



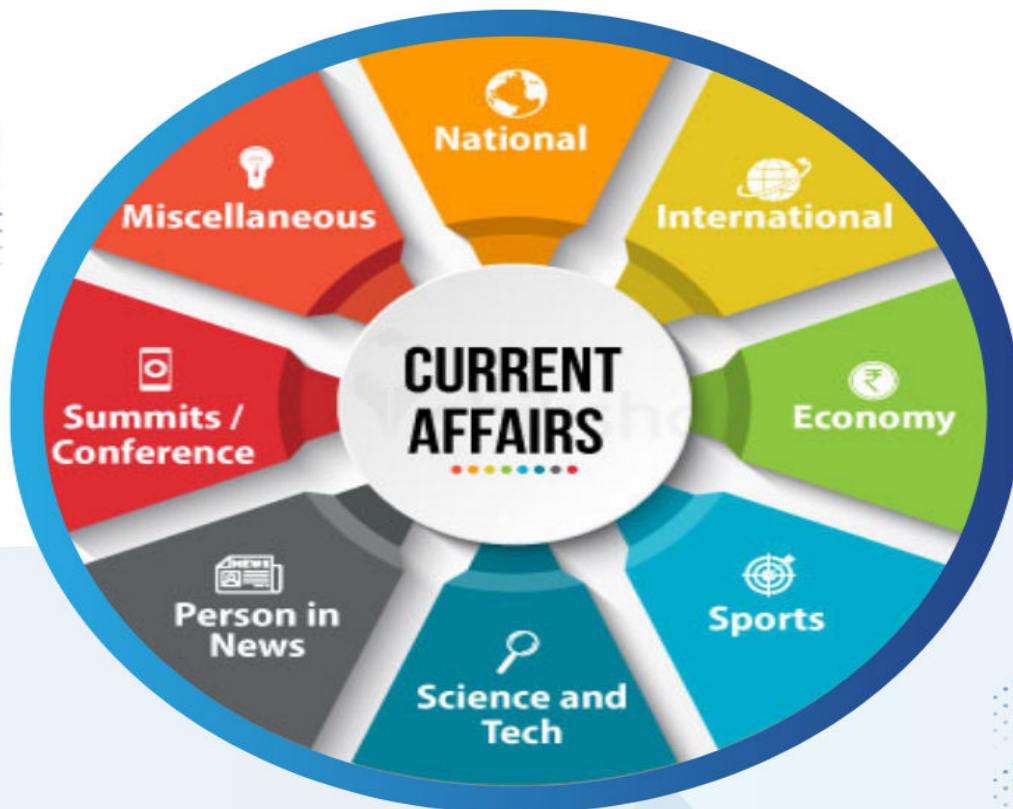
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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 07/05/2026 (THURSDAY)



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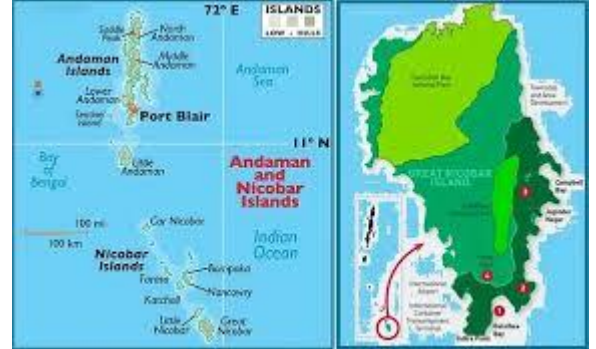
VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Great Nicobar Project: Controversy over Gram Sabha Quorum and FRA Compliance

Executive Summary

- **Quorum Violation:** The Andaman and Nicobar administration reportedly bypassed the mandatory 50% quorum requirement under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) for the ₹72,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project.
- **Discrepancy in Figures:** Attendance at Gram Sabha meetings ranged from a mere 1.83% to 14.72% of the population, significantly lower than the statutory requirement.
- **Legal Defense:** The administration argued in the Calcutta High Court that these figures constituted a "proper quorum," claiming resolutions for the project were passed unanimously despite the low turnout.
- **Procedural Lapses:** Petitions allege that the "Stage-I" forest clearance was granted based on these contested consents, potentially violating the rights of the local tribal communities and settlers.
- **FRA Implementation:** Central rules explicitly state that a Gram Sabha quorum is achieved only if one-half (50%) of the adult members are present, with at least one-third being women.
- **Scale of Consent:** In total, only 349 individuals (approximately 4.6% of the 2011 Census population) signed off on a project impacting seven villages and vast tracts of ecologically sensitive forest land.



Key Definitions

- **Gram Sabha:** A body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level. It is the cornerstone of local self-governance.
- **Quorum:** The minimum number of members of an assembly or society that must be present at any of its meetings to make the proceedings of that meeting valid.
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** A landmark legislation that recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling communities to land and other resources, which had been denied to them over decades.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA) Rules:** The 2012 amendment to the FRA Rules specifies that for the purpose of seeking consent for the diversion of forest land, the quorum of the Gram Sabha must be at least 50% of the members.
- **Article 243G:** Empowers State Legislatures to endow Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government.
- **PESA Act, 1996:** While the A&NI are not currently under the Fifth Schedule, the principles of the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act emphasize the "informed consent" of Gram Sabhas in tribal regions.
- **The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Specifically Section 6, which outlines the authorities to vest forest rights and the process for verification by the Gram Sabha.



Critical Analysis & Key Points

- **Procedural Integrity:** The reliance on 2011 Census data suggests that even by older population standards, the participation was insufficient. Using current population estimates would likely show an even lower percentage of participation.
- **Women's Representation:** The FRA mandate for one-third women's participation in the quorum is a safeguard for gender-inclusive decision-making, which is often sidelined in large-scale infrastructure projects.
- **Environmental vs. Development Balance:** The Great Nicobar project (including a transshipment port, airport, and power plant) faces scrutiny for its impact on the Shompen and Nicobarese tribes and the endemic biodiversity of the region.

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the Great Nicobar project highlights a significant friction point between ambitious national development goals and the statutory rights of grassroots democratic institutions. The bypass of quorum requirements undermines the spirit of the Forest Rights Act, which seeks to rectify "historical injustices" against forest dwellers. A judicial determination on whether "attendance figures" can override "statutory percentages" will set a critical precedent for future infrastructure projects in ecologically and culturally sensitive zones.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Governance, Constitution, PESA Act, and the role of Gram Sabhas in decentralized decision-making. Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services.
- **General Studies III:** Environmental impact assessment, biodiversity conservation, and the challenges of balancing infrastructure with tribal rights.
- **Essay & Ethics:** Ethical dimensions of "consent" in development and the rights of marginalized indigenous communities.

2. Strategic Consolidation in India's Music Industry: The Shift Toward Regional Catalogues

Core Summary

- **Strategic Pivot:** Faced with stagnant paid subscription growth and declining per-stream payouts (pay rates halved recently), major music labels are aggressively acquiring regional libraries to diversify revenue streams.
- **Economies of Scale:** Acquisition allows major players to pool resources, enhance bargaining power with streaming platforms/advertisers, and access shared marketing and data-driven distribution technologies.
- **Capital Efficiency:** As the cost of producing original content rises, buying established regional Intellectual Property (IP) serves as a one-time investment that offers predictable content flow and immediate market footprint expansion.





- **Monetization Struggle:** Labels are currently squeezed between high costs for film music rights and lower returns from streaming platforms, where audience interest is shifting toward podcasts and stand-up comedy.
- **Mutual Benefits:** While big labels gain cultural depth and "IP control," smaller regional firms gain access to global infrastructure, better royalty management systems, and a chance to monetize assets before capital availability shrinks.
- **Risk of Market Distortion:** The entry of large conglomerates into niche regional markets may lead to short-term cost inflation and potential commercial unsustainability if the nuances of local culture-led success are ignored.

Key Definitions

- **Intellectual Property (IP) Rights:** Legal rights providing creators protection for their original works; in this context, the ownership of song recordings, lyrics, and compositions.
- **Regional Catalogue:** A curated collection of music specific to a particular language or geographic region (e.g., Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Tamil) held by a record label.
- **Monetization:** The process of converting an asset or digital content into a revenue-generating stream, typically through licensing, ads, or subscriptions.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Copyright Act, 1957:** The primary legislation governing the music industry in India. It protects the rights of authors, composers, and owners of sound recordings. Recent amendments (2012) specifically addressed royalty sharing between creators and labels.
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy, 2016:** Aims to promote a holistic ecosystem for IPR to foster innovation and creativity, which is central to the consolidation of music catalogues.
- **Competition Act, 2002:** Relevant in the context of acquisitions; the Competition Commission of India (CCI) monitors such deals to ensure they do not result in an "Appreciable Adverse Effect on Competition" (AAEC) or lead to a monopoly.

Additional Key Insights

- **The "Ficci-EY" Projection:** Industry reports suggest a 2025 trend where labels prioritize predictable, long-term IP control over one-off, transactional acquisitions of film soundtracks.
- **Shift in Consumption:** Digital streaming is no longer purely music-centric; the rise of non-music audio content (podcasts) is forcing labels to seek "niche and deep" regional engagement to retain listeners.
- **Bargaining Asymmetry:** Smaller labels often possess high-value IP but lack the technical "stack" to track global royalties, making them ideal targets for acquisition by tech-heavy major labels.

Conclusion

The trend of major music labels "tuning into" regional libraries marks a transition from a volume-based growth model to an IP-centric survival strategy. As the digital audio landscape becomes increasingly fragmented with podcasts and short-form content, regional music offers a stable and loyal listener base. However, the long-term success of this consolidation depends on whether major players can maintain the cultural authenticity of regional content while streamlining it through global corporate structures.



UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Statutory bodies and regulatory frameworks like the Competition Commission of India (CCI); government policies regarding the Media and Entertainment (M&E) sector.
- **General Studies III:** Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues; changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; digital economy and monetization challenges.
- **Current Affairs:** Consolidation trends in the Indian market and the impact of global digital shifts on local cultural industries.

3. Strategic Trade Resilience: India's Diversification Beyond the Strait of Hormuz

Core Summary

- **Strategic Shift:** India has operationalized alternative shipping services to bypass the Strait of Hormuz—a vital chokepoint handling 20% of global oil and gas trade—due to heightened regional conflict and blockades.
- **Alternative Port Activation:** Shipping lines like Maersk and CMA CGM are now connecting Indian hubs (JNPA, Mundra, Hazira) to West Asian ports outside the conflict zone, specifically Sohar (Oman), Fujairah (UAE), and Khorfakkan (UAE).
- **Economic Stakes:** The West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region is critical for India, with bilateral trade exceeding \$216 billion in FY25 and MSMEs contributing nearly 48% of the country's total exports.
- **Energy Security Management:** To prevent domestic fuel shortages during geopolitical instability, the government is coordinating refinery maintenance schedules (e.g., Jamnagar and Vadinar) and exploring new LPG storage facilities.
- **Logistics Challenges:** Despite the "normalization" of port congestion, exporters face surging freight costs and "last-mile" connectivity issues from neutral ports to final inland destinations in the Gulf.
- **MSME Impact:** Rising freight rates and cargo delays are disproportionately affecting small-scale exporters, necessitating government intervention through fixed shipping schedules and logistics assistance.



Key Definitions

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; it is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- **WANA Region:** West Asia and North Africa; a geo-economic grouping vital for India's energy security and diaspora remittances.
- **Chokepoint:** A strategic narrow passage (usually maritime) that can be easily blocked to disrupt international traffic and trade.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 73:** Extends the executive power of the Union to matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws, including "Foreign Affairs" and "Trade and Commerce with foreign countries" under the Union List (Seventh Schedule).
- **Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976:** Provides the legal framework for India's maritime rights and security of trade routes.
- **Energy Conservation Act, 2001:** While primarily for efficiency, it provides the statutory basis for the government to manage energy resources during national exigencies and supply disruptions.

Additional Key Insights

- **Refinery Synergy:** The Ministry of Petroleum is ensuring that major refineries do not undergo maintenance simultaneously, safeguarding the domestic supply of 33 million tonnes from the Jamnagar complex.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** The crisis underscores the urgency of Phase II of India's SPR program to mitigate supply shocks from the Hormuz blockade.
- **Multi-modal Connectivity:** The reliance on ports like Khorfakkan highlights the need for integrated road-rail links within the Arabian Peninsula to move cargo when sea lanes are contested.

Conclusion

India's proactive tapping of Omani and UAE ports reflects a pragmatic "de-risking" strategy in its neighborhood policy. By diversifying transit points, India is not just securing its \$64 billion export market but also ensuring that domestic energy prices remain insulated from global volatility. However, for these alternatives to be sustainable, the government must address the "assistance gap" in moving cargo from neutral transshipment hubs to conflict-adjacent destinations.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests (West Asia crisis impact).
- **GS Paper III:** Energy security; Infrastructure (Ports and Shipping); Mobilization of resources; and Growth/Development challenges.
- **Geography (Mapping):** Location of the Strait of Hormuz, Port of Sohar, Fujairah, Khorfakkan, and Indian West Coast ports.

4. De-escalation in the Persian Gulf: Pausing of 'Project Freedom' and U.S.-Iran Negotiations

Core Summary

- **Strategic Pause:** U.S. President Donald Trump has paused "Project Freedom," a maritime operation designed to escort merchant ships through the Strait of Hormuz, citing diplomatic progress with Tehran.
- **Mediation Efforts:** Pakistan has emerged as a key diplomatic intermediary, with both the U.S. and Iran exchanging proposals through Pakistani channels to finalize a "complete and final agreement."



- **Conditional Ceasefire:** While active bombing has largely ceased since early April, the U.S. maintains a strict naval blockade on Iranian ports, using economic leverage to compel Iran toward a new deal.
- **Conflict Timeline:** The crisis escalated following U.S. and Israeli strikes starting February 28, 2026, leading Iran to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz—a vital global energy chokepoint.
- **Security Risks:** Despite the pause, recent hostilities included Iranian fire at U.S. destroyers and drone/missile attacks on UAE tankers, underscoring the volatility of the region's maritime security.
- **Diplomatic Warning:** The U.S. administration has signaled that the pause is temporary; failure to reach a signed agreement will result in a resumption of forceful military action.

Key Definitions

- **Project Freedom:** A tactical U.S. military initiative aimed at providing safe passage for commercial vessels through contested waters in the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Naval Blockade:** An act of war whereby a country uses its navy to prevent vessels from entering or leaving another nation's ports, intended to sever supply lines and economic trade.
- **Project Escort/Convoy System:** A maritime strategy where merchant ships travel in groups protected by naval warships to deter unconventional or asymmetric attacks.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **UNCLOS (1982):** The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea governs "Transit Passage" through international straits. Iran's closure of the Strait challenges the legal right of unimpeded navigation for all vessels.
- **Article 51 of UN Charter:** Pertains to the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.
- **U.S. War Powers Resolution (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.
- **International Sanctions Law:** The legal framework allowing nations or international bodies to impose economic penalties to influence the behavior of states violating international norms.

Additional Key Insights

- **The "Pakistan Factor":** Pakistan's role as a mediator highlights its strategic importance in Islamic world diplomacy and its ability to maintain back-channels between Washington and Tehran.
- **Global Energy Volatility:** The Strait of Hormuz carries roughly 1/5th of the world's total oil consumption; even a "paused" conflict keeps global oil futures and insurance premiums for shipping exceptionally high.
- **Tactical Shift:** The shift from "Project Freedom" (active escort) to a "Blockade" (passive containment) suggests a transition from kinetic warfare to a "maximum pressure" diplomatic strategy.

Conclusion

The pause in "Project Freedom" represents a critical inflection point in the 2026 West Asian crisis. While the threat of immediate naval confrontation has receded, the underlying blockade ensures that Iran remains under severe economic duress. The success of this diplomatic window depends on the mediation capacity of



regional players like Pakistan and Iran's willingness to accept a deal that likely involves significant concessions on its regional influence and nuclear program. For India, this de-escalation is vital for stabilizing energy import costs and ensuring the safety of millions of expatriates in the Gulf.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** International Relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; Linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Energy security and its impact on the Indian economy.
- **International Geography:** Strategic importance of the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, and the Strait of Hormuz as global maritime "chokepoints."

5. India's New Sports Policy Toward Pakistan: Bifurcating Bilateral and Multilateral Ties

Core Summary

- **Policy Shift:** The Union Sports Ministry has formalized a new policy that explicitly separates bilateral sporting engagements from participation in global or multilateral events held in India.
- **Open Door for Multilateralism:** Pakistani athletes and teams are now permitted to compete on Indian soil for international tournaments, accompanied by a more supportive visa regime for players and officials.
- **Bilateral Prohibition:** The policy maintains a strict "no" to bilateral series; Indian teams will not travel to Pakistan for head-to-head matches, and Pakistani teams remain barred from playing bilateral matches in India.
- **Strategic Intent:** The move seeks to align with international sporting federations' practices and protect the interests of Indian sportspersons who might otherwise face sanctions for non-participation in global events.
- **Geopolitical Conditionality:** While India will host Pakistani athletes, Indian participation in events hosted *within* Pakistan remains uncertain and contingent upon the prevailing security and geopolitical climate.
- **Upcoming Calendar:** This policy provides clarity for several high-profile events scheduled in India, including the 2026 World Badminton Championships, the 2029 ICC Champions Trophy, and the 2031 ODI World Cup.



Key Definitions

- **Bilateral Ties:** Political, economic, or cultural relations conducted between two sovereign states directly (e.g., an India vs. Pakistan cricket series).
- **Multilateral Events:** International competitions involving more than two nations, usually organized by global governing bodies like the IOC, FIFA, or ICC (e.g., Olympics or World Cups).



- **Office Memorandum (OM):** A common form of written communication within government departments, used to convey executive decisions or policy directives.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Entry 10 & 13, Union List (Seventh Schedule):** The Constitution grants the Central Government exclusive power over "Foreign Affairs" and "Participation in international conferences, associations and other bodies," which includes international sports.
- **Passport Act, 1967:** Governs the issuance of passports and travel documents; the "supportive visa regime" mentioned in the policy falls under the executive discretion provided by this Act and the Foreigners Act, 1946.
- **Article 19(1)(g):** While citizens have the right to practice any profession, the state can impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, often cited in the context of sports diplomacy.
- **National Sports Development Code of India, 2011:** A set of regulations that governs the functioning of National Sports Federations (NSFs) and their alignment with government policy.

Additional Key Insights

- **Post-Crisis Normalization:** The policy comes a year after significant security incidents (Pahalgam attacks and Operation Sindoor), indicating a shift toward "nuanced engagement" rather than total isolation.
- **International Pressure:** Global sporting bodies (like the IOC) have previously threatened to revoke India's hosting rights if visas were denied to specific nationalities; this policy preemptively secures India's status as a global sporting hub.
- **The "Grey Zone":** The policy removes ambiguity for events *in* India but retains strategic flexibility regarding Indian movement *into* Pakistan, keeping the "Security First" approach intact.

Conclusion

The new sports policy represents a pragmatic evolution in India's neighborhood diplomacy. By decoupling global commitments from bilateral grievances, India maintains its standing as a reliable host for international tournaments without compromising its principled stance on cross-border issues. This "de-hyphenation" allows Indian athletes to compete for world titles on home soil while ensuring that the resumption of direct bilateral ties remains a lever of formal foreign policy rather than a sporting casualty.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood relations; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; International relations and the role of soft power.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** The ethics of "Sports Diplomacy"—whether sports should be used as a political tool or kept entirely separate from bilateral conflicts.
- **Current Affairs:** Strategic significance of soft power in the Indo-Pak context and India's growing role as a destination for global sporting infrastructure.



6. Sabarimala and Dawoodi Bohra Review: Judicial Scrutiny of Essential Religious Practices

Core Summary

- **Maintainability Questioned:** The Supreme Court's nine-judge Bench questioned whether decades-old Constitution Bench judgments can be challenged via Public Interest Litigations (PILs), even those seeking social reform.
- **Excommunication Issue:** The core controversy involves the Dawoodi Bohra community's practice of excommunication, which was protected by a 1962 SC ruling (*Sardar Syedna Saifuddin v. State of Bombay*).
- **Tagging with Sabarimala:** The Dawoodi Bohra case was tagged with the Sabarimala review (*Kantaru Rajeevaru v. Indian Young Lawyers Association*) to address larger questions on the intersection of religious freedom and individual rights.
- **Legal Clash:** The court is examining if excommunication can survive as a "protected practice" despite modern laws like the Maharashtra Protection of People from Social Boycott Act, 2016.
- **Scope of Judicial Review:** The Bench is deliberating whether the judiciary should intervene in internal religious matters to ensure "constitutional morality" or uphold the autonomy of religious denominations.
- **Nine-Judge Reference:** This larger Bench was necessitated to provide an authoritative pronouncement on Article 25 and 26, specifically concerning practices that potentially violate the right to dignity and social inclusion.

Key Definitions

- **Excommunication:** A formal action by a religious community to exclude a member from its rights, privileges, and social interactions, often leading to social boycott.
- **Maintainability:** The legal requirement that a petition must satisfy certain criteria (such as standing or jurisdiction) before a court can hear the merits of the case.
- **Constitutional Morality:** A judicial concept emphasizing that the values of the Constitution (liberty, equality, fraternity) should override traditional or religious norms that are discriminatory.
- **Public Interest Litigation (PIL):** Litigation filed in a court of law for the protection of "Public Interest", such as pollution, terrorism, road safety, or fundamental rights of the marginalized.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health.
- **Article 26:** Grants religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion; this is the primary defense used by the Dawoodi Bohra leadership.
- **Article 13:** Mandates that all laws in force before the commencement of the Constitution, if inconsistent with Fundamental Rights, shall be void to the extent of such inconsistency.



- **Maharashtra Protection of People from Social Boycott Act, 2016:** A state law that criminalizes social boycott and excommunication as being against human dignity and social integration.
- **Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine:** A judicial test evolved by the SC to determine which religious practices are integral to a faith and thus eligible for protection under Articles 25 and 26.

Additional Key Insights

- **The 1962 Precedent:** In the original Sardar Syedna case, the SC struck down a law banning excommunication, viewing the practice as an essential part of the denomination's management rights.
- **Reformist Intent vs. Procedure:** Justice Nagarathna's query highlights a procedural tension: can a "reformist" PIL overturn a specific 60-year-old judgment, or must such changes come through legislative action or specific appeals?
- **Individual vs. Group Rights:** The case represents a fundamental struggle between the "Right of the Denomination" (Art 26) and the "Right of the Individual member" to be free from social ostracization (Art 21 and 25).

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's focus on the maintainability of these petitions indicates a cautious approach toward judicial overreach into settled religious precedents. While the court recognizes the need for social reform, it is grappling with the procedural sanctity of Constitution Bench rulings. The final outcome from the nine-judge Bench will define the limits of religious autonomy in India and determine if "Social Boycott" laws can constitutionally override the traditional powers of religious heads.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, and significant provisions; Judiciary—structure, organization, and functioning; Separation of powers between various organs.
- **GS Paper IV:** Human Values and Social Reform; Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions (Religious freedom vs. Social equality).
- **Essay:** Topics related to Judicial Activism, Constitutional Morality, and the secular fabric of the Indian state.

7. Inequality and Policy Transitions in India: From MGNREGA to the Bill of 2025

Core Summary

- **Legislative Overhaul:** The transition from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025, alongside the implementation of new Labour Codes, marks a significant shift in rural and informal labor policy.
- **The Consumption Gap:** Analysis of the HCES 2023-24 data reveals a Gini index of 0.29 for consumption expenditure, which is notably higher than earlier World Bank estimates (0.25), indicating deeper structural disparities.
- **Urban-Rural Divergence:** Inequality is predominantly driven by non-food expenditure, where the urban sector exhibits higher disparity than rural areas; the mean urban non-food spending is 1.5 times the national average.



- **Concentration of Spending:** Wealth concentration is evident in urban centers, where the top 10% of the population accounts for 27% of total non-food expenditure, and the richest decile's mean spending is nine times that of the rural poorest decile.
- **Underestimation of the Super-Rich:** Current NSSO surveys primarily capture consumption rather than the massive wealth of the super-rich, leading to a gross underestimation of actual economic inequality in national statistics.
- **Class-Based Lag:** While urban professionals and managers have gained disproportionately since the 1980s, urban informal workers and rural agricultural laborers have lagged, worsening between-class inequality despite various welfare interventions.

Key Definitions

- **Gini Index:** A statistical measure representing income or expenditure distribution of a nation's residents; a score of 0 represents perfect equality, while 1 represents perfect inequality.
- **MPCE (Monthly Per Capita Expenditure):** The average amount spent by an individual in a household per month on goods and services for consumption.
- **Decile Groups:** A method of dividing a population into ten equal parts based on a specific variable (like income or spending) to analyze distribution patterns.
- **Viksit Bharat-GRAAM Bill, 2025:** The proposed successor to MGNREGA, aimed at restructuring rural employment and livelihood guarantees under the "Viksit Bharat" framework.

Consumption expenditure inequality in India
Locating inequality by space and consumption type

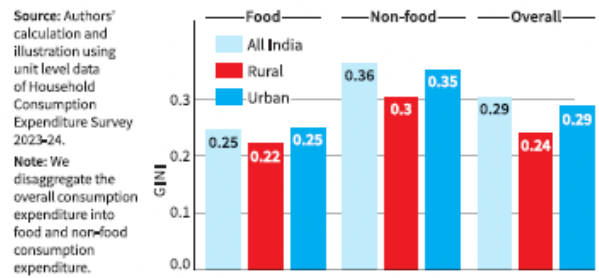
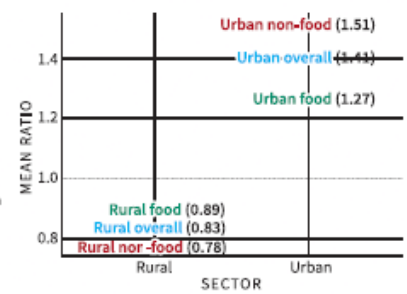


Figure 2: Urban – rural gap by consumption type

Source: Same as figure 1. Respective mean ratio is in parenthesis.
Note: Here, mean ratio implies the ratio of sectoral average MPCE to All India MPCE.
For example, mean ratio for urban non-food consumption is calculated as the ratio of average urban non-food MPCE to that of all India (rural and urban combined) average non-food MPCE.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 38:** A Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) mandating the State to secure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people and to minimize inequalities in income, status, and opportunities.
- **Article 39:** Directs the State to ensure that the ownership and control of material resources are distributed to subserve the common good and to prevent the concentration of wealth.
- **Article 41:** Right to work, to education, and to public assistance in certain cases, which provides the constitutional basis for employment guarantee schemes like MGNREGA and its successor.
- **The Labour Codes (2020-2025):** Consolidation of 29 central labor laws into four codes (Wages, Social Security, Industrial Relations, and Occupational Safety) aimed at formalizing the economy but raising concerns regarding the social safety net for informal workers.

Additional Key Insights

- **The "Invisible" Wealth:** The fact that 13% of the richest decile still hold BPL cards indicates significant leakages or data inaccuracies in the identification of beneficiaries for welfare schemes like PMGKY.



- **Debt-Led Consumption:** A substantial portion of the Indian middle and lower classes relies on credit to sustain consumption, masking the true extent of income stagnation among lower deciles.
- **Structural Distress:** Persistent agricultural distress and urban-centric growth models are the primary drivers behind the widening "mean ratio" disparity between rural and urban sectors.

Conclusion

The transition to the Viksit Bharat-GRAAM Bill, 2025, occurs at a juncture where statistical inequality appears lower due to methodological shifts, yet "ground-level" class disparity remains acute. Policy formulation based on the assumption of declining inequality risks marginalizing the urban informal workforce and rural laborers who have not shared proportionally in the non-food consumption boom. For genuine "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India), the growth-class-inequality nexus must be addressed by ensuring that livelihood missions provide more than just subsistence.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
- **Key Concept (Social Justice):** The debate between "Growth vs. Redistribution" and the effectiveness of the "Trickle-down theory" in the Indian context.

8. Rare Sighting of Rusty-spotted Cat in Aravalli Scrublands: Ecological Significance

Core Summary

- **Rare Sighting:** The Rusty-spotted cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*), one of the world's smallest wildcat species, was recently sighted and photographed breeding in the Aravalli scrublands near Delhi-NCR (specifically Faridabad and Gurgaon).
- **Evidence of Breeding:** This is the first recorded instance of the species breeding in this landscape, with photographic evidence of a mother and kitten in Kot village, indicating a resident and reproducing population.
- **Conservation Status:** Classified as "Near Threatened" on the IUCN Red List, the species is native to India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, surviving in "virgin forests" and undisturbed scrublands.
- **Habitat Under Threat:** Approximately 75% of its habitat is currently threatened by land-use changes, including intensive agriculture and rapid urban expansion in the Delhi-NCR region.
- **Ecological Indicator:** The presence of this elusive and sensitive species serves as a "proof of health" for the Aravalli ecosystem, highlighting the need to protect these scrublands from further fragmentation.
- **Research Milestone:** The findings, documented by researchers from Indira Gandhi University and published in the journal *Zoo's Print*, transition the species status in the region from "sporadic visitor" to "resident wildlife."

Key Definitions

- **Scrubland:** An area of land that is uncultivated and covered with sparse, stunted trees and bushes; a critical but often ignored ecosystem for small carnivores.



- **Near Threatened (IUCN):** A conservation category assigned to species that may be considered threatened with extinction in the near future, although they do not currently qualify for the threatened status.
- **Elusive Species:** Animals that are naturally secretive, have low population densities, or are well-camouflaged, making them extremely difficult to observe or document in the wild.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** The Rusty-spotted cat is protected under **Schedule I** of this Act, providing it the highest level of legal protection in India, equivalent to that of the Tiger or Asiatic Lion.
- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** It is the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** Relevant for the Aravalli region to prevent the diversion of forest land (including "deemed forests" or scrublands) for non-forest purposes like mining or real estate.



Additional Key Insights

- **Physical Characteristics:** Measuring only 35-48 cm in length (about half of which is tail), it is often referred to as the "hummingbird of the cat family." Its fur is reddish-grey with distinctive rusty spots.
- **Aravalli Conservation:** The sighting reinforces the demand for a "Green Wall" or a protected corridor in the Aravallis to prevent the desertification of the Indo-Gangetic plain and preserve regional biodiversity.
- **Technological Role:** The shift from rare camera-trap recordings to live sightings indicates either a growing population or improved ecological monitoring techniques in the Haryana-Delhi border areas.

Conclusion

The discovery of a breeding population of Rusty-spotted cats at the "doorstep of Delhi" is a major conservation win. It challenges the perception of the Aravalli scrublands as "wastelands" and underscores their role as a vital biodiversity repository. Ensuring the survival of this Schedule I species will require strict enforcement of land-use regulations and the recognition of these scrublands as critical wildlife habitats rather than mere buffer zones for urban sprawl.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Biodiversity and Wildlife protection.
- **Prelims Factor:** Species-specific details (Scientific name, IUCN status, Wildlife Protection Act Schedule, and typical habitat) are frequent targets for Preliminary examination questions.
- **Geography (Mapping):** Significance of the Aravalli Range as a climate regulator and biodiversity corridor in Northern India.



9. India-South Korea CEPA Review: Addressing Trade Imbalance and Modernizing Ties

Core Summary

- **Negotiation Schedule:** India and South Korea are set to hold formal negotiations on May 25, 2026, to review and upgrade the existing Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
- **Trade Deficit Concerns:** A primary driver for the review is the widening trade imbalance; India's trade deficit with Korea surged to \$15.19 billion in FY25, with exports at \$5.81 billion against imports of \$21 billion.
- **Modernization Focus:** India aims to negotiate a "contemporary" agreement (CEPA 2.0) that addresses non-tariff barriers, improves market access for Indian services and engineering goods, and updates Rules of Origin.
- **Strategic Growth Target:** Both nations have reaffirmed a target to double bilateral trade to \$54 billion by 2030, leveraging new sectors like semiconductors, green hydrogen, and electric vehicle (EV) supply chains.
- **Investment Synergies:** The review coincides with major industrial collaborations, including POSCO's \$1.09 billion joint venture for a steel plant in Odisha and defense deals like the K9 Vajra howitzers.
- **Geopolitical Context:** Amid global supply chain shifts and the ongoing West Asia crisis affecting energy routes, the two countries are seeking a "Technology-Driven Partnership" to ensure resource stability.



Key Definitions

- **CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement):** A type of free trade pact that covers negotiation on trade in services and investment, and other areas of economic partnership beyond just trade in goods.
- **Trade Deficit:** An economic measure of a negative balance of trade in which a country's imports exceed its exports.
- **Rules of Origin (RoO):** The criteria needed to determine the national source of a product. Their duties and restrictions in several cases depend upon the source of imports.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country.
- **Union List (Entry 14):** Entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing of treaties, agreements and conventions with foreign countries falls under the exclusive domain of the Central Government.
- **Customs Act, 1962:** Provides the legal framework for the levy and collection of duties, including preferential rates agreed upon under bilateral treaties like the CEPA.



Additional Key Insights

- **CAROTAR Rules, 2020:** India's "Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules" will be critical during the review to prevent the "re-routing" of third-country goods through Korea.
- **Korea Plus:** A special strategic facilitation cell established in 2016 to promote and facilitate Korean investments in India, acting as a bridge for MSMEs and large conglomerates like Samsung and Hyundai.
- **Sectoral Focus:** India is pushing for the "revival of mango exports" and greater recognition of Ayurveda products in the Korean market to diversify its export basket beyond mineral fuels and organic chemicals.

Conclusion

The upcoming May 25 talks signify a shift from mere trade facilitation to a strategic economic re-alignment. For India, the CEPA review is not just about reducing the \$15 billion deficit but about integrating into the high-tech supply chains of East Asia. As South Korea looks to diversify its manufacturing base away from China, India's "Viksit Bharat" goals and "Make in India" initiatives provide a timely platform for a more balanced and futuristic economic partnership.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** India and its neighborhood relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Effects of liberalization on the economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; Intellectual Property Rights.
- **International Relations:** The "Act East Policy" and the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific economic corridor.

10. NCRB Data 2024: Delhi's Crime Landscape and Urban Security Challenges

Executive Summary

- **Highest Crime Volume:** Delhi continues to record the highest number of total crime cases among India's 19 metropolitan cities, with 2,75,402 cases registered in 2024—a figure significantly higher than Mumbai, which ranks second with 51,428 cases.
- **Vulnerable Groups:** The national capital remains the most unsafe for women and senior citizens; it recorded 13,396 cases of crimes against women and 1,267 cases against senior citizens in 2024, accounting for nearly one-third of such cases across all metros.
- **Theft and Juvenile Offending:** Delhi dominates the country in theft-related statistics, accounting for nearly 30% of all such offences nationally; additionally, 41.6% (2,306) of crimes committed by juveniles across major metros occurred in Delhi.
- **Prison Overcrowding:** The city faces a severe crisis in prison infrastructure, with 19,512 inmates against a capacity of 10,026—reflecting an occupancy rate of 194.6%. Notably, 88% of these prisoners are undertrials.
- **Murder and Kidnapping:** While murder cases saw a slight dip (504 in 2024), the murder rate of 2.3 per lakh population remains higher than the national average of 1.9. Kidnapping and abduction cases stood at 5,580, accounting for 35% of all such cases in metropolitan areas.



- **Cybercrime Trends:** In a rare positive trend, cybercrime cases in Delhi (404) are significantly lower than the national metropolitan average, though officials highlight the growing menace of "money mule" accounts.

Key Definitions

- **NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau):** An Indian government agency responsible for collecting and analyzing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL).
- **Undertrial:** A person who is currently on trial in a court of law but has not yet been convicted, frequently highlighting delays in the judicial process.
- **Metropolitan City:** For NCRB data categorization, these are cities with a population of one million or more as per the last census.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Public Order and Police:** Under the Seventh Schedule (List II - State List) of the Constitution, "Police" and "Public Order" are state subjects. However, in the case of Delhi, these powers vest with the Union Government via the Lieutenant Governor.
- **Article 21:** The Right to Life and Personal Liberty. Overcrowded prisons and the high percentage of undertrials (88%) often raise concerns regarding the violation of this fundamental right and the right to a speedy trial.
- **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:** The primary legal framework for dealing with children in conflict with the law; Delhi's high juvenile crime rate (41.6% of metro cases) necessitates a review of the Act's implementation at the grassroots level.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):** The new penal code (replacing the IPC) under which these crimes are now classified, aiming for more efficient registration and prosecution.

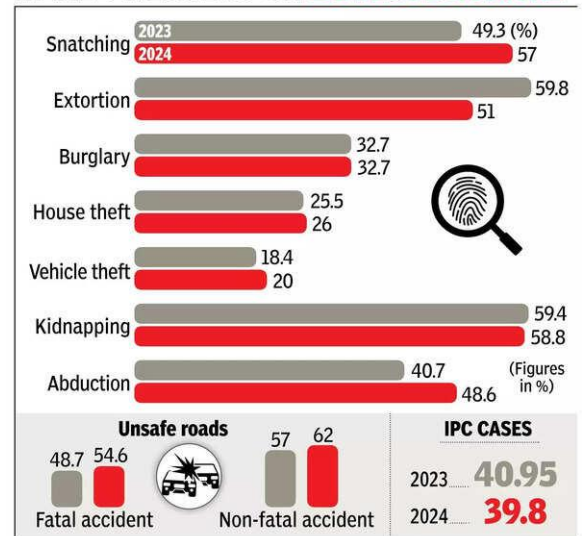
Additional Key Insights

- **Institutional Factors:** High registration figures in Delhi are often attributed by officials to "liberal registration" policies, where cases are filed promptly on the basis of the first complaint, unlike in other cities where "burking" (suppression) of crime might occur.
- **Social Isolation:** Senior citizens in upscale localities are increasingly targeted due to isolation, making them vulnerable to "inducement" and robbery.
- **Infrastructure Lag:** The prison occupancy rate of 194.6% underscores a massive gap between judicial processing speed and the physical capacity of correctional facilities.

Conclusion

The 2024 NCRB data underscores a paradox: while Delhi's high crime statistics reflect a robust mechanism for case registration, they also highlight systemic failures in urban safety, particularly for women and the elderly. The disproportionately high rates of juvenile crime and prison overcrowding suggest that punitive measures alone are insufficient. A holistic approach involving urban planning (for theft prevention), social

MIXED RESULTS ON DETECTION RATE





counseling (for juveniles), and judicial reforms (to reduce undertrial populations) is essential for changing Delhi's narrative from the "Crime Capital" to a secure global metropolis.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies II:** Governance and Social Justice; Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
- **General Studies III:** Internal Security; Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites; Police reforms.
- **Essay Paper:** Topics related to urban decay, the safety of women in modern India, and the efficacy of the Indian criminal justice system.

11. Mitigating SO₂ Emissions from Thermal Plants: Health and Policy Imperatives

Core Summary

- **Health Impact:** A recent IIT Delhi study published in *Nature* reveals that India could prevent approximately 1,24,564 premature deaths annually by fully mitigating Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) emissions from coal-fired thermal power plants (CFPPs).
- **PM_{2.5} Correlation:** CFPPs emit SO₂ which reacts in the atmosphere to form secondary inorganic aerosols like sulfates and nitrates; these are major precursors to fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) linked to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.
- **Geographic Sensitivity:** Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka are estimated to have the highest number of avoidable deaths due to high population density, while Chhattisgarh and Odisha would see the most significant air quality improvements.
- **Economic Viability:** The study argues that the health-related monetary gains and lives saved would significantly outweigh the high costs associated with installing emission-control technologies like Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD).
- **Environmental Equity:** Vulnerable groups, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and lower-income brackets, are disproportionately affected by pollution, making SO₂ mitigation a critical issue of environmental justice.
- **Policy Relaxation:** Despite rising emissions (India's SO₂ increased from 2.36 million tonnes in 2005 to 5.05 million tonnes in 2021), the Centre recently relaxed 2015 norms, exempting nearly 79% of coal-fired units from immediate FGD installation.

Key Definitions

- **Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD):** A set of technologies used to remove sulphur dioxide (SO₂) from exhaust flue gases of fossil-fuel power plants and from the processes of other sulphur oxide emitting processes.
- **Secondary Aerosols:** Particles formed in the atmosphere through chemical reactions of gaseous precursors (like SO₂ and NO_x) rather than being emitted directly from a source.
- **Ammonium Aerosols:** Chemical compounds formed when ammonia reacts with acidic gases like sulfuric acid or nitric acid, contributing to atmospheric haze and PM_{2.5}.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The Right to Life includes the right to a healthy environment and clean air, as interpreted by the Supreme Court in various landmark judgments.
- **Article 48A:** A Directive Principle mandate stating that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g):** A Fundamental Duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:** The primary legal framework under which the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) sets emission standards for thermal power plants.
- **Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986:** The source of the 2015 emission norms which introduced mandatory limits for SO₂, NO_x, and mercury for the first time in India.



Additional Key Insights

- **The Coal Dilemma:** Indian coal has relatively low sulphur content (approx. 0.5%), which was historically used as an argument against expensive FGD systems; however, the sheer volume of coal burnt compensates for low concentration, leading to high total emissions.
- **Hotspot Prioritization:** Experts suggest that instead of a blanket relaxation, the government should prioritize FGD installation in "hotspot sub-regions" where population exposure and emission density are highest.
- **Global Trend:** While global SO₂ emissions from CFPPs declined between 2005 and 2021, India's emissions moved in the opposite direction, increasing by nearly 30% even as recently as 2023.

Conclusion

The IIT Delhi study underscores that the "cost of compliance" for thermal power plants is a secondary concern compared to the "cost of inaction" regarding public health. While energy security remains a priority, the persistent delays in implementing FGD technology represent a significant public health risk. Bridging the gap between energy production and environmental safety requires a renewed commitment to the 2015 emission standards and a shift toward cleaner coal technologies alongside renewable integration.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental pollution and degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Infrastructure: Energy.
- **Key Theme:** The conflict between "Ease of Doing Business" (relaxing norms for power plants) and the "Right to Health" (mitigating deadly emissions).



12. Addressing Structural Deficits in India's Healthcare: Beyond Infrastructure Expansion

Core Summary

- **Expansion vs. Access:** While 43 new medical colleges and 20,649 new seats (MBBS and PG) were approved for 2025-26, the move fails to address the critical 79.9% vacancy rate for specialists in rural Community Health Centres (CHCs).
- **Private Sector Dominance:** Out of the 43 new colleges, 27 are in the private sector, which operates without an obligation to post graduates in underserved public health areas, further widening the rural-urban specialist divide.
- **Specialist Shortfall:** Despite producing over 70,000 specialists annually, India faces a persistent shortfall of approximately 17,500 specialists in CHCs, primarily due to the lack of "living infrastructure" like staff quarters and schools in remote areas.
- **Flawed Operational Model:** Currently, with only 4,413 available specialists, India can fully operationalize only 882 out of 5,491 CHCs (approx. one per district) under the mandated five-specialist team model.
- **Faculty Vacuum:** Even premier institutions like AIIMS report a 40% vacancy in teaching and research faculty, jeopardizing the quality of training for the very specialists intended to serve the public system.
- **Resource Misallocation:** The health budget remains skewed toward capital expenditure (buildings) while neglecting essential operational outcomes like drug availability, diagnostics, and competitive salaries for rural staff.

HEALTHCARE | CLARIST ZABLAN, INDIA

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Forecast Revision Highlights Growing Public Healthcare Spending Measures
Healthcare Market Forecast



f = Fitch Solutions forecast. Source: Fitch Solutions

Key Definitions

- **Community Health Centre (CHC):** The secondary level of the 3-tier rural health system, acting as a First Referral Unit (FRU) for a population of 1.2 to 1.5 lakh, required to have 30 beds and 5 specialists.
- **Specialist Cadre:** Doctors with postgraduate degrees in specific fields (Surgeon, Physician, Gynecologist, Pediatrician, and Anesthetist) essential for functioning referral units.
- **Aspirational Districts:** A government program launched in 2018 to transform 112 of India's most underdeveloped districts by improving health, nutrition, and education.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Mandates the State to regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- **Entry 6, List II (State List):** Public health and sanitation, hospitals, and dispensaries are primarily state subjects, though the Union coordinates medical education (Entry 66, List I).
- **National Health Mission (NHM):** The primary administrative framework for strengthening rural (NRHM) and urban (NUHM) health systems through central funding and state implementation.



- **Compulsory Rural Service Bond:** A legal instrument used by several states to mandate a period of public service for medical graduates, currently facing challenges regarding national uniformity and enforcement.

Strategic Recommendations

- **Geographic Classification:** Categorizing health centers into "Normal, Difficult, and Most Difficult" areas to provide graded financial and career incentives, modeled on Chhattisgarh's Rural Medical Corps.
- **Linked Seat Allocation:** Proposing that government-sponsored PG seats be linked directly to existing vacancies in CHCs, where candidates are allotted specialties based on their commitment to fill those specific posts.
- **"All or None" Deployment:** Transitioning from piecemeal postings to a team-based approach, ensuring all five required specialists are posted together at a CHC to provide functional, 24-hour emergency care.
- **Service Bonds:** Prioritizing medical aspirants willing to sign 10-year service bonds for difficult areas in exchange for guaranteed PG seats and enhanced National Health Mission benefits.

Conclusion

Building medical colleges and hospitals is merely the "hardware" of healthcare; the "software"—trained specialists willing to serve in rural areas—remains critically missing. The persistent 80% specialist vacancy rate in CHCs suggests that India's health crisis is one of distribution and retention, not just production. Transitioning from populist infrastructure declarations to an incentive-linked, outcome-oriented policy is the only way to ensure that the public health system serves the poor and marginalized effectively.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Governance; Issues arising out of design and implementation of policies.
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. (Health Infrastructure as a sub-component); Human Resource Development.
- **Ethics (GS IV):** Ethical dilemmas in medical service—Public duty vs. Individual career aspirations; Social justice in healthcare distribution.

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