay.
- **Governance and Reclaiming Space:** New policy directions, such as the Kerala Urban Commission's "Workers' Council," advocate for informal workers to become co-producers of urban governance, bridging the gap between organized unions and the precarious workforce.



Key Definitions & Concepts

- **Social Reproduction:** The activities involved in maintaining and reproducing life on a daily and generational basis, such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, which have become a primary struggle for the urban poor.
- **Washington Consensus:** A set of 10 economic policy prescriptions (like fiscal discipline, privatization, and deregulation) considered the "standard" reform package for developing countries.
- **Urban Helix:** A conceptual framework describing the intertwined relationship between climate change, urban disasters, and precarious development processes.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life has been interpreted by the Supreme Court (e.g., *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*) to include the Right to Livelihood and the Right to Shelter.
- **Article 39(a):** Directive Principle mandating that the State shall direct its policy toward securing that the citizens have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- **Article 43:** Directs the State to endeavor to secure a living wage and a decent standard of life for all workers, including those in the informal sector.
- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** One of the four new labour codes that aims to extend social security benefits to unorganized and platform workers, though implementation remains a point of debate.

Additional Important Points

- **Gentrification:** The process where "world-class" infrastructure and high-end real estate projects displace low-income residents, pushing the workforce further to the urban periphery.
- **Urban Commons:** Historically shared resources like parks, wetlands, and open spaces that are increasingly being diverted for private commercial development.
- **PM SVANidhi:** A government scheme providing micro-credit to street vendors, representing an attempt to integrate informal urban workers into the formal financial system.

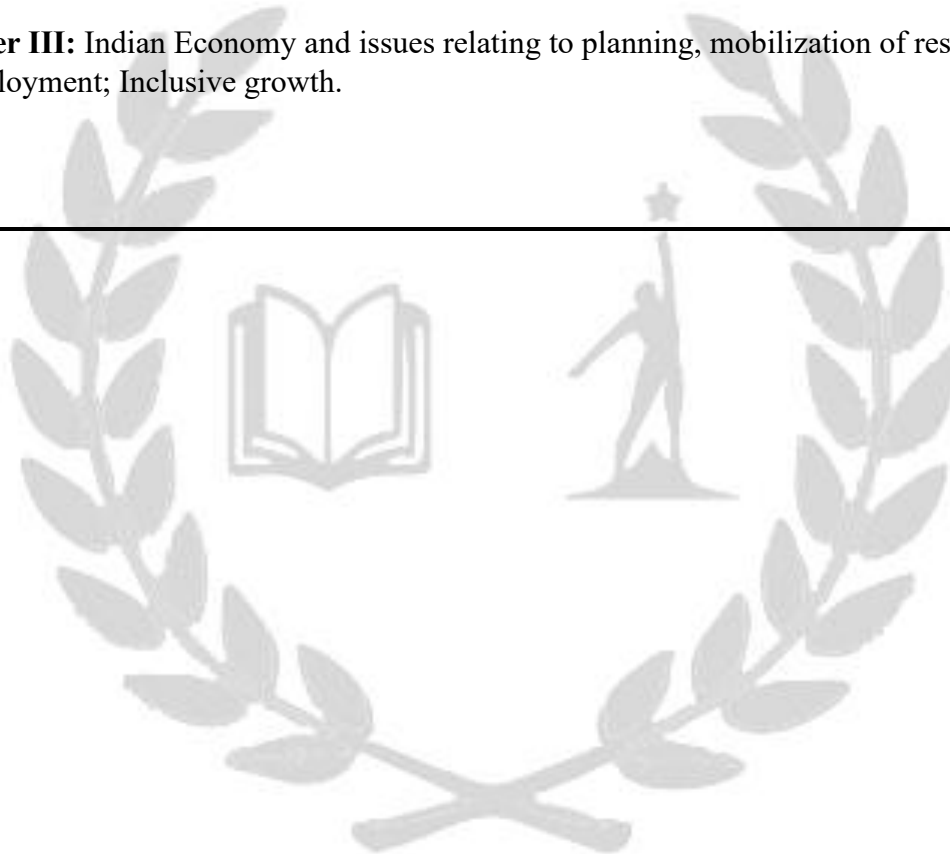


Conclusion

The recent unrest in Noida serves as a systemic warning that India's urban growth model is increasingly decoupled from the welfare of its primary builders—the informal workforce. Shifting from a "need-based" market model back to a "rights-based" governance framework is essential. Inclusive urban planning must move beyond "high-end real estate" to integrate workers as active stakeholders in the city's economic and political life.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Urbanization, their problems and their remedies; Poverty and developmental issues.
- **GS Paper II:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and employment; Inclusive growth.



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