



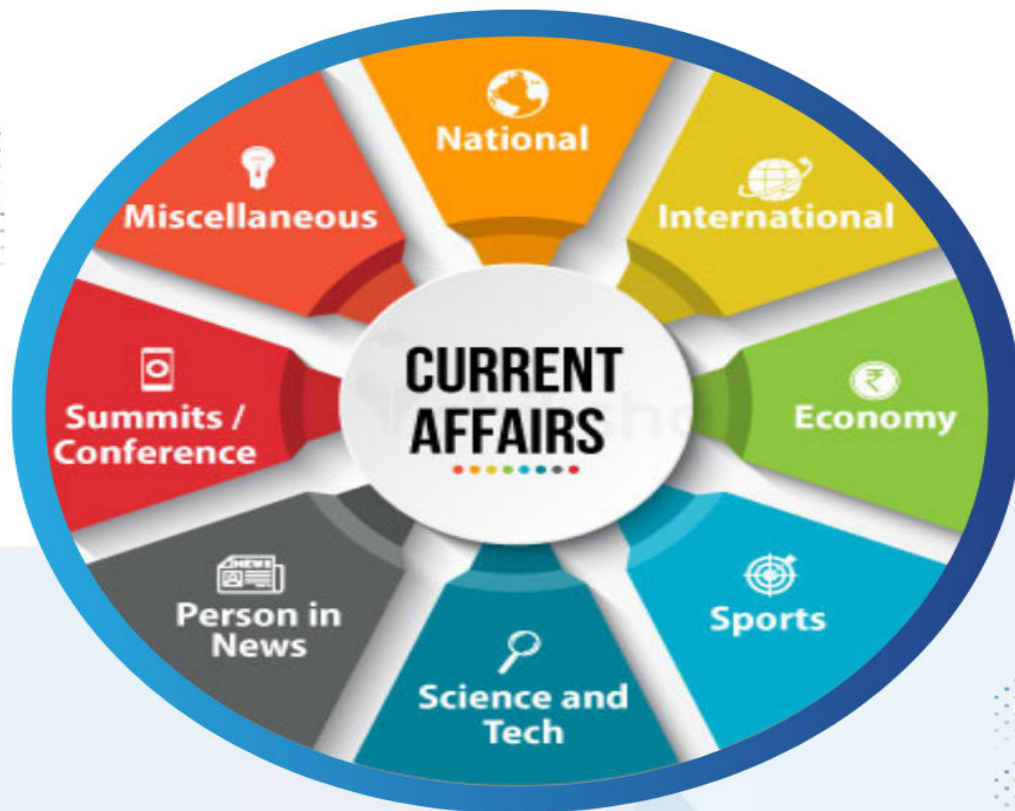
“ We help you reach for the star ”

# **VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE**

## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION**

**DATE: 28/04/2026 (TUESDAY)**



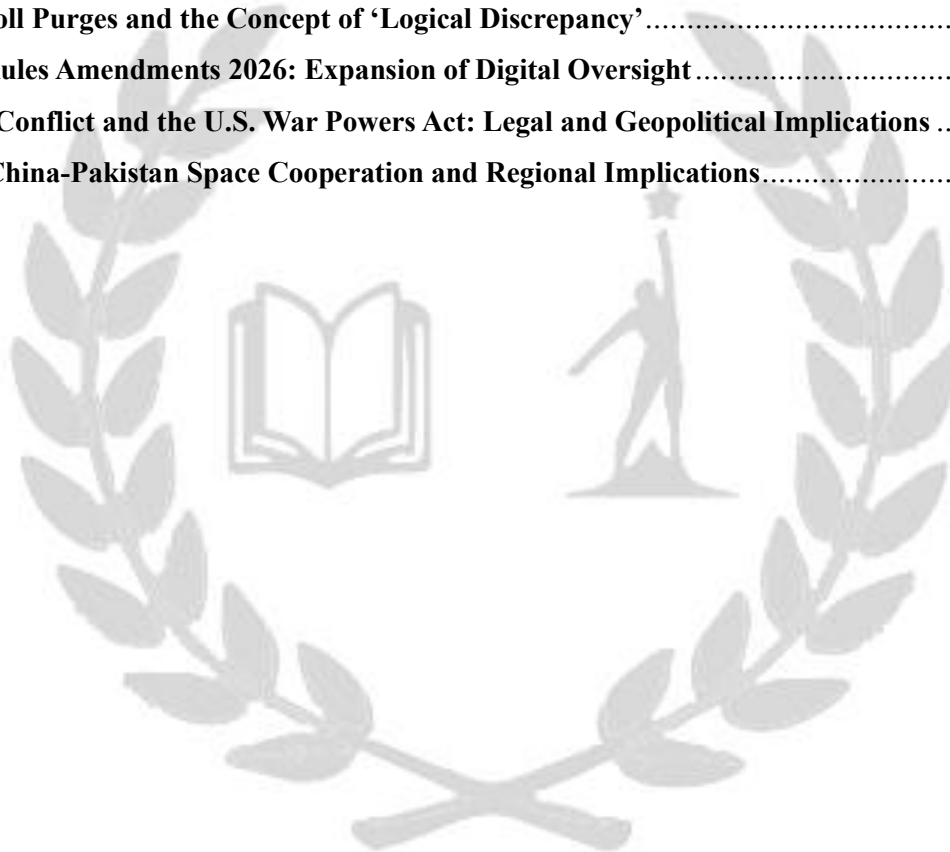
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VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY

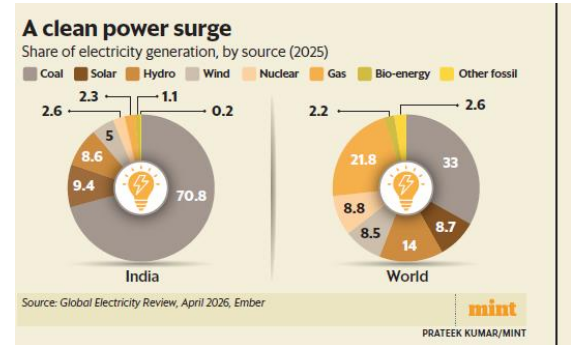


## 1. Global Energy Transition: Renewables Overtaking Coal

The global energy landscape reached a definitive inflection point in 2025 as renewable energy generation surpassed coal for the first time in history. While the global share of renewables reached 34%, India continues to navigate a complex transition, balancing a 71% coal dependency with record-breaking solar expansions and falling storage costs.

### Key Highlights of the Energy Transition

- **Historical Global Shift:** Renewables accounted for approximately 34% of global power generation in 2025, effectively pushing coal's share below the one-third mark for the first time.
- **Solar as Growth Engine:** Solar energy served as the primary catalyst, meeting 75% of the total increase in global electricity demand and driving the transition alongside wind.
- **India's Record Capacity:** India added a record 38 GW of solar capacity in 2025 (a 54% year-on-year increase), marking the world's third-largest rise in solar generation.
- **Decoupling Growth from Emissions:** For the first time, both China and India saw fossil fuel-based generation fall despite rising demand, signaling a peak in global power sector emissions.
- **Economic Viability:** A 45% reduction in battery storage costs in 2025 has made round-the-clock (RTC) renewable energy tariffs competitive with, or cheaper than, new coal-based power.
- **Geopolitical Resilience:** Persistent tensions in West Asia and volatile fossil fuel prices are accelerating India's electrification efforts in cooking (induction) and transport (EVs) to reduce import dependency.



### Key Definitions

- **Intermittency:** The non-continuous nature of energy sources like solar and wind, which require backup (coal/hydro) or storage (batteries) when the sun isn't shining or wind isn't blowing.
- **Installed Capacity vs. Generation:** Installed capacity is the maximum potential output of a plant (GW), while generation is the actual electricity produced over time (TWh).
- **Non-Fossil Sources:** Energy derived from solar, wind, biomass, small hydro, and nuclear power.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment.
- **Article 51A(g):** Establishes a fundamental duty for citizens to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **Electricity Act, 2003:** Provides the framework for the development of the power sector and encourages competition and renewable energy integration.
- **Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022:** Empowers the government to specify energy consumption standards and mandates the use of non-fossil sources.

**Important Data Points for Mains**

Indicator	Global Status (2025)	India Status (2025/26)
Renewable Generation Share	34%	~23-25%
Coal Generation Share	<33%	71%
Solar Installed Capacity	-	147 GW (as of March 2026)
Total Renewable Capacity	-	251 GW
Battery Storage Cost Drop	45%	45%

**Way Forward and Conclusion**

The transition from a coal-centric grid to a renewable-heavy one is no longer just an environmental imperative but an economic and strategic necessity. For India, the challenge lies in bridging the gap between "installed capacity" and "actual generation." Continued investment in Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Green Hydrogen will be critical to managing solar intermittency. As India moves toward its 60% non-fossil capacity target by 2035, the synergy between falling technology costs and geopolitical pressures will likely compress the timeline for achieving Net Zero.

**UPSC Relevance**

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions; International relations (Impact of West Asia tensions on energy security).
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Energy); Environmental conservation; Science and Technology (Battery storage and EVs).
- **Preliminary Examination:** Reports by international bodies (Ember, IEA), India's updated NDC targets, and definitions of renewable energy metrics.

**2. Historic India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**

The signing of the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement marks a strategic shift in India's trade policy, highlighting a rapid negotiation process initiated in March 2025 and concluded by December 2025. This "historic" pact aims to eliminate trade barriers and foster deep economic convergence between two major democracies in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Key Highlights of the Agreement**

- **Unprecedented Tariff Liberalization:** New Zealand will eliminate tariffs on 100% of goods imported from India, providing a significant competitive edge to Indian textiles, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods.
- **Reciprocal Market Access:** India has committed to removing or reducing tariffs on 95% of current imports from New Zealand, facilitating easier access for high-quality agricultural products and specialized machinery.

**Deal dynamics** | The graphic lists select products on which India will be reducing or eliminating tariffs, as well as items excluded from the deal. New Zealand has removed tariffs on all items

<p><b>Immediate elimination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wood   ■ Wool</li> <li>■ Leather-raw hides</li> </ul> <p><b>Phased elimination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Petroleum oil</li> <li>■ Vegetable oils</li> <li>■ Select electrical machinery</li> </ul> <p><b>Tariff reductions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wine and pharma</li> <li>■ Polymers, aluminium, iron and steel articles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Products excluded by India</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dairy products (milk, cream, whey, yoghurt, cheese etc.)</li> <li>■ Animal products (other than sheep meat)</li> <li>■ Agricultural products (onions, chana, peas, corn, almonds etc.)</li> <li>■ Sugar   ■ Artificial honey</li> <li>■ Copper and articles thereof (cathodes, cartridges, rods)</li> <li>■ Aluminium and articles thereof (ingots, billets etc.)</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Sealing the deal:</b> Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, with New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Investment, Todd McClay, during the signing ceremony of the FTA in New Delhi on Monday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA</p>
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- **Fast-Track Diplomacy:** The deal is one of India's fastest-negotiated trade agreements, taking less than a year from announcement to signing, signaling high levels of mutual trust and shared ambition.
- **Demographic Synergy:** Beyond trade in goods, the agreement emphasizes "people-to-people ties," which is expected to streamline visa processes for students, professionals, and tourists.
- **Strategic Indo-Pacific Alignment:** The FTA strengthens the economic pillar of the Indo-Pacific relationship, providing an alternative to traditional trade blocs and ensuring supply chain resilience.
- **Implementation Timeline:** Following the signing in New Delhi, the deal awaits ratification by the New Zealand Parliament, with full implementation expected before the end of 2026.

### Definitions of Key Terms

- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A pact between two or more nations to reduce barriers to imports and exports among them, including tariffs, quotas, and administrative hurdles.
- **Ratification:** The formal validation of a proposed treaty or agreement by the legislative body of a country (in this case, the New Zealand Parliament).
- **Convergence of Values:** A diplomatic term implying that the participating nations share similar political systems (democracies) and ethical standards in governance and trade.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253 of the Indian Constitution:** Empowers Parliament to make laws for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country.
- **Entry 13 (Union List):** International Conferences, associations, and other bodies and implementing of decisions made thereat.
- **Entry 14 (Union List):** Entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing of treaties, agreements, and conventions with foreign countries.
- **Customs Act, 1962:** Provides the legal framework for the levy and collection of customs duties, which will be amended via notifications to reflect the new FTA tariff rates.

### India-New Zealand Economic Profile (Contextual Data)

- **India's Major Exports:** Textiles, apparel, precious stones, pharmaceuticals, and retail software services.
- **New Zealand's Major Exports:** Logs and wood products, fruit (kiwi), dairy processing technology, and education services.
- **Strategic Partnership:** Both nations are part of the Commonwealth and share interests in a free and open Indo-Pacific.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The India-New Zealand FTA is a testament to India's "Act East" policy and its growing appetite for high-standard trade agreements. By securing 100% tariff elimination from a developed economy like New Zealand, India has set a precedent for future negotiations with the UK and the EU.



### 3. Madhya Pradesh Assembly Resolution on Women's Reservation

The Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly recently passed a resolution supporting the implementation of the 33% women's quota in Parliament and State Assemblies post-delimitation. The move, occurring during a special session in 2026, highlights the ongoing legislative and political debate surrounding the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam and the prerequisites of Census and constituency boundary readjustments.

#### Key Highlights of the Legislative Session

- **Resolution for Post-Delimitation Quota:** The Madhya Pradesh Assembly formally backed the implementation of women's reservation specifically after the delimitation exercise, aligning with the Union Government's stance.
- **Opposition Demand for Immediacy:** The Indian National Congress staged a walkout, advocating for a Private Member's Bill to implement the 33% quota immediately based on the current strength of the House, bypassing the wait for Census and delimitation.
- **Context of the 131st Amendment Bill:** The debate referenced the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which had proposed increasing Lok Sabha seats to 816 to facilitate reservation without reducing general category representation.
- **Political Polarization:** Chief Minister Mohan Yadav emphasized that the quota would increase Madhya Pradesh's female Lok Sabha representation from 6 to 14, while the Opposition highlighted the current low percentage of women in the State Cabinet.
- **Regional Ripple Effect:** Simultaneously, the Haryana Assembly passed a resolution to form a committee on women's empowerment, showing a broader trend of state legislatures engaging with the women's rights narrative ahead of general implementation.



#### Key Definitions

- **Delimitation:** The act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats based on the latest Census data to ensure equal representation for equal segments of the population.
- **Private Member's Bill:** A bill introduced by any Member of Parliament or Legislative Assembly who is not a Minister. Such bills are usually discussed only on Fridays and rarely become law without government backing.
- **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam:** Formally known as the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, it mandates 1/3rd reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

#### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 330A and 332A:** Inserted by the 106th Amendment to provide reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies respectively.
- **Article 334A:** Specifies that the reservation shall come into effect only after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures for the first census taken after the commencement of the Act have been published.
- **Article 82 and 170:** Deal with the readjustment of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies after each Census.



- **Rule 110 (State Assembly Rules):** Governs the procedure for moving resolutions on matters of general public interest within the State Legislature.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **The Population Link:** The current freeze on delimitation (based on the 1971 Census) is set to expire in 2026. The implementation of the women's quota is intrinsically tied to the completion of the long-delayed Census and subsequent delimitation.
- **Representation Gap:** Proponents of immediate implementation argue that women's representation remains stagnant at approximately 14-15% in the current Lok Sabha, well below the global average and the proposed 33% mark.
- **Federal Dynamics:** While the center passes the law, State Assemblies passing supportive or dissenting resolutions serves as a significant tool for building political pressure and demonstrating federal consensus.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The resolution in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly underscores the logistical and political complexities of implementing the Women's Reservation Act. While the legal framework exists, the operationalization remains stalled by the statutory requirement for Census and delimitation. This reflects the tension between the "politics of presence" and "administrative preparedness." **UPSC Relevance:**

- **GS Paper II:** Parliament and State Legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges; Issues related to Women (Vulnerable sections); Constitutional Amendments and their significance.
- **GS Paper I:** Social Empowerment and Communalism/Secularism (Role of women in society).

## 4. NSIL Revises Satellite Bandwidth Pricing After a Decade

NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has implemented a 20% hike in satellite bandwidth prices effective 1 April 2026. This marks the first price revision since 2016, reflecting a strategic reset in the valuation of India's scarce orbital resources amid a significant shift in sectoral demand from traditional broadcasting to high-end enterprise and defense applications.

### Key Highlights of the Pricing Revision

- **First Revision in 10 Years:** The 20% upward revision in Ku-band capacity pricing ends a decade-long price freeze, signaling a move towards market-linked valuation of satellite resources.
- **Targeted Satellite Capacity:** The price hike specifically affects Ku-band transponder capacity on three key communication satellites: GSAT-31, GSAT-10, and GSAT-16.
- **Shifting Demand Dynamics:** While traditional Direct-to-Home (DTH) demand is softening, there is a surge in high-value requirements from aviation, maritime connectivity, and the defense sector.
- **Impacted Stakeholders:** The revision directly affects broadcasters, DTH platforms, ATM connectivity providers, and companies facilitating communication in remote and rural areas.





- **Operational Autonomy:** The move underscores NSIL's role as a commercial entity designed to operate on business principles, moving away from the older model of subsidized government-led pricing.
- **Supply-Demand Gap:** The revision highlights the scarcity of orbital capacity, prompting a "pricing correction" to prioritize high-utilization sectors and ensure the financial sustainability of future missions.

### Key Definitions

- **NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL):** A Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Department of Space (DoS), established in 2019 to commercially exploit ISRO's research and development.
- **Ku-Band:** A portion of the electromagnetic spectrum (12–18 GHz) used primarily for satellite communications, particularly for DTH television and satellite broadband.
- **Transponder:** A device on a satellite that receives a signal at one frequency and retransmits it at another; it is the fundamental unit of capacity leased to users.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Space Policy 2023:** Provides the framework for NSIL to act as the primary interface for commercializing space assets and encourages private sector participation.
- **Article 297:** Specifies that all lands, minerals, and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters, the continental shelf, and the exclusive economic zone of India vest in the Union. By extension, orbital slots and spectrum are treated as sovereign national resources.
- **Department of Space (DoS):** Directly under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the DoS oversees the legal and administrative framework for satellite communications in India.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Strategic Autonomy:** Pricing revisions allow NSIL to generate internal resources for "demand-driven" satellite missions, reducing the burden on the Union Budget.
- **Connectivity for Remote Areas:** While prices have risen, satellite communication remains the only viable link for ATMs and enterprise networks in "media-dark" or hilly terrains where fiber-optic reach is limited.
- **In-Flight and Maritime Connectivity (IFMC):** The aviation and maritime sectors are emerging as the most lucrative customers for Ku-band capacity, replacing the stagnant growth of the television sector.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The 20% hike by NSIL represents a transition from a "welfare-based" allocation of space resources to a "market-driven" commercial model. This shift is essential for India to compete in the global space economy, which is projected to grow exponentially by 2030. However, the government must balance commercial profitability with the need to maintain affordable connectivity for essential services like rural ATMs and disaster management. **UPSC Relevance:**

- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Space); Science and Technology-developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Awareness in the fields of Space.
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (NSIL and IN-SPACE).



- **Preliminary Examination:** Facts about NSIL, GSAT series satellites, and the significance of Ku-band vs. Ka-band in communication.

## 5. Global Supply Disruptions and India's Surging Fertilizer Subsidy

India's fertilizer subsidy bill is projected to increase by approximately 20% in the current fiscal year, driven by geopolitical tensions in West Asia and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Despite global prices nearly doubling, the Union Government has maintained the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) to shield farmers, leading to a substantial fiscal burden that could surpass the budgeted estimates for FY27.

### Key Highlights of the Fertilizer Crisis

- **Fiscal Burden Escalation:** The subsidy bill, estimated at ₹1.71 trillion for the ongoing fiscal, is expected to jump significantly following an upwardly revised ₹1.86 trillion in FY26 due to war-induced price spikes.
- **Geopolitical Chokepoints:** The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has choked West Asian supply lines, directly impacting the 30% of urea and DAP, and 50% of LNG (a critical raw material), that India sources from the region.
- **Price Decoupling for Farmers:** While global procurement prices for urea have nearly doubled, the government has ensured that the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) remains unchanged to maintain agricultural viability.
- **Import Dependency Risks:** India remains the world's largest importer of DAP and urea, relying on foreign markets for 60% of its DAP needs and 15% of its urea and NPK requirements.
- **Aggregated Procurement Strategy:** To secure supplies for the peak Kharif season, Indian companies have issued global tenders for 1.2 million tonnes of DAP and other essential nutrients to mitigate local shortages.
- **Stability in Domestic Supply:** Despite global volatility, the country currently holds 19.02 million tonnes of fertilizers, meeting nearly 49% of the total requirement for the Kharif 2026 season.

### Key Definitions

- **Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS):** A scheme where a fixed amount of subsidy is decided on an annual/bi-annual basis for each nutrient (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potash, and Sulphur) contained in P&K fertilizers.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A strategic waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, through which a significant portion of the world's petroleum and fertilizer raw materials transit.
- **DAP (Di-ammonium Phosphate):** The most popular phosphatic fertilizer in India, containing 18% Nitrogen and 46% Phosphorus, essential for root development and crop yield.



### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 282:** Empowering the Union or a State to make any grants for any public purpose, which serves as the basis for central subsidies provided for national food security.
- **Entry 33 (Concurrent List):** Trade and commerce in, and the production, supply, and distribution of, domestic and imported products of an industry where the control of such industry by the Union is declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest (including fertilizers).



- **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Used by the government to regulate the price, production, and distribution of fertilizers to prevent hoarding and ensure equitable access.
- **Fertilizer Control Order (FCO), 1985:** Regulates the quality and distribution of fertilizers across India.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Impact of LNG Prices:** Since natural gas is the primary feedstock for urea production, the 50% import dependency on West Asian LNG makes domestic production highly sensitive to regional conflicts.
- **Subsidy Mechanism:** Unlike Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in other sectors, fertilizer subsidies are currently paid to the manufacturers based on the quantities sold to farmers through Point of Sale (PoS) devices.
- **Shift to Nano-Urea:** To reduce the subsidy burden and import reliance, the government is aggressively promoting "Nano Urea" and "Nano DAP," which are more efficient and locally produced.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The ballooning fertilizer subsidy highlights the vulnerability of India's food security to external geopolitical shocks. While the "farmer-first" approach stabilizes domestic food prices, it expands the fiscal deficit and underlines the urgent need for "Atmanirbharata" (Self-reliance) in the fertilizer sector through green ammonia and indigenous nutrient production. **UPSC Relevance:**

- **GS Paper III:** Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies; Public Distribution System; Food security; Mobilization of resources; Effects of liberalization on the economy.
- **GS Paper II:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (International Relations).
- **Preliminary Examination:** Major fertilizer producing and consuming nations, types of fertilizers (NBS vs. Urea), and geographical locations of global trade chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.

## 6. RBI Directives on Reporting Offshore Rupee Derivatives

In a significant move to bolster financial stability and transparency, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has mandated all Authorized Dealer Category-I (AD Cat-I) banks to report their offshore foreign exchange derivative transactions involving the Indian Rupee (INR). This directive aims to bridge the information gap between onshore and offshore markets, ensuring better monitoring of rupee-linked speculative activities globally.

### Key Highlights of the RBI Guidelines

- **Mandatory Reporting Mechanism:** All AD Cat-I banks must now report OTC foreign exchange derivative contracts involving the rupee, executed by their related offshore entities, to the Clearing Corporation of India Ltd (CCIL).
- **Comprehensive Scope:** The reporting requirement covers both deliverable and non-deliverable contracts (NDFs), ensuring that no segment of the offshore rupee market remains outside the regulatory radar.





- **Price Discovery and Transparency:** By bringing offshore trades into the reporting net, the RBI seeks to improve price discovery and ensure that exchange rate movements reflect genuine market fundamentals rather than opaque offshore speculation.
- **Enhanced Risk Monitoring:** The data gathered will allow the central bank to conduct better risk assessments and monitor the systemic impact of offshore currency volatility on the domestic economy.
- **Closing the Blind Spot:** While onshore Over-the-Counter (OTC) trades were already being tracked, this move targets a "long-standing blind spot" where significant rupee-linked activity occurred outside India's jurisdiction.
- **Global Market Alignment:** The framework aligns with G20 reforms for the OTC derivatives market, focusing on improving transparency and reducing systemic risk in global financial systems.

### Key Definitions

- **Authorized Dealer Category-I (AD Cat-I) Banks:** Commercial banks licensed by the RBI to deal in foreign exchange and carry out a comprehensive range of external trade and remittance transactions.
- **Derivatives:** Financial instruments whose value is derived from an underlying asset, in this case, the exchange rate of the Indian Rupee against foreign currencies.
- **Offshore Market (Non-Deliverable Forward - NDF):** A market where foreign exchange derivative contracts are traded outside the home country, often settled in a convertible currency (like the USD) rather than the physical delivery of the rupee.
- **Over-the-Counter (OTC):** Trades conducted directly between two parties without the supervision of an exchange.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Section 45W of the RBI Act, 1934:** Empowers the RBI to determine policy relating to interest rates or equity instruments and to give directions to any agency dealing in various money market instruments and derivatives.
- **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999:** Provides the overarching legal framework for the regulation and management of foreign exchange in India, aiming to facilitate external trade and promote the orderly development of the forex market.
- **Preamble of the RBI Act:** Mandates the central bank to maintain monetary stability and generally to operate the currency and credit system of the country to its advantage.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Impact on Volatility:** Offshore markets often lead price discovery during periods of high volatility; reporting helps the RBI intervene more effectively in the spot market if needed.
- **CCIL's Role:** As a central counterparty and trade repository, CCIL provides the infrastructure for reporting, which enhances the efficiency of the settlement process and reduces counterparty risk.
- **Related Party Transactions:** The rule specifically targets "related entities" of Indian banks, preventing the bypass of domestic regulations through foreign subsidiaries or branches.



## Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The RBI's mandate for reporting offshore rupee trades is a proactive step toward "Internationalization of the Rupee" while maintaining regulatory grip over currency stability. By integrating offshore data with onshore monitoring, the RBI strengthens its "macro-prudential" oversight. For the Indian economy, this reduces the "tail-risk" associated with sudden capital outflows or speculative attacks on the currency. **UPSC Relevance:**

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development; Banking sector reforms; External sector and exchange rate management.
- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies (The role of RBI as a regulator).
- **Preliminary Examination:** Definitions of NDFs, OTC derivatives, the role of CCIL, and the specific categories of Authorized Dealers (ADs) under FEMA.

## 7. India's Push for Sovereign Cloud in Critical Sectors

Amid escalating geopolitical tensions and cybersecurity threats, the Government of India is considering a mandate for companies in critical sectors—energy, telecommunications, and banking—to adopt "Made-in-India" sovereign cloud systems. This policy shift aims to mitigate the risks of foreign dependency, where sudden service disruptions by global providers can paralyze national infrastructure.

### Key Highlights of the Sovereign Cloud Mandate

- **Geopolitical Trigger:** The proposal gained momentum after Microsoft suddenly blocked IT services for Indian oil refiner **Nayara Energy** in July 2025, citing EU sanctions due to the company's partial Russian ownership.
- **National Security Imperative:** Government officials view foreign-controlled cloud infrastructure as a potential "kill switch" that could be used to unilaterally disrupt sensitive operations in banking, power grids, and telecom.
- **Reduction of Dependency:** The primary objective is to decrease reliance on dominant global providers (AWS, Azure, Google Cloud) and establish a domestic digital stack that operates strictly under Indian jurisdiction.
- **Sectoral Scope:** The mandate is expected to apply to "Critical Information Infrastructure" (CII), ensuring that data storage, communication tools, and proprietary software remain accessible regardless of international sanctions.
- **Competitive Gap:** A significant challenge remains as domestic cloud services are currently not globally competitive in terms of scale and sophistication, necessitating a strategic "policy push" to foster local innovation.
- **Data Sovereignty:** The move aligns with the broader goal of "**Data Swaraj**," emphasizing that Indian data must be governed by Indian laws to protect economic autonomy and prevent digital colonialism.





## Key Definitions

- **Sovereign Cloud:** A cloud computing environment designed to store and process data in compliance with the local laws and regulations of the country where the data is generated, ensuring it remains outside the reach of foreign subpoenas or sanctions.
- **Critical Information Infrastructure (CII):** Defined under the IT Act as computer resources, the destruction of which shall have a debilitating impact on national security, economy, public health, or safety.
- **Cloud Intermittency/Blockade:** The sudden withdrawal of access to cloud-based services (like email, databases, or Teams) by a provider, often due to legal compliance with foreign sanctions.

## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(g):** While citizens have the right to practice any profession, the State can impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of the general public, including national security mandates for businesses.
- **Section 70 of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000:** Empowers the government to declare any computer resource as "Critical Information Infrastructure" and regulate its security.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** Provides the framework for data localization and cross-border transfer restrictions, supporting the move toward sovereign data storage.
- **National Cyber Security Policy:** Outlines the roadmap for creating a secure computing environment and promoting indigenous development of security technologies.

## Additional Important Keypoints

- **The "Charkha" Moment:** Critics and policymakers have compared the need for sovereign cloud to the Swadeshi movement, arguing that digital infrastructure is the "cloth" of the 21st century.
- **Role of MeitY:** The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is the nodal agency currently evaluating the technical feasibility and industry impact of this transition.
- **Hybrid Approach:** The government may initially allow a hybrid model where non-sensitive data remains on global clouds while core operational data moves to sovereign platforms.

## Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The transition to "Made-in-India" cloud systems represents a pivot from mere "Digital India" to "**Digital Atmanirbharta**." While the technical gap between domestic and global providers is a hurdle, the Naryana Energy incident has proved that technological dependence is a strategic vulnerability. Balancing global interoperability with sovereign control will be the defining challenge of India's tech policy in the coming decade.

## UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper III:** Internal Security (Cybersecurity); Infrastructure (Energy, Telecom, Banking); Science and Technology (Cloud Computing, Indigenization of technology).
- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; International Relations (Impact of global sanctions on Indian economy).
- **Essay/Ethics:** Sovereignty in the digital age; The ethics of unilateral service withdrawal by multinational corporations.



## 8. 'New Delhi Declaration' and International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)

The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA), headquartered in New Delhi, is drafting a landmark 'New Delhi Declaration' to be adopted at a global summit in June 2026. This initiative aims to establish the first-ever international framework for the coordinated conservation of seven major big cat species across 95 range countries, positioning India as a global leader in wildlife diplomacy.

### Key Highlights of the IBCA Summit

- **Pioneering Conservation Framework:** The New Delhi Declaration will be the first international political document dedicated specifically to the protection of seven big cats: Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma.
- **Institutional Evolution:** Launched on April 9, 2023, to commemorate 50 years of Project Tiger, the IBCA was officially approved as an international body with headquarters in India by the Union Cabinet in February 2024.
- **Global Membership Expansion:** The alliance currently comprises 24 member countries, including a significant presence of 10 African nations; Kazakhstan, Namibia, and Thailand hold observer status.
- **Focus on Landscape Connectivity:** A core pillar of the declaration is promoting transboundary habitat connectivity and landscape-level conservation to ensure genetic diversity and migratory safety.
- **One Health Approach:** The framework explicitly links wildlife health with livestock and human health, addressing emerging wildlife diseases and zoonotic risks that threaten global biosecurity.
- **Combating Wildlife Crime:** The summit aims to strengthen international cooperation on wildlife crime prevention, intelligence sharing, and the mobilization of dedicated conservation finance.



### Key Definitions

- **Big Cats:** A term used for the seven apex predators covered under the alliance—Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma.
- **Range Countries:** Nations where these seven big cat species occur naturally in the wild across Asia, Africa, and the Americas.
- **Transboundary Habitat:** Ecological landscapes that span across the borders of two or more countries, requiring international cooperation for management.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g):** Declares it a fundamental duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** The primary legal framework in India for the protection of wild animals, birds, and plants.
- **Entry 17B (Concurrent List):** Added via the 42nd Amendment, it gives both the Union and State governments the power to legislate on the "Protection of wild animals and birds."



### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Species Diversity:** While India is the only country in the world to host five of these seven big cats in the wild (excluding Jaguar and Puma), the IBCA allows India to lead global efforts even for species not found domestically.
- **Model of Success:** IBCA is modeled after the International Solar Alliance (ISA), reflecting India's strategy of creating "coalitions of the willing" to solve global environmental challenges.
- **Major Threats:** The declaration specifically targets four critical challenges: deforestation, illegal wildlife trade/poaching, habitat fragmentation, and emerging diseases.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The 'New Delhi Declaration' signifies India's transition from domestic conservation success (Project Tiger) to global environmental leadership. By spearheading the IBCA, India is effectively utilizing its "soft power" in ecology to unite range countries across the Global South. For the UPSC aspirant, this represents a convergence of environmental policy and foreign affairs. **UPSC Relevance:**

- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Wildlife protection initiatives.
- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **Preliminary Examination:** Species specific questions (habitats of the seven big cats), headquarters and membership of IBCA, and international environmental conventions like CITES.

## 9. Electoral Roll Purges and the Concept of 'Logical Discrepancy'

The integrity of India's electoral process has come under scrutiny due to the "Special Intensive Revision" (SIR) of electoral rolls conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) ahead of recent State Assembly elections. The deletion of millions of voters, categorized under the non-statutory term "logical discrepancy," has sparked a significant constitutional debate regarding citizenship, administrative jurisdiction, and the right to vote.

### Critical Concerns in Electoral Roll Revision

- **The "Logical Discrepancy" Categorization:** The ECI has introduced this term to justify the large-scale deletion of names from the voters' list. Critics argue this category is unknown to existing election laws, namely the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.
- **Jurisdictional Overreach:** While Article 324 grants the ECI powers of "superintendence, direction, and control" of elections, the determination of citizenship—a prerequisite for voting under Article 326—is the exclusive domain of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. By prescribing its own list of citizenship documents, the ECI is alleged to have usurped the Home Ministry's power.
- **Procedural Deviation:** Law mandates a "summary revision" before general elections, whereas "intensive revision" (preparing rolls afresh) is reserved for non-election years due to its time-consuming nature. The ECI's decision to conduct an SIR just months before elections is seen as a deviation from statutory norms.





- **Violation of Natural Justice:** Reports indicate that a significant portion of the 91 lakh deletions in West Bengal and 64 lakh in Bihar occurred without providing the affected individuals an opportunity to be heard, violating the principle of *Audi Alteram Partem*.
- **Documentary Barriers:** The ECI's refusal to accept common identity proofs like the [Aadhaar Redacted] card, ration cards, or even its own previously issued photo voter IDs as proof of citizenship has disproportionately affected rural and illiterate populations who lack sophisticated documentation.
- **Impact on Universal Adult Suffrage:** The exclusion of genuine citizens from the electoral roll undermines the mandate of Article 326, effectively disenfranchising millions and threatening the "free and fair" nature of Indian democracy.

### Key Definitions

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** A comprehensive exercise where the electoral roll is prepared de novo (from the beginning), usually involving house-to-house enumeration by Booth Level Officers (BLOs).
- **Summary Revision:** A less exhaustive update of the existing electoral roll to include new voters or remove deceased/shifted voters based on applications received.
- **Logical Discrepancy:** A technical term used by the ECI to denote inconsistencies in voter data (such as age, address, or photo) which has been used as a ground for deletion.

### Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 324:** Vests the power of superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission.
- **Article 326:** Guarantees the right to be registered as a voter to every citizen of India not less than 18 years of age, subject to certain disqualifications.
- **Section 21, Representation of the People Act, 1950:** Governs the preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- **Rule 25, Registration of Electors Rules, 1960:** Distinguishes between the methods of summary and intensive revision of the rolls.
- **The Citizenship Act, 1955:** The parent legislation governing the acquisition and determination of Indian citizenship, administered by the Home Ministry.

### Additional Keypoints

- **Burden of Proof:** The ECI's insistence on specific, hard-to-find documents shifts the burden of proving citizenship onto the voter in a manner not currently prescribed by any centralized Home Ministry notification.
- **Judicial Silence:** While the Supreme Court is the guardian of the Constitution, it has yet to definitively rule on whether the ECI can set citizenship verification standards independent of the Union Government.
- **Role of BLOs:** Under Rule 8 of the 1960 Rules, occupants need only furnish information to the "best of their ability," suggesting that the ECI should adopt a more flexible, inclusive approach during enumeration.



## Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The controversy over electoral roll purges highlights a "federal and functional" tension between the ECI and the Union Home Ministry. The use of extra-legal terms like "logical discrepancy" to disenfranchise millions of voters raises a fundamental question: Can administrative convenience override a constitutional right? Ensuring the accuracy of the roll is essential, but it must not come at the cost of excluding genuine citizens through procedural haste or jurisdictional overreach.

### UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** Election Commission of India (Powers and Functions); Constitutional bodies; Salient features of the Representation of People's Act; Fundamental Rights and Citizenship.
- **GS Paper IV:** Ethics in administration; Accountability of constitutional authorities; Justice and fairness in electoral processes.
- **Preliminary Examination:** Articles 324-329, eligibility for voting, and the difference between various types of electoral roll revisions.

## 10. Draft IT Rules Amendments 2026: Expansion of Digital Oversight

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) recently released draft amendments to the Information Technology Rules on March 30, 2026. These changes represent a pivotal transformation in India's digital governance, shifting the balance of power toward executive discretion and raising significant concerns regarding the constitutional safeguards for online speech and privacy.

### Key Highlights of the Draft Amendments

- **Dilution of Safe Harbour Protections:** Rule 3(4) proposes that platforms must comply with informal government instruments (advisories, SOPs, and directions) to retain "safe harbour" under Section 79 of the IT Act. This effectively forces platforms to follow government instructions even without a formal legal order.
- **Expansion of State Oversight:** Amendments to Rule 8 bring ordinary users who share news or current affairs content under the government's oversight mechanism, including the Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC), extending regulation far beyond traditional publishers.
- **Proactive Executive Scrutiny:** The IDC's role has shifted from a grievance redressal body to an instrument of proactive scrutiny, empowered to examine any undefined "matter" referred by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- **Increased Data Retention:** The draft expands data retention obligations, potentially requiring platforms to store user data, communication records, and browsing activity for years, increasing the risk of data breaches and state surveillance.
- **Risk of Over-Censorship:** To protect their legal immunity, platforms are likely to "err on the side of removal" when faced with informal government directives, leading to broad self-censorship and the suppression of legitimate critique.
- **Circumvention of Judicial Precedents:** Critics argue the rules reconstruct a regulatory architecture already stayed by the Bombay and Madras High Courts, bypassing established judicial scrutiny on media independence.



## Key Definitions

- **Safe Harbour:** Legal protection provided to intermediaries (like social media platforms) under Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000, which exempts them from liability for third-party content, provided they follow certain "due diligence" norms.
- **Delegated Legislation:** Laws or rules made by the executive (Ministry) under the authority granted by a parent Act of Parliament (e.g., the IT Act).
- **Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC):** A regulatory body consisting of representatives from various government ministries empowered to review digital content and recommend blocking or modification.

## Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. Any restriction must be "reasonable" and fall under the specific categories mentioned in Article 19(2).
- **Section 79, IT Act, 2000:** The "safe harbour" provision for intermediaries that is central to the functioning of the modern internet in India.
- **Shreya Singhal vs. Union of India (2015):** The landmark Supreme Court ruling that struck down Section 66A and held that intermediaries are only required to remove content upon receiving a court order or formal government notification.
- **Indian Express Newspapers vs. Union of India (1986):** A precedent establishing that delegated legislation (rules) cannot exceed the powers granted by the parent statute (Act).

## Additional Important Keypoints

- **Self-Censorship:** The cumulative effect of expanded data retention and informal censorship directives creates a "chilling effect," where citizens refrain from speaking freely, fearing their interactions are archived for potential future misuse.
- **Bypassing Parliament:** By using "rules" and "advisories" rather than legislative amendments, the government is accused of avoiding the robust debate and scrutiny associated with the parliamentary process.
- **Global Precedent:** While other nations are regulating harmful content, India's approach is unique in its reliance on executive-led "standard operating procedures" (SOPs) rather than judicial oversight.

## Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The 2026 draft amendments to the IT Rules mark a departure from the "hands-off" approach to intermediary liability. While managing online harm is a legitimate state interest, the use of informal directives and the expansion of oversight to ordinary citizens risk tilting the balance toward administrative control. The survival of a diverse digital public square depends on whether these rules are aligned with the "proportionality test" established by the judiciary.

## UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions; Important aspects of governance, transparency, and accountability; Role of judiciary and impact of its judgments (Shreya Singhal Case).
- **GS Paper III:** Challenges to internal security through communication networks; Role of media and social networking sites; Basics of cybersecurity.



- **Preliminary Examination:** Features of IT Rules 2021/2026, Section 79 of the IT Act, and Fundamental Rights under Part III of the Constitution.

## 11. West Asia Conflict and the U.S. War Powers Act: Legal and Geopolitical Implications

The 2026 military offensive launched by the Trump administration against Iran has brought the United States War Powers Act (WPA) of 1973 back into sharp focus. As hostilities escalate across the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, the constitutional tug-of-war between the U.S. Executive and Congress over the authority to wage war presents significant implications for global energy security and international law.

### Key Highlights of the Conflict and Legal Framework

- **Military Escalation in West Asia:** Initiated on February 28, 2026, the U.S. offensive against Iran, complemented by regional strikes, has triggered a massive Iranian retaliation involving drone attacks on Gulf nations and a strategic blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **The 60-Day Mandate:** Under the War Powers Act, the U.S. President must terminate any military involvement abroad within 60 days unless Congress formally declares war or provides specific statutory authorization.
- **Consultation and Reporting:** The Act mandates that the President consult Congress "in every possible instance" before committing troops and requires a formal report within 48 hours of the commencement of hostilities.
- **Ambiguity and Circumvention:** The Trump administration may utilize a 30-day grace period or argue that temporary ceasefires do not count toward the 60-day deadline, following precedents set by previous administrations in conflicts like Libya and Yemen.
- **Congressional Gridlock:** Despite the legal requirement, the U.S. Congress has not formally authorized the use of military force since 2002, reflecting a long-standing erosion of legislative oversight in favor of executive "Commander-in-Chief" powers.
- **Global Economic Impact:** The Iranian blockade and the U.S. counter-blockade of the Strait of Hormuz directly threaten the 30% of global oil and fertilizer supplies that transit this route, creating inflationary pressures for major importers like India.



### Key Definitions

- **War Powers Act (1973):** A federal law intended to check the U.S. president's power to commit the United States to an armed conflict without the consent of the U.S. Congress.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A vital maritime chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, essential for the global transport of petroleum and LNG.
- **Statutory Authorization:** A formal act of a legislature (Congress) that gives the executive branch the legal authority to take a specific action, such as engaging in military hostilities.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article II, Section 2 (U.S. Constitution):** Designates the President as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, providing the basis for executive military action.



- **Article I, Section 8 (U.S. Constitution):** Grants Congress the exclusive power to "Declare War" and "Raise and Support Armies," creating a deliberate constitutional check on the executive.
- **War Powers Resolution, Section 5(b):** Stipulates the 60-day limit for unauthorized hostilities, with an additional 30 days for safe withdrawal of forces.
- **International Law (UN Charter Article 2(4)):** Prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, unless in self-defense (Article 51) or authorized by the UN Security Council.

### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Strategic Blockades:** The U.S. counter-blockade of Iranian ports serves as a "economic warfare" tactic intended to force a diplomatic or military surrender without a full-scale ground invasion.
- **India's Vulnerability:** Given India's heavy reliance on West Asian oil and fertilizer (as noted in current economic reports), any prolonged engagement under the WPA deadline directly affects India's fiscal deficit and agricultural stability.
- **The Role of Technology:** The 2026 conflict features extensive use of autonomous drones and cyber-warfare, which some legal experts argue fall into "gray zones" not explicitly covered by the original 1973 WPA text.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The West Asia crisis of 2026 underscores the fragility of international order when domestic constitutional constraints—like the U.S. War Powers Act—are tested by executive persistence. For India, the conflict is not merely a diplomatic concern but an existential economic challenge. The ability of the U.S. President to circumvent legislative "guardrails" highlights a global trend toward executive dominance in foreign policy, which has profound consequences for multilateralism and regional stability.

### UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with that of other countries (U.S. War Powers vs. Indian Emergency/War provisions); Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** International Security; Impact of global conflicts on India's Energy Security and Economy.
- **Preliminary Examination:** Geography of West Asia (Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf), International bodies like the UN Security Council, and fundamental concepts of U.S. vs. Indian Executive powers.

## 12. Evolving China-Pakistan Space Cooperation and Regional Implications

The strategic partnership between China and Pakistan has expanded significantly into the space domain, characterized by satellite launches, lunar exploration, and navigation systems. Since the launch of Badr-I in 1990, Beijing has emerged as the sole provider of orbital access for Islamabad, leveraging space technology as a key component of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and "all-weather" diplomatic soft power.

### Key Highlights of the Space Partnership

- **Human Spaceflight Collaboration:** In 2026, China announced the selection of two Pakistani candidates (Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud) for training to visit the Tiangong space station; one will serve as a payload specialist under a 2025 agreement.



- **Dominance in Satellite Launches:** China has launched a series of Pakistani satellites in 2025-26, including the indigenous electro-optical satellite EO-3, and remote-sensing satellites PRSS-2, PRSS-1, and PRSC-EO1, strengthening Pakistan's communication and reconnaissance capabilities.
- **Lunar Exploration Success:** The ICUBE-Q, a 7kg lunar CubeSat developed by Pakistan's IST and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, was successfully launched on China's Chang'e 6 in 2024 to explore the far side of the moon.
- **Strategic Navigation Integration:** Pakistan became the first foreign country to adopt China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS); the system provides sub-centimeter precision and serves as a strategic alternative to the US-owned GPS.
- **Defense and CORS Network:** The establishment of a Continuously Operating Radar Station (CORS) network in Pakistan, enabled by BeiDou, facilitates high-precision military applications and disaster management.
- **Space Silk Road:** Beijing is integrating space services into the BRI framework, weaving a network of ground stations and satellites to create a "Service Network" that benefits partner countries while expanding Chinese influence.



### Key Definitions

- **Tiangong Space Station:** China's permanently crewed space station in low Earth orbit, serving as a hub for international scientific and diplomatic collaboration.
- **BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS):** China's indigenous global navigation satellite system, providing positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) services.
- **CubeSat:** A type of miniaturized satellite for space research that usually has a volume of exactly one liter (10cm x 10cm x 10cm) and a mass of no more than 2kg per unit.
- **Electro-Optical (EO) Satellite:** A satellite equipped with sensors to capture high-resolution images of the Earth's surface for civilian or military monitoring.

### Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (Indian Constitution):** Directs the State to promote international peace and security; the China-Pakistan space nexus is a critical factor in India's external security environment.
- **Entry 6 (Union List):** Atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production; by extension, space and high-technology research are exclusive Union subjects in India.
- **Outer Space Treaty (1967):** An international treaty to which China, Pakistan, and India are signatories, mandating that space exploration be for the benefit of all countries and not subject to national appropriation.
- **Space Policy 2023 (India):** India's domestic framework to enhance its own space capabilities and private participation to counter regional technological shifts.



### Additional Important Keypoints

- **Dual-Use Technology:** The remote sensing and navigation data provided by China have significant "dual-use" potential, enhancing Pakistan's precision-strike capabilities and maritime domain awareness.
- **The GPS-BDS Divide:** The transition from GPS to BeiDou by the Pakistani military reduces vulnerability to potential US-led sanctions or service disruptions during conflicts.
- **Soft Power Diplomacy:** China's willingness to share its space station and launching platforms like the Long March allows it to position itself as a technological leader for the Global South.

### Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The deepening China-Pakistan space cooperation represents a shift from purely terrestrial strategic ties to a sophisticated "High-Tech Alliance." This partnership provides Islamabad with a significant technological leap in reconnaissance and navigation, potentially altering the regional balance of power. For India, this necessitates a calibrated response through its own space diplomacy, enhanced ISRO-DRDO synergy, and the development of independent regional navigation systems like NavIC.

### UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood- relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Awareness in the fields of Space; Security challenges and their management in border areas.
- **Preliminary Examination:** Features of BeiDou, Tiangong, and NavIC; Important space missions like Chang'e 6 and Gaganyaan; Locations of satellite launch centers.