



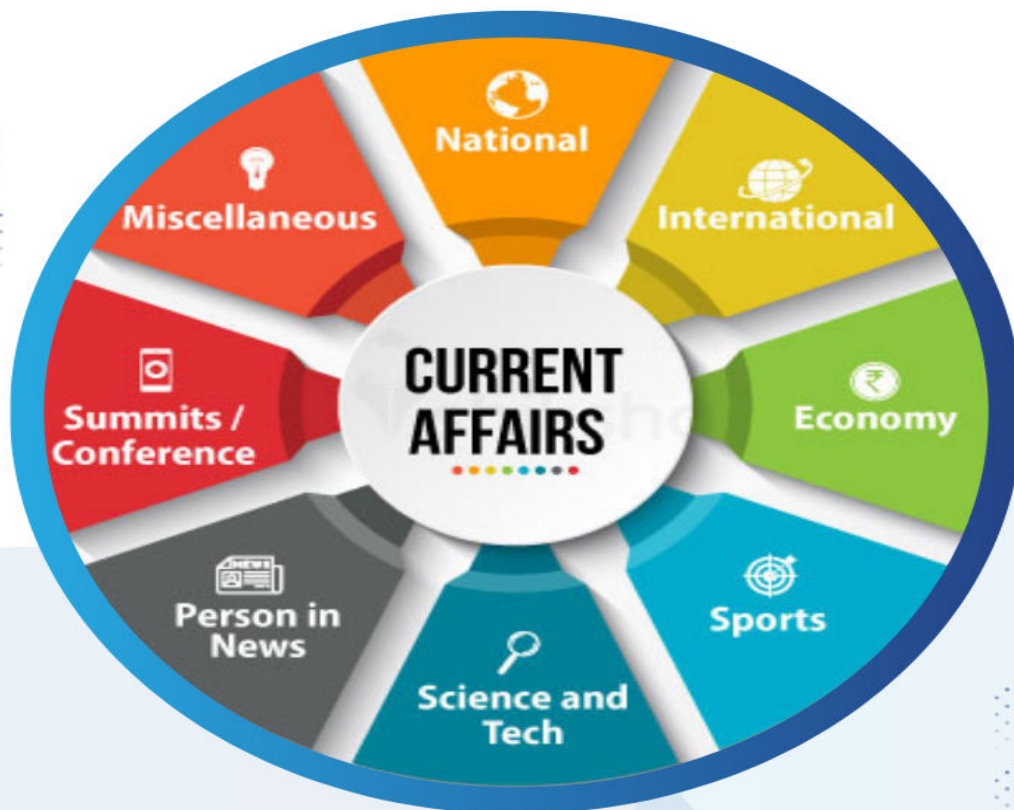
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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 08/05/2026 (FRIDAY)



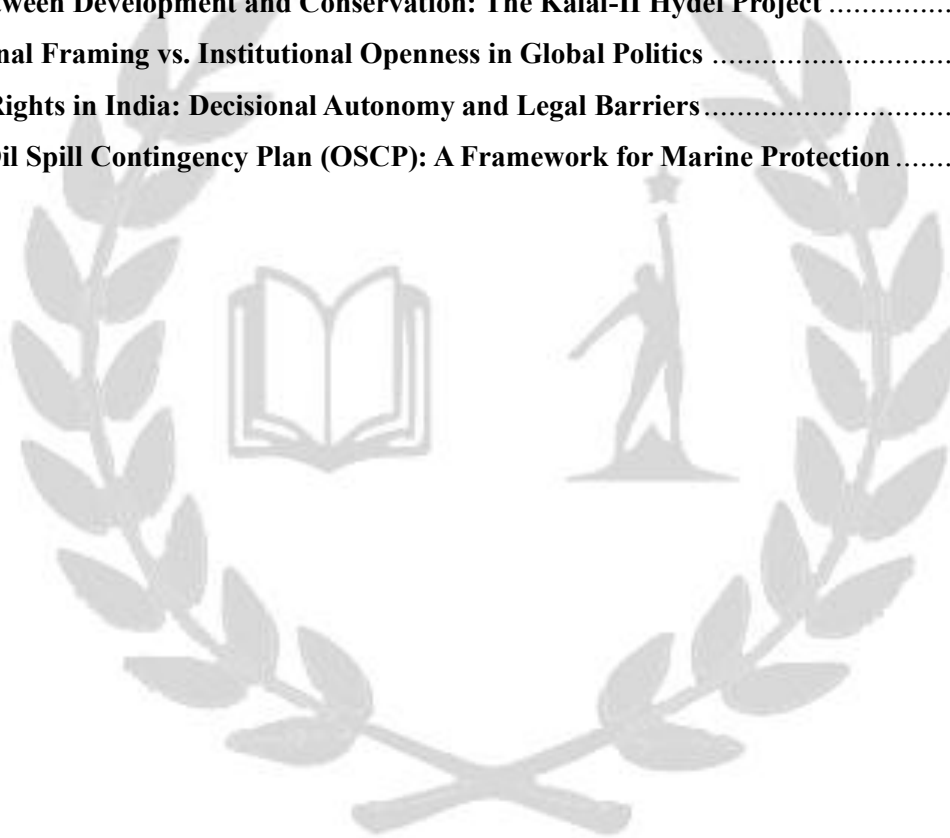
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VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Space-Based AI Data Centres: Prospects and Challenges

Data Centre in Space: A decentralized network of satellites equipped with high-performance Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) and storage systems designed to process AI workloads and manage massive data sets directly in Earth's orbit.

- **Decoupling Environmental Impact:** Moving data centres to space addresses Earth-based concerns regarding the massive consumption of water for cooling and the heavy reliance on land and terrestrial power grids, potentially reducing the carbon footprint of AI.
- **Solar Energy Synergy:** Satellites can theoretically harness continuous, uninterrupted solar radiation, providing a consistent power source for energy-intensive GPU clusters that would otherwise strain terrestrial renewable energy targets.
- **Critical Infrastructure Barriers:** The transition is hindered by exorbitant launch costs, the necessity of heavy heat shielding to protect hardware from solar radiation, and the extreme difficulty of maintaining hardware in a zero-gravity, high-vacuum environment.
- **Latency and Connectivity Gaps:** Current satellite communication technology struggles with the high-bandwidth, low-latency requirements of real-time AI processing, making it difficult to compete with fiber-optic terrestrial speeds.
- **The Indian Landscape:** While Indian startups like Agnikul Cosmos, Pixxel, and Sarvam AI have formed strategic partnerships to explore this frontier by FY27, they face significant hurdles in commercial viability, capital requirements, and a lack of proven orbital track records.
- **Sovereignty and Security:** Space data centres offer a potential solution for "Data Sovereignty," allowing nations to process sensitive information in a jurisdiction-free or highly controlled orbital environment, away from terrestrial physical interference.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51A(h):** The Indian Constitution emphasizes the "scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry," providing a fundamental backing for high-technology exploration like space-based computing.
- **Indian Space Policy 2023:** This policy enables End-to-End participation of Non-Governmental Entities (NGEs) in all domains of space activities, providing the legal framework for startups to launch and operate data-processing satellites.
- **Outer Space Treaty (1967):** As a signatory, India must ensure that its space data centres are used for peaceful purposes and that the nation remains liable for any space debris or damage caused by these private orbital assets.
- **UN COPUOS Guidelines:** International guidelines on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities govern how these large constellations of "computing satellites" must manage orbital crowding and debris mitigation.



Additional Key Insights

- **Edge Computing in Orbit:** Rather than replacing Earth centres, these systems may serve as "Edge" nodes, processing satellite imagery (e.g., from Pixxel) in-situ before sending refined insights to Earth, saving downlink bandwidth.



- **Thermal Management Paradox:** While space is cold, dissipating heat in a vacuum is difficult because convection is absent; satellites must rely on bulky radiators, complicating the engineering of "cool" data centres.

Conclusion: While the vision of orbiting AI factories captures the imagination of global tech leaders like Elon Musk and Indian innovators, it currently sits at the intersection of high-risk venture capital and theoretical engineering. For India to lead, it must bridge the gap between "paper plans" and successful orbital deployments. Success will depend on reducing launch costs through reusable rockets and developing radical new thermal management systems.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper III (Science & Technology):** Developments in Space Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and the role of private players in the Indian space sector.
- **GS Paper III (Environment):** Sustainable technology and the impact of terrestrial data centres on global warming.
- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Space diplomacy and the legalities of the Outer Space Treaty.

2. Strategic Expansion of GIFT-IFSC: InvITs, REITs, and Commodity Trading

International Financial Services Centre (IFSC): A jurisdiction that provides financial services to non-residents and residents in foreign currency, offering a regulatory environment at par with global hubs like London or Singapore.

- **Regulatory Evolution:** The International Financial Services Centre Authority (IFSCA) is fast-tracking frameworks for Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), with specialized regulations expected within a 30-day window to deepen the capital market.
- **Onshoring Global Trading:** A primary objective is to reclaim high-value commodity trading currently dominated by offshore centers like Dubai and Singapore, thereby integrating India more closely with the global supply chain and treasury operations.
- **Shielding against Volatility:** By establishing a global commodity trading hub within GIFT City, India aims to mitigate the impact of international price fluctuations in essential imports like crude oil and base metals.
- **Wholesome Financial Ecosystem:** The integration of commodity trading with existing treasury operations is intended to create a comprehensive business bucket, enhancing operational efficiency for multinational corporations and financial institutions.
- **Inter-Ministerial Synergy:** While the IFSCA has finalized internal approvals, the rollout remains contingent on final nods from the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), ensuring the new framework aligns with broader national economic policies.
- **Capital Inflow Potential:** The introduction of IFSC-specific REITs and InvITs is expected to attract significant foreign patient capital into India's infrastructure and real estate sectors by offering a tax-efficient and globally recognized investment vehicle.





Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **IFSCA Act, 2019:** This is the primary legislation that established the IFSCA as a unified regulator to promote and regulate financial products, services, and institutions in the IFSC in India.
- **SEBI (REIT/InvIT) Regulations:** While SEBI governs domestic trusts, the IFSCA adapts these frameworks under its sovereign powers to suit the international requirements of GIFT City, focusing on ease of doing business for global investors.
- **Article 246 (Seventh Schedule):** The regulation of stock exchanges and futures markets falls under the Union List (Entry 90), giving the Central Government exclusive power to legislate on these financial frontiers.
- **FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act):** Operations in GIFT City are treated as "offshore" under FEMA, allowing for seamless cross-border transactions and repatriation of funds in foreign currency.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **InvITs (Infrastructure Investment Trusts):** Instruments that work like mutual funds, pooling small sums of money from investors to invest in income-generating infrastructure assets.
- **REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts):** Companies that own, operate, or finance income-producing real estate across various property sectors, allowing investors to earn dividends from real estate investments.
- **Onshoring:** The process of bringing back financial activities and transactions involving Indian underlying assets that are currently being traded in foreign jurisdictions.

Conclusion

The expansion of GIFT City into commodities and investment trusts marks a pivotal shift from being a mere financial gateway to becoming a global price-setter. By aligning its regulatory timelines with market demands, India is positioning the IFSC as a formidable competitor to established global hubs. The success of this transition will depend on the speed of inter-ministerial clearances and the ability to provide a stable, predictable tax and regulatory regime.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Mobilization of resources, capital markets, and the role of specialized financial zones in national growth.
- **GS Paper III (Infrastructure):** Innovative financing models like InvITs for bridging the infrastructure funding gap.
- **Prelims Context:** Functions of IFSCA, differences between domestic and IFSC regulations, and the strategic importance of onshoring financial services.

3. Rising Dormancy in PMJDY Accounts: Challenges to Financial Inclusion

Inoperative Account: As per RBI guidelines, a savings or current account is classified as inoperative or dormant if there are no customer-induced transactions (such as ATM withdrawals, cash deposits, or online transfers) for a continuous period of over two years.

- **Widening Usage Gap:** While the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has achieved record-breaking numbers in account openings (581.8 million), a significant 26% of these accounts at public sector banks (PSBs) have turned dormant as of March 2026.



- **Public vs. Private Sector Divergence:** State-run banks, which hold the lion's share of Jan Dhan accounts (449.8 million), are seeing a sharp rise in inactivity, whereas private banks have shown a marginal improvement in their dormancy ratios, falling to 36%.
- **Concentration of Inactivity:** Major lenders like State Bank of India have seen dormancy ratios double to 23%, while others like Bank of India and Union Bank report as high as 36% inactivity, reflecting a struggle in sustaining active banking habits among the rural and semi-urban poor.
- **Structural Bottlenecks:** Experts attribute this trend to the proliferation of multiple accounts by migrant laborers across different states and a lack of recurring direct benefit transfers (DBT) or credit linkages that would otherwise keep the accounts active.
- **Capital Accumulation Performance:** Despite the high dormancy, the scheme has successfully mobilized significant domestic savings, with total deposits in PMJDY accounts reaching ₹3.02 trillion by April 2026, showcasing the program's potential for formalizing the economy.
- **The Private Sector Outlier:** High dormancy persists in specific private entities, such as ICICI Bank (65%) and Kotak Mahindra Bank (49%), indicating that the challenge of account "utility" transcends ownership types and points toward deeper behavioral or systemic issues.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 38 (Directive Principles):** Mandates the State to secure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people and to minimize inequalities in income and status, which forms the bedrock of financial inclusion schemes like PMJDY.
- **Article 39:** Directs the state to ensure that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth, supporting the mandate for universal banking access.
- **National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (2019-2024):** A policy framework by the RBI aimed at providing a formal financial services tube to every adult, focusing on the "last mile" delivery through Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile (JAM) trinity.
- **RBI Master Circular on Customer Service:** Governs the classification of inoperative accounts and mandates banks to conduct annual reviews and contact customers of accounts that have not been operated for a year.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **Financial Inclusion:** The process of ensuring access to appropriate financial products and services needed by all sections of the society in general and vulnerable groups in particular at an affordable cost.
- **JAM Trinity:** The integration of Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar (Biometric Identity), and Mobile numbers to plug leakages in government subsidies via Direct Benefit Transfer.
- **Zero-Balance Account:** An account where the holder is not required to maintain a minimum average balance, a core feature of the Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA) under PMJDY.

Conclusion

The surge in dormant PMJDY accounts highlights that "access" to banking does not automatically translate into "usage." While the initial phase of financial inclusion was successful in terms of physical reach, the current phase faces the "utility challenge." Without creating a vibrant ecosystem of micro-insurance, micro-pension, and localized credit products, these accounts risk becoming mere statistical entries rather than tools for economic empowerment.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and growth. Success and failure analysis of financial inclusion as a tool for poverty alleviation.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Evaluation of government schemes for the vulnerable sections and the efficiency of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanisms.
- **Essay/Ethics:** The role of economic formalization in achieving social justice and the ethical responsibility of banks toward the unbanked population.

4. Proposed Disinvestment in Coal India: Fiscal and Strategic Implications

Offer for Sale (OFS): A simplified mechanism used by promoters of listed companies (including the Government) to reduce their shareholding and dilute stakes through the exchange platform, typically used for fast-track divestment.

- **Stake Divestiture Plan:** The Government of India is reportedly planning to divest approximately 3-4% of its equity in Coal India Limited (CIL) to mobilize roughly ₹10,000 crore, aiming to meet annual disinvestment targets and shore up non-tax revenue.
- **Fiscal Management:** This move serves as a vital tool for fiscal consolidation, helping the government manage the fiscal deficit by tapping into the valuation of a high-performing Maharatna Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE).
- **Market Mechanism:** The divestment is expected to follow the OFS route, often featuring a floor price at a slight discount to the prevailing market price to attract institutional and retail investors, which can lead to short-term stock price volatility.
- **Energy Transition Context:** While the government is divesting financial stake, Coal India remains a strategic asset as the backbone of India's energy security, producing over 80% of the nation's domestic coal output.
- **Minimum Public Shareholding (MPS):** Periodic stake sales in PSU giants like CIL also help the government move closer to the SEBI-mandated 25% minimum public shareholding requirement for listed entities.
- **Impact on Maharatna Status:** Strategic disinvestment of a minor stake does not alter the Maharatna status or operational autonomy of the entity, as the government continues to maintain a majority controlling interest.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 266:** Deals with the Consolidated Fund of India, where the proceeds from disinvestment are credited before being utilized for various social and infrastructure projects.
- **Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM):** Operating under the Ministry of Finance, DIPAM is the nodal agency empowered to manage the government's investments in CPSEs and oversee the disinvestment process.
- **SEBI (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations:** Governs the technicalities of the OFS mechanism to ensure transparency, fair price discovery, and protection of minority shareholders.



- **Public Asset Management Policy:** The "New PSE Policy" (2021) classifies coal as a 'Strategic Sector', where the government intends to maintain a bare minimum presence while allowing for partial disinvestment to improve market discipline.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **Disinvestment:** The action of a government selling or liquidating an asset or subsidiary. It is often referred to as "divestiture" or "minority stake sale."
- **Maharatna CPSE:** A status granted to top-performing PSUs that allows them to make independent investments up to ₹5,000 crore in a project without seeking government approval.
- **Non-Tax Revenue:** Revenue earned by the government from sources other than taxes, such as dividends from PSUs, interest receipts, and disinvestment proceeds.

Conclusion

The proposed stake sale in Coal India underscores the government's balanced approach to asset monetization—extracting financial value without compromising state control over a sector critical to national energy security. By utilizing the OFS route, the government ensures a swift and transparent transaction that aligns with broader fiscal targets. However, long-term success will depend on maintaining the profitability of the coal sector amidst a global shift toward renewable energy.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Mobilization of resources, government budgeting, and the role of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) in the Indian economy.
- **GS Paper III (Energy):** Strategic importance of coal in India's energy mix and the transition toward a greener economy.
- **Prelims Context:** Identifying the difference between strategic disinvestment and minority stake sale, the role of DIPAM, and the criteria for Maharatna status.

5. ASEAN Summit 2026: Navigating Energy Security Amid Global Crises

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations): A regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten Southeast Asian states (plus Timor-Leste as an observer/member-elect) which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, and socio-economic integration.

- **Geopolitical Spillover Effects:** The 2026 ASEAN Summit in the Philippines is being held under the shadow of the West Asia crisis, highlighting how distant conflicts directly threaten the economic stability of Southeast Asian nations through disrupted supply chains.
- **Energy Vulnerability:** The summit's primary focus is the acute energy crisis facing fuel-import-dependent economies in the region. Leaders are seeking collective strategies to mitigate the impact of volatile global oil and gas prices.
- **Food-Energy Nexus:** High energy costs are inextricably linked to food security in the region, as increased transport and fertilizer costs threaten the affordability of staples, necessitating a coordinated regional response.
- **Diversification Mandate:** There is an urgent push within the bloc to accelerate the transition to renewable energy sources to reduce the strategic dependency on external fossil fuel suppliers located in conflict-prone zones.



- **Strategic Autonomy:** The summit emphasizes "ASEAN Centrality," aiming to ensure that the bloc remains a non-aligned, cohesive force capable of protecting its members' interests amidst the intensifying global "polycrisis."
- **ASEAN+3 and Beyond:** The meetings serve as a platform for dialogue with external partners (including China, Japan, and South Korea) to establish emergency energy reserves and currency swap arrangements to stabilize regional markets.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **ASEAN Charter (2008):** The legally binding document that provides the legal status and institutional framework for ASEAN. It codifies the norms of non-interference and consensus-based decision-making (the "ASEAN Way").
- **Article 51 of the UN Charter:** ASEAN members frequently invoke the right to collective self-defense and regional cooperation within the framework of international law to maintain regional peace.
- **ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (APAEC) 2016-2025:** A key policy document guiding the region toward energy connectivity and market integration, currently being reviewed to address the 2026 crisis.
- **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):** The world's largest free trade agreement involving ASEAN members, which includes provisions for trade facilitation that are crucial during global supply shocks.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **ASEAN Centrality:** The notion that ASEAN must be the dominant "driver" and institutional hub for regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.
- **West Asia Crisis:** A term referring to the geopolitical instability in the Middle East, which acts as the primary source of energy imports for most ASEAN countries.
- **Polycrisis:** A situation where multiple global emergencies (energy, food, climate, and geopolitical) occur simultaneously and are deeply interconnected.

Conclusion

The 2026 ASEAN Summit underscores the reality that regional stability is no longer isolated from global shocks. While the "ASEAN Way" of consensus has maintained peace within the bloc, the current energy and food crises demand more proactive, integrated economic policies. The success of this summit will be measured by the bloc's ability to move beyond rhetoric and establish concrete mechanisms for energy sharing and supply chain resilience.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Regional and global groupings involving India and/or affecting India's interests. ASEAN is a cornerstone of India's "Act East Policy."
- **GS Paper III (Economy/Energy):** Energy security, infrastructure, and the impact of global price volatility on developing economies.



- **Prelims Context:** Member states of ASEAN, the significance of the Philippines as the host, and the objectives of the ASEAN Power Grid (APG) and Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline (TAGP).

6. Standardization of State GDP: New Uniform Norms and Base Year 2022-23

Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP): The total value of all finished goods and services produced within the geographical boundaries of a state during a specific period, serving as a key indicator of a state's economic health and size.

- **Uniform Measurement Framework:** The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has issued mandatory guidelines to standardize the compilation of GSDP and Gross State Value Added (GSVA), ensuring that economic performance is comparable across all states and Union Territories.
- **Base Year Revision:** In alignment with the updated National Accounts, the base year for GSDP calculation has been shifted from 2011-12 to 2022-23 to better reflect the current structural changes in the economy, particularly in the digital and service sectors.
- **Enhanced Data Integration:** The new norms mandate the use of modern data sources, including GST records, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) database, to minimize "statistical discrepancies" and improve the reliability of regional accounts.
- **Onboarding of Excluded UTs:** For the first time, concerted efforts are being made to onboard Lakshadweep and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu (DNH&DD) into the formal GSDP compilation process, ensuring 100% geographical coverage of India's economic mapping.
- **Fiscal Federalism Implications:** Standardized GSDP figures are critical for the Finance Commission's tax devolution formulas and the Department of Expenditure's determination of borrowing limits for states under the FRBM framework.
- **Improved Deflation Strategy:** The guidelines introduce a "Double Deflation" method (adjusting both input and output for price changes) for the manufacturing sector, replacing older, less accurate estimation techniques to provide a more realistic picture of constant-price growth.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 280:** The Finance Commission relies on GSDP data to assess the "fiscal capacity" of states when recommending the horizontal distribution of central taxes.
- **Article 293:** Empowers the Central Government to set borrowing limits for states; these limits are typically calculated as a percentage (e.g., 3-3.5%) of a state's GSDP.
- **Collection of Statistics Act, 2008:** Provides the legal backbone for MoSPI and state agencies to collect the socio-economic data required for GDP and GSDP estimations.
- **Entry 94 (Union List):** The Seventh Schedule gives the Union the power to conduct inquiries, surveys, and collect statistics for the purpose of any of the matters in the list, ensuring central oversight over national accounting standards.



Key Terms for UPSC

- **Base Year:** A specific year used as a benchmark for measuring real growth by eliminating the effects of inflation. It must be a "normal" year free from major economic shocks.
- **GSVA (Gross State Value Added):** Defined as GSDP minus net taxes on products. It provides a picture of the economic activity from the supply side (producer's perspective).
- **Benchmark-Indicator Methodology:** A method where estimates for a benchmark year are extrapolated using high-frequency indicators (like power consumption or vehicle sales) to estimate current growth.

Conclusion: The shift to a 2022-23 base year and uniform GSDP guidelines marks a significant upgrade in India's statistical architecture. By moving away from the outdated 2011-12 series, the government is ensuring that fiscal policy and resource allocation are based on the post-pandemic economic reality. While this improves transparency, the challenge remains for states with lower administrative capacity to meet these high-frequency data integration standards.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, and growth. Concepts of GDP/GSDP and national income accounting.
- **GS Paper II (Polity/Governance):** Fiscal federalism, the role of the Finance Commission, and center-state relations regarding financial autonomy and borrowing limits.
- **Prelims Context:** Identification of the new base year (2022-23), the nodal ministry (MoSPI), and the role of the Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics (ACNAS).

7. Tuberculosis Elimination in India: Intensive Screening and Tech-driven Interventions

Active Case Finding (ACF): A proactive systematic screening approach to identify people with suspected TB in a predetermined target group, rather than waiting for them to present themselves to a healthcare facility with symptoms.

- **Intensified Screening Drive:** Delhi has detected over 12,000 TB cases in just six weeks through the 'TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan 2.0', showcasing the efficacy of door-to-door screening in slums, high-risk neighborhoods, and congregate settings.
- **Technological Integration:** A critical shift in strategy involves the mass deployment of handheld X-ray machines, which allow health workers to identify asymptomatic or early-stage infections in the field far more rapidly than traditional microbiological tests alone.
- **Targeting Asymptomatic Transmission:** The campaign focuses on "missing cases"—individuals who are infected but do not yet show visible symptoms—to break the chain of transmission in high-density areas like JJ colonies, prisons, and shelter homes.
- **Demographic Insights:** Official data reveals a significant burden across age groups, with roughly 11% of notified patients being pediatric cases (children), and a nearly balanced gender distribution (52.6% male, 47.3% female), emphasizing the universal risk.
- **Public Health Challenges:** Despite intensified efforts, experts highlight systemic gaps, including the inadequate involvement of the private healthcare sector in case notification and the lingering impact of the pandemic on the 2025 elimination timeline.



- **Institutionalization of Care:** The 100-day campaign interventions are now being integrated into the routine public health system, ensuring that high-risk screening and portable diagnostics remain permanent fixtures of the urban health model.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 21:** The right to health is an integral part of the Right to Life; the state is constitutionally obligated to provide effective disease control and public health infrastructure.
- **Article 47 (DPSP):** Directs the State to regard the improvement of public health as among its primary duties, providing the ethical mandate for the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP).
- **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:** Provides the legal framework for the government to take special measures and prescribe regulations to prevent the outbreak or spread of dangerous epidemic diseases.
- **Notification Mandate (2012):** It is legally mandatory for all healthcare providers (private and public) to notify TB cases to the local health authority (Nikshay portal), failing which can lead to legal penalties under Section 269 and 270 of the IPC.



Key Terms for UPSC

- **Ni-kshay Portal:** The web-enabled patient management system for TB control under the NTEP that facilitates tracking of notifications and treatment adherence.
- **Latent TB Infection (LTBI):** A state of persistent immune response to stimulation by Mycobacterium tuberculosis antigens without evidence of clinically manifested active TB.
- **Congregate Settings:** High-risk environments where people live in close proximity for extended periods, such as prisons, homeless shelters, and old age homes, where TB spreads rapidly.

Conclusion

The detection of a high volume of cases in a short window underscores that while TB remains a persistent threat, the transition from passive to active screening is a game-changer. The use of portable technology like handheld X-rays bridges the "diagnostic gap" in urban slums. However, achieving true elimination will require a multi-sectoral approach that seamlessly integrates private practitioners and addresses the social determinants of health, such as malnutrition and overcrowded housing.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (Social Justice/Health):** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
- **GS Paper III (S&T):** Application of technology (Portable X-rays, AI-based screening) in public health management.
- **Prelims Context:** National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) targets, Ni-kshay Poshan Yojana (Direct Benefit Transfer for nutrition), and the biological characteristics of Mycobacterium tuberculosis.



8. India-Bangladesh Relations: Migration, Repatriation, and Water Diplomacy

Repatriation: The process of returning a person—voluntarily or forcibly—to their place of origin or citizenship. In the bilateral context, it involves a rigorous nationality verification process by the home country (Bangladesh) before India can deport illegal immigrants.

- **Repatriation Deadlock:** India has officially urged Dhaka to expedite the nationality verification of over 2,862 pending cases, some of which have been stalled for over five years, to ensure the smooth return of illegal foreign nationals.
- **The 'Push-In' Controversy:** Bangladesh has expressed concerns over potential "push-in" incidents (unilateral deportation) following a significant political shift in West Bengal, whereas India maintains that all returns must follow established bilateral arrangements and domestic laws.
- **Political Shift in Border States:** With the BJP securing a victory in West Bengal on a platform highlighting illegal immigration, the internal political pressure on the Union government to address demographic concerns in border districts has intensified.
- **Teesta Water Dispute:** The long-pending Teesta water-sharing pact remains a central diplomatic hurdle; however, the change in the West Bengal state government may remove the decade-long provincial opposition that previously stalled the treaty.
- **Transboundary Water Cooperation:** Beyond the Teesta, both nations share 54 transboundary rivers, necessitating a robust institutional framework like the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) to manage water scarcity and flood control affecting millions on both sides.
- **Bilateral Equilibrium:** The diplomatic challenge lies in balancing the "neighborhood first" policy with sensitive domestic issues like deportation and water rights, which are critical for maintaining a stable and secure eastern frontier.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 253:** Empowers the Parliament to make laws for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country; this is the basis for the Union's authority over the Teesta pact despite water being a State subject.
- **The Foreigners Act, 1946:** Grants the Central Government the absolute power to deport illegal foreign nationals. It places the burden of proof on the individual to prove they are not a foreigner.
- **Entry 17 (Union List):** Specifically covers "Citizenship, naturalization, and aliens," giving the Union government exclusive jurisdiction over immigration and deportation matters.
- **The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920:** Regulates the entry of persons into India and mandates valid travel documents, forming the legal basis for identifying "illegal" entrants.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **Teesta River:** A tributary of the Brahmaputra (known as Jamuna in Bangladesh), flowing through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh. It is vital for the lean-season irrigation of North Bengal and the Rangpur region.



- **Nationality Verification:** A sovereign process where the destination country (Dhaka) confirms the citizenship status of a person based on records before accepting them back.
- **Neighborhood First Policy:** India's core foreign policy priority of building friendly and mutually beneficial ties with its immediate neighbors.

Conclusion

The evolving political landscape in India's border states has brought the dual issues of illegal migration and river-sharing to the forefront of the bilateral agenda. While the potential resolution of the Teesta deadlock offers a significant diplomatic opening, the friction over repatriation requires a high degree of mutual trust. Sustained engagement through institutional mechanisms rather than unilateral actions will be key to ensuring that these issues do not destabilize the otherwise robust strategic partnership between New Delhi and Dhaka.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** India and its neighborhood relations. Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Issues relating to the management of international borders and the impact of migration on domestic politics.
- **GS Paper I (Geography):** Inter-state and transboundary water disputes and the physical geography of the Brahmaputra river system.

9. Conflict Between Development and Conservation: The Kalai-II Hydrel Project

Run-of-the-river Project: A type of hydroelectric scheme where little or no water storage is provided. The generation of electricity depends on the natural flow of the river, making it theoretically less disruptive to local ecology than large reservoir-based dams.

- **Infrastructure Overview:** The 1,200 MW Kalai-II hydroelectric project, valued at over ₹14,000 crore, is proposed on the Lohit River in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district. It involves a 128.5 m concrete gravity dam and necessitates the diversion of 869.35 hectares of forest land.
- **Biodiversity Omission:** Environmentalists have flagged a critical omission in the project proposal—the failure to mention the habitat of the White-Bellied Heron. Despite documented sightings of this "Critically Endangered" bird in the Lohit basin, the site inspection report claimed no rare flora or fauna were present.
- **Critically Endangered Status:** The White-Bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) is the world's second-largest heron, with a global population estimated at fewer than 60 individuals. It is a Schedule-I species, granted the highest level of legal protection in India.
- **Habitat Sensitivity:** This species is strictly dependent on free-flowing, undisturbed Himalayan riverine ecosystems and rapids for feeding. Hydroelectric dams pose an existential threat by altering river flow, fragmenting habitats, and reducing fish availability.
- **Inter-State Compensatory Afforestation:** Due to Arunachal Pradesh already having over two-thirds of its area under forest cover, the compensatory afforestation (CA) for this project is proposed in Madhya Pradesh, highlighting a complex logistical and ecological trade-off in forest management.
- **Regulatory Clearance Status:** While the project received a recommendation for environmental clearance in late 2025, it is currently under appraisal by the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) for the final diversion of forest land.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972:** As a Schedule-I species, any harm to the White-Bellied Heron or its habitat attracts severe legal penalties. The omission of its presence in official reports raises questions regarding the validity of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** Requires prior central government approval for the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) acts as the apex body advising on these clearances.
- **Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Act, 2016:** Governs the utilization of funds (CAMPA) collected from user agencies to offset the loss of forest cover. The Act allows for CA in other states if the home state lacks suitable non-forest land.
- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.



Key Terms for UPSC

- **White-Bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*):** A large, elusive heron found in India, Bhutan, and Myanmar. It serves as a bio-indicator of a healthy, free-flowing river ecosystem.
- **Lohit River:** A major left-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra, originating in Tibet and flowing through the Mishmi Hills of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Forest Advisory Committee (FAC):** A statutory body under the MoEFCC that reviews proposals for the diversion of forest land for large-scale industrial or infrastructure projects.

Conclusion: The Kalai-II project highlights the recurring tension between India's energy security goals and its biodiversity commitments. While large-scale hydel projects are essential for a green energy transition, the omission of a "Critically Endangered" species from impact assessments undermines the integrity of the clearance process. Protecting the White-Bellied Heron is not merely a conservation choice but a legal requirement that necessitates river-sensitive engineering and rigorous environmental oversight.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper III (Environment):** Biodiversity conservation, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, and the conflict between development and ecology.
- **GS Paper III (Energy):** Role of hydroelectric power in India's renewable energy mix and the strategic importance of the Lohit river basin.
- **Prelims Context:** Identifying the conservation status of the White-Bellied Heron, the geography of the Lohit river, and the functions of the FAC and CAMPA.

10. Civilizational Framing vs. Institutional Openness in Global Politics

Civilizational Identity: A framework that interprets global affairs through the lens of shared cultural, religious, or historical heritage (e.g., "Western Civilization") rather than purely through the national interests or ideological alignments of individual states.



- **Shift in Global Rhetoric:** Modern global politics is increasingly being framed in civilizational terms by major powers, moving away from the post-Cold War language of universal liberal values and rules-based power dynamics toward "identity-based" competition.
- **The 'Clash of Civilizations' Echo:** This trend reflects Samuel Huntington's 1990s thesis, which predicted that cultural and religious fault lines would become the primary source of global conflict, replacing the ideological struggles of the 20th century.
- **Openness as a Strategic Asset:** Historically, the "Western advantage" has not been based on cultural homogeneity but on institutional openness—the capacity to attract global talent, capital, and innovation irrespective of civilizational origins.
- **Innovation and AI Frontier:** Modern sectors like Artificial Intelligence and biotechnology rely on globally distributed production systems and international research networks (e.g., NVIDIA, OpenAI), which are threatened by narrow civilizational silos.
- **Demographic and Economic Necessity:** For many advanced economies, including India's partners in the West, immigration and the flow of human capital are economic imperatives required to counter aging populations and sustain fiscal growth.
- **The Risk of Identity over Capability:** Prioritizing "civilizational purity" over performance risks misdiagnosing a nation's strength, potentially weakening the very institutional resilience and adaptability that drive modern national power.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 51 (DPSP):** Directs the State to promote international peace and security and maintain just and honorable relations between nations; it underscores India's commitment to international law over narrow parochial interests.
- **Article 253:** Grants Parliament the power to make laws for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with other countries, providing the legal basis for India's engagement in the global rules-based order.
- **Seventh Schedule (Entry 10-14):** Places foreign affairs, including diplomatic representation and entering into treaties, exclusively under the Union List, centralizing the response to global civilizational narratives.
- **Passive/Active Integration Laws:** While India does not have a formal "Refugee Law," its approach to the diaspora (OCI/PIO cards) and foreign talent (Specialized Visas) reflects a legal balancing act between national security and global openness.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **Samuel Huntington's Thesis:** The argument that in the post-Cold War world, the primary axis of conflict will be along cultural lines (The Clash of Civilizations).
- **Institutional Resilience:** The ability of a country's legal, political, and social systems to absorb diversity and adapt to change without collapsing or losing core functional efficiency.



- **Global Innovation Ecosystems:** Interconnected networks of researchers, companies, and governments that collaborate across borders to drive technological breakthroughs.

Conclusion: The resurgence of civilizational framing offers a tempting clarity in a world of rapid change, but it risks undermining the very "openness" that fostered modern progress. For a rising power like India, which sits at the intersection of various civilizational influences, the challenge lies in maintaining institutional trust while remaining an active participant in a globally integrated world. Strategic strength in the 21st century will likely be defined not by the walls a civilization builds, but by its capacity to govern and utilize global flows of talent and ideas.

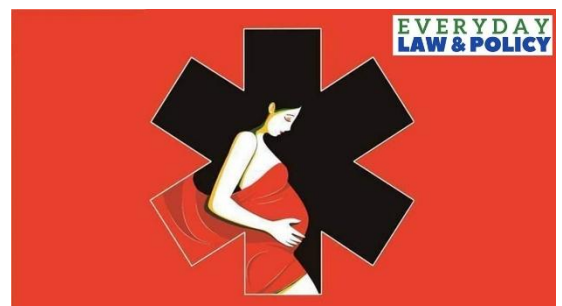
UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II (International Relations):** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests and the Indian diaspora.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries and the management of diversity.
- **Essay/Ethics:** The tension between national/cultural identity and global cooperation; the ethics of migration and openness in a competitive world.

11. Abortion Rights in India: Decisional Autonomy and Legal Barriers

Reproductive Decisional Autonomy: A constitutional principle recognized by the Supreme Court, affirming that the choice to carry a pregnancy to term or terminate it belongs solely to the pregnant person, as an extension of their right to privacy, dignity, and bodily integrity under Article 21.

- **Dual Legal Framework:** Abortion in India is regulated by a "conditional framework" consisting of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971 (as an exception) and Section 88 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which criminalizes "causing miscarriage" without a life-saving medical justification.
- **Expansion of Eligibility:** Following the 2021 Amendment and the 2022 Supreme Court ruling (*X v. Health & Family Welfare Department*), the law now allows all women—regardless of marital status—and transgender persons to access abortion, extending the gestational limit to 24 weeks for specific vulnerable categories.
- **The Provider-Centric Gap:** Despite liberal amendments, the law remains "provider-centric," meaning the final authority to grant an abortion rests with a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) or a Medical Board, which often leads to denials based on personal biases or fear of criminal prosecution.
- **Rigid Gestational Limits:** Statutory cut-offs (20/24 weeks) often ignore ground realities where victims of sexual assault or minors may discover pregnancies late due to trauma or lack of awareness, forcing many to approach Courts for special permissions.
- **Interplay of Conflicting Laws:** Mandatory reporting requirements under POCSO (for minors) and the strict regulations of the PCPNDT Act (to prevent sex selection) create a "chilling effect" for doctors, who may hesitate to provide legal services to avoid legal scrutiny.
- **Transition to Reproductive Justice:** Experts advocate for "delinking" abortion from criminal law (BNS) and moving toward a rights-based framework where early-





term abortion is available "on demand," ensuring safe and stigma-free access for all sections of society.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Section 88, BNS:** Replaces Section 312 of the IPC; it criminalizes causing miscarriage except in "good faith" to save a woman's life, carrying a punishment of up to 3 years (or 7 years if the woman is "quick with child").
- **Article 21:** Interpreted by the Supreme Court to include reproductive rights as a fundamental right, covering the "decisional autonomy" to make choices about one's body without state interference.
- **MTP (Amendment) Act, 2021:** Increased the upper limit for termination from 20 to 24 weeks for survivors of rape, minors, and women with disabilities, and mandated State-level Medical Boards for cases involving substantial fetal anomalies after 24 weeks.
- **POCSO-MTP Harmonization:** The Supreme Court (2022) ruled that RMPs are not required to disclose the identity of a minor in their mandatory report under POCSO if the minor seeks an abortion, prioritizing the minor's privacy and access to healthcare.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **Quick with Child:** A legal and medical term (historically used) referring to the stage of pregnancy where the fetus's movements are first felt by the pregnant person (approx. 16–20 weeks).
- **Medical Board:** A specialist body (including a gynecologist, pediatrician, and radiologist) designated by the State to decide on terminations beyond 24 weeks in cases of severe fetal abnormalities.
- **Chilling Effect:** A situation where legal threats or complex regulations discourage individuals (like doctors) from exercising or providing a legal right for fear of punishment.

Conclusion: While India's abortion laws are among the most progressive globally, they remain anchored in a criminal justice framework that treats abortion as an exception rather than a right. The persistent need for judicial intervention indicates that statutory limits and provider biases continue to obstruct "safe and timely" access. True reform would involve decriminalizing the act for pregnant persons and simplifying the "gatekeeping" role of medical professionals to align the law with the Supreme Court's vision of reproductive justice.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper II (Polity/Social Justice):** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Women's rights and judicial activism.
- **GS Paper II (Governance):** Analysis of the MTP Act and its interaction with other laws like POCSO and PCPNDT.
- **GS Paper IV (Ethics):** Ethical dilemmas in healthcare, professional autonomy of doctors vs. patient rights, and the morality of late-term abortions.

12. Kerala's Oil Spill Contingency Plan (OSCP): A Framework for Marine Protection

Nurdles: Small plastic pellets (approximately 5 mm) used as raw material in the manufacture of plastic products. In marine accidents, they represent a significant "hazardous cargo" threat as they are nearly impossible to recover completely and can absorb toxic chemicals, entering the food chain via marine life.



- **Genesis of the Plan:** Triggered by the 2025 shipwrecks of *MSC Elsa 3* and *MV Wan Hai 503* off the Kerala coast, the State has finalized a draft Oil Spill Contingency Plan (OSCP) to mitigate severe ecological threats posed by hazardous cargo and oil leaks.
- **Strategic Vulnerability:** Kerala's 590 km coastline is highly susceptible to disasters due to its proximity to international oil transportation routes. The OSCP aims to formalize a "response-focused" framework that was previously stalled by technical and financial hurdles since 2016.
- **Scope and Jurisdiction:** The plan covers marine oil spills occurring within **12 nautical miles (24 km)** of the coastline and extends **40 km inland** into riverine systems or up to the tidal limit, ensuring protection for both the open sea and sensitive backwater ecosystems.
- **Mapping and Sensitivity:** A core component of the OSCP is the **Environmental Sensitive Index (ESI)** mapping, which identifies vulnerable areas like fishing grounds, mangroves, and biodiversity hotspots to prioritize protection during an emergency.
- **Operational Chain of Command:** The plan establishes a clear hierarchy for crisis management, detailing the responsibilities of various departments, list of available machinery (booms, skimmers), and contact databases for rapid mobilization.
- **Regulatory Alignment:** The draft is prepared in accordance with the **National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP)** guidelines and requires vetting by an expert committee followed by final approval from the **Indian Coast Guard**.



Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife, providing the foundational duty for disaster response planning like the OSCP.
- **Article 51A (g):** Imposes a fundamental duty on citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Empowers the Central and State governments to take measures for the prevention, control, and abatement of environmental pollution, including marine spills.
- **The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958:** Contains provisions regarding the prevention of sea pollution by oil and other hazardous substances, enabling the government to take action against polluting vessels.
- **National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010:** As the judicial overseer in this case, the NGT ensures that states adhere to environmental safety norms and expedite disaster management frameworks.

Key Terms for UPSC

- **NOS-DCP (National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan):** The apex national plan promulgated by the Indian Coast Guard (the Central Coordinating Authority) to respond to oil spills in Indian waters.
- **Oil Spill Booming:** A tactical response where floating barriers (booms) are used to contain spilled oil, preventing it from spreading to sensitive shorelines or diverting it to recovery areas.



- **Net Environmental Benefit Analysis (NEBA):** A process used by response teams to compare the environmental benefits of different clean-up options against the risks, ensuring the chosen method does not cause more harm than the spill itself.

Conclusion: The formulation of the OSCP marks a critical transition for Kerala from reactive to proactive disaster management. By integrating scientific modeling with administrative accountability, the plan seeks to bridge the "preparedness gap" exposed by recent shipwrecks. Its success will depend on the periodic conduct of mock drills and the seamless coordination between the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and the Indian Coast Guard.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper III (Environment):** Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- **GS Paper III (Disaster Management):** Institutional frameworks for managing man-made disasters and marine pollution.
- **GS Paper III (Economy):** Impact of international shipping routes and maritime accidents on the blue economy and coastal livelihoods.
- **Prelims Context:** Role of the Indian Coast Guard as the Central Coordinating Authority for oil spills; the significance of ESI mapping and Nurdles in marine ecology.



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