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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

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FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 09/06/2026 (TUESDAY)



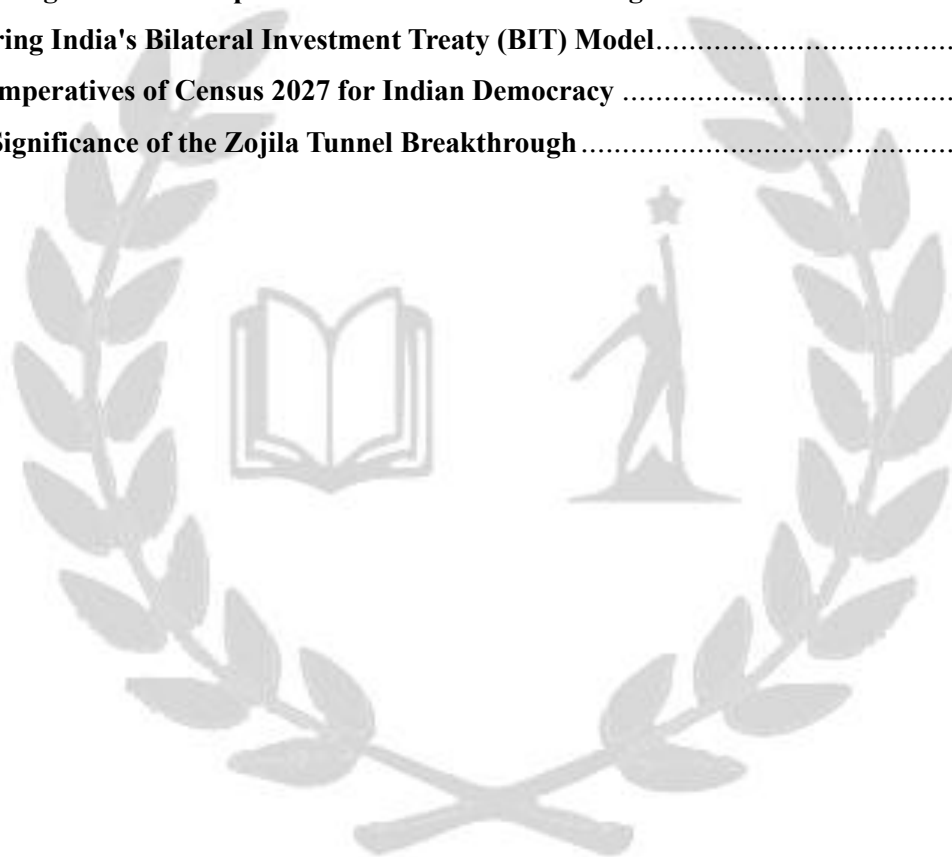
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1. India's Remodelling of Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)

The Central Government is actively remodelling its Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) framework to protect national sovereignty while maintaining a balanced investment climate.

Key Summary Points

- **Three Core Principles:** The revamped BIT model focuses on three pillars: a mandatory local remedy period, the exclusion of Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) clauses, and the total exclusion of tax-related matters from treaty purviews.
- **Exhaustion of Local Remedies:** Foreign investors must pursue domestic legal or administrative remedies for a minimum of two years before they can initiate international arbitration. The government is also considering a flexible one-year cooling window for specific countries during active bilateral negotiations.
- **Omission of MFN Clause:** By excluding the MFN clause, India prevents foreign investors from borrowing more favorable dispute resolution or substantive provisions from treaties India has signed with third-party nations.
- **Taxation Exclusion:** Tax-related provisions are strictly kept outside the scope of the BITs to prevent foreign companies from challenging domestic fiscal policies and tax demands (like retrospective taxation) in international tribunals.
- **Sovereign Protection:** The primary objective of these changes is to preserve state sovereignty over economic regulation and shield the public exchequer from predatory Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) claims.

Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT):** An agreement between two countries establishing the terms and conditions for private investments by nationals and companies of one state in another state.
- **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) Clause:** A treaty provision requiring a country to provide any concessions, privileges, or immunities granted in a trade or investment agreement to all other third parties.
- **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS):** A mechanism that allows foreign investors to sue host governments in international arbitration tribunals if they believe the host country breached treaty obligations.

Legal and Constitutional Context

- **Article 73 of the Constitution:** Extends the executive power of the Union to matters with respect to which Parliament has power to make laws, including entering into treaties.
- **Article 253 of the Constitution:** Grants Parliament exclusive power to make laws for implementing international treaties, agreements, and conventions.
- **Entry 14 (Union List):** Seventh Schedule explicitly covers "Entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing of treaties, agreements and conventions with foreign countries."





Conclusion

The calibrated shift in India's BIT model reflects a strategic transition from a pro-investor framework to a pro-state regulatory approach. By establishing local remedy windows and omitting standard MFN protections, India seeks to insulate its domestic policy space and judicial independence from external arbitral overreach, ensuring economic growth aligns seamlessly with sovereign legislative authority.

UPSC Relevance

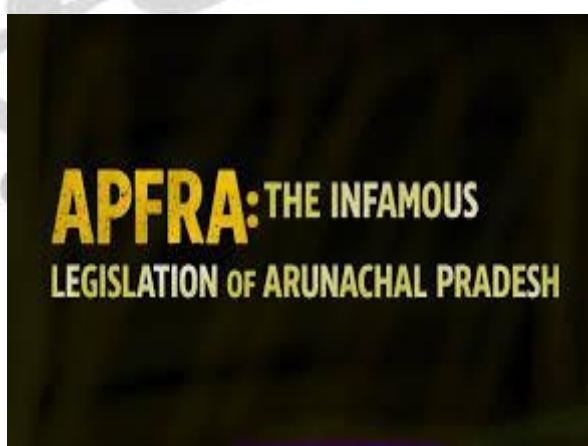
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Bilateral groupings & agreements involving India and affecting India's interests).
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy, and foreign direct investment).
- **Prelims Focus:** Core definitions of BIT, MFN, ISDS, and constitutional provisions governing international treaties (Articles 51, 73, and 253).

2. Operationalisation of Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act

The High-Powered Draft Rules Committee has submitted its recommendations to the state government, paving the way to operationalise the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (APFRA), 1978, after nearly five decades.

Key Summary Points

- **Historical Dormancy:** The APFRA was enacted by the state assembly in 1978 and received Presidential assent, but successive state governments left it largely dormant for 48 years by failing to frame its implementation rules.
- **Judicial Intervention:** The activation process was triggered by specific directions from the Itanagar Bench of the Gauhati High Court, which mandated the state government to frame and notify the statutory rules under the Act.
- **High-Powered Committee:** Headed by Justice (Retd) Brojendra Prasad Katakey, the panel conducted extensive consultative exercises with key socio-religious stakeholders to formulate the final draft recommendations.
- **Prohibition of Coercion:** The 1978 parent Act strictly prohibits any religious conversions achieved through force, fraud, or inducement, and sets specific penal punishments for violations.
- **Preservation Mandate:** The primary legislative intent behind operationalising the rules is to legally protect and preserve the indigenous faiths, traditional practices, and nature worship (such as Donyi-Polo) of the state's diverse ethnic tribes.



Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Conversion:** The formal act of renouncing one's native religious faith or tribal custom to adopt another religion.



- **Indigenous Faith:** Traditional religions, beliefs, rituals, and customs native to Arunachal communities, including Donyi-Polo, Mahayana/Theravada Buddhism, and localized forms of Vaishnavism.
- **Inducement:** The offer of any gift, cash, material benefits, or systemic privileges (pecuniary or otherwise) to tempt an individual to alter their faith.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 25(1):** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health.
- **Rev. Stainislaus v. State of MP (1977):** The Supreme Court ruled that the right to "propagate" does not include the fundamental right to convert another person, validating early state anti-conversion laws.
- **Seventh Schedule (State List - Entry 1):** "Public Order" empowers state legislatures to enact regulations governing religious conversions if they threaten local public tranquility.

Conclusion

The formal submission of the Katakay Committee report marks a critical milestone in Arunachal Pradesh's legal history. Striking a fine balance between safeguarding fragile indigenous tribal identities and ensuring individual constitutional liberties remains central to its final executive notification and implementation.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Significant provisions, Article 25, judicial review, and the federal dynamics of state-level social legislations).
- **GS Paper III:** Issues related to Internal Security and Social Diversity (Preservation of northeastern indigenous tribal cultures).

3. India's Balance of Payments: March Quarter Trends

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the Balance of Payments (BoP) data for the final quarter (Q4) of the fiscal year, highlighting shifts in India's external sector dynamics amid global economic headwinds.

Key Summary Points

- **Current Account Reversal:** India recorded a current account surplus of 0.7% of GDP (\$13.7 billion) in Q4FY26, reversing the \$13.2 billion deficit seen in the preceding quarter (Q3FY26), though lower than the 1.4% surplus in the year-ago period.
- **Full-Year Deficit Status:** For the entire fiscal year, the absolute Current Account Deficit (CAD) widened to \$25.2 billion from \$22.9 billion in the prior fiscal, remaining steady at 0.6% of GDP due to a range-bound trade deficit and lower crude oil import volumes.

Recent Trends in India's Balance of Payments (BoP)

- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):** Narrowed from 2.0% of GDP in FY23 to ~0.7% in FY24, supported by strong services exports and lower commodity prices.
- **Services Surplus:** Robust growth in IT, BFSI, and other services sustained a healthy surplus (~USD 90+ billion in FY24).
- **Merchandise Trade:** Decrease in import bill (oil, gold) and growth in exports helped improve trade balance.
- **Capital Account:** Higher FDI inflows and external commercial borrowings supported balance.
- **Foreign Exchange Reserves:** Increased to all-time high (~USD 650+ billion in 2024), enhancing external stability.
- **Rupee Stability:** Managed volatility through RBI interventions and forex inflows.



UPSC Relevance: BoP is a key component of external sector stability and is frequently asked in GS Paper III (Indian Economy) and Essay.

CIVIL SERVICES EDUPAPERS



- **Robust Remittance Inflows:** Personal transfer receipts, primarily remittances from overseas Indians, rose substantially to \$43.5 billion from \$33.9 billion year-on-year, driven partly by precautionary fund transfers during the West Asia crisis.
- **Capital Account Operations:** The financial surplus was supported by a \$20 billion buy-sell swap executed by the RBI and an increase in net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows to \$4.2 billion in Q4, up from \$0.4 billion a year earlier.
- **Portfolio Outflows and Interventions:** Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) recorded a net outflow of \$12 billion during the quarter. To mitigate resulting rupee pressure, the Centre and RBI expanded FPI access to government securities and extended tax incentives on sovereign bonds.

Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Current Account:** A component of the BoP that records a nation's net trade in goods and services, net earnings on cross-border investments, and net transfer payments like remittances.
- **Current Account Surplus:** An economic condition occurring when the value of a country's exports of goods, services, and transfers exceeds the value of its imports.
- **Buy-Sell Swap:** An open market operation tool used by the central bank to inject or suck out liquidity and manage foreign exchange volatility by simultaneously buying and selling foreign currency.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Union List - Entry 36):** Grants Parliament exclusive jurisdiction over currency, coinage, legal tender, and foreign exchange regulations.
- **Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999:** The primary statutory framework empowering the RBI to regulate foreign exchange transactions, manage the capital account, and maintain external trade stability.

Conclusion

While robust software service exports and resilient remittance cushions keep India's current account sustainable, volatile portfolio outflows pose persistent exchange rate challenges. Capital-attracting reforms initiated by the state remain vital to insulate external balances from geopolitical disruptions.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Growth, development, mobilization of resources, and balance of payments).
- **Prelims Focus:** Components of Current and Capital accounts, factors influencing FDI vs FPI, and the statutory role of FEMA and RBI in forex management.

4. Strategic Significance of the Great Nicobar Island Project

The ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Island (GNI) mega infrastructure project is positioned as a pivotal geopolitical and maritime initiative to safeguard India's long-term interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key Summary Points

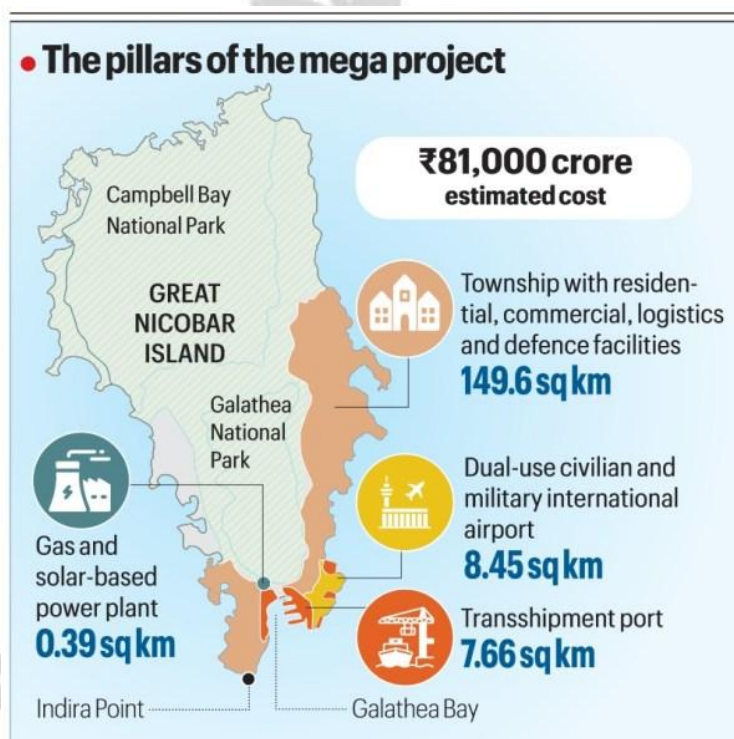
- **Geostrategic Proximity:** The project leverages Great Nicobar's critical location near major International Maritime Routes and Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs), enhancing India's maritime domain awareness and power projection.



- **Core Components:** The mega-development encompasses an International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP) at Galathea Bay, a joint-user greenfield airfield/Naval Air Station, a township, and a dedicated power plant.
- **Civil-Military Integration:** Designed explicitly with a dual-use blueprint, the deep-water port and airfield integrate civil commercial activities with military logistics, allowing defense forces to sustain operations and monitor vital choke points.
- **Reducing Transshipment Dependency:** Most of India's transshipped cargo is currently handled at foreign hubs like Colombo, Singapore, and Klang. The Galathea port aims to reduce this external economic vulnerability significantly.
- **Security vs. Ecology Debate:** While defense experts state that merely expanding existing assets like INS Baaz is insufficient for comprehensive Indo-Pacific deterrence, the massive land reclamation has drawn intense domestic scrutiny regarding its impact on pristine tribal heritages, flora, and local fauna.

Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs):** Primary maritime routes between ports used for commercial shipping, logistics, and naval operations.
- **Transshipment Port:** A transit hub where cargo or containers are unloaded from one vessel and loaded onto another to complete a journey to the final destination.
- **Dual-Use Infrastructure:** Facilities engineered to serve both civilian economic purposes and sovereign military security requirements concurrently.



Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 243ZB to 243ZG:** Special provisions regarding the administration of Union Territories, vesting executive responsibility directly with the Union Government via the Administrator.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Statutory framework governing environmental impact assessments (EIA) and clearances required for mega infrastructure projects in ecologically sensitive zones.
- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Legal mandate governing the rights and displacement rehabilitation of indigenous tribal populations (like the Shompen and Nicobarese).

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar Project reflects India's shift toward a proactive maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean. Balancing vital national security imperatives and transshipment autonomy with stringent ecological safeguards and tribal preservation remains the definitive execution challenge for the government.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Ports, Roads, Airports), Security Challenges and their Management in Border/Coastal Areas, and Environmental Impact Assessment.
- **GS Paper II:** India and its Neighborhood Relations (Strategic significance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in counterbalancing regional naval assertions).

5. SIPRI Report on Global and Regional Nuclear Stockpiles

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its annual assessment, highlighting strategic expansions, modernization of delivery systems, and shifting operational doctrines among nuclear-armed states.

Key Summary Points

- **Expansion of Indian Stockpile:** India’s total nuclear stockpile grew to approximately 190 warheads as of January 2026, up from 180 a year prior, alongside continuous development of advanced long-range delivery systems.
- **Regional Dynamics:** Pakistan's stockpile remained relatively stable at around 170 warheads, focusing primarily on accumulating fissile materials and refining its nascent nuclear triad delivery mechanisms.
- **Doctrinal Posture Shift:** Historically, India stored warheads separately from launchers during peacetime. SIPRI suggests a tactical shift toward "canisterizing" missiles and mating a small number of warheads with delivery vehicles, including deployment on its SSBN fleet for deterrence patrols.
- **Global Nuclear Landscape:** Nine countries collectively possess roughly 12,187 nuclear weapons, with about 9,745 held in active military stockpiles. Russia and the United States maintain dominant ownership over nearly all global warheads.
- **Heightened Operational Readiness:** China and India are noted to be occasionally deploying a small number of warheads on launchers during peacetime, signaling a global trend toward higher operational readiness and strategic deterrence posture.

World nuclear forces, January 2026 DEFENCEHQ THE TIMES OF INDIA

Country	Deployed warheads ^a		Stored warheads ^b		Military stockpile ^c		Total inventory ^d	
	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026
United States	1,770	1,770	1,930	1,930	3,700	3,700	5,177	5,042
Russia	1,718	1,796	2,591	2,604	4,309	4,400 ^f	5,459	5,420
United Kingdom	120	120	105	105	225	225	225	225
France	280	280	10	10	290	290	290	370
China	24	34	576	586	600	620	600	620
India	-	12	180	178	180	190	180	190
Pakistan	-	-	170	170	170	170	170	170
North Korea	-	-	50	60	50	60g	50	60g
Israel	-	-	90	90	90	90	90	90
Total	3,912	4,012	5,702	5,733	9,614	9,745	12,241	12,187



Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Canisterization:** The practice of storing nuclear-capable missiles inside sealed, controlled environmental tubes (canisters), reducing launch reaction times and enhancing mobility.
- **Nuclear Triad:** A three-pronged military force structure consisting of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), strategic bombers, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).
- **SSBN:** A hull classification symbol designating a nuclear-powered, ballistic missile-carrying submarine, providing nations with a survivable second-strike capability.



Legal and Policy Framework

- **India's Nuclear Doctrine (2003):** Formally mandates a Credible Minimum Deterrent (CMD) alongside a strict "No First Use" (NFU) policy, retaining the right to massive nuclear retaliation only if its territory or forces face a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) attack.
- **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT):** A landmark international treaty aiming to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Neither India nor Pakistan is a signatory, maintaining independent sovereign nuclear postures.
- **Weapons of Mass Destruction Act, 2005:** Indian statutory legislation providing integrated domestic control over the export and transfer of dual-use materials and technologies related to WMDs.

Conclusion

The latest SIPRI metrics underscore an evolving strategic equilibrium in Southern Asia. India's qualitative modernization, balancing of regional asymmetries, and transition toward operationalizing its naval triad signify a calibrated reinforcement of its second-strike survivability within a complex geopolitical landscape.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Internal Security (Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with cyber and defense systems).
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Bilateral, regional and global groupings involving India or affecting India's interests).
- **Prelims Focus:** Core tenets of India's 2003 Nuclear Doctrine, definition of second-strike capability, operational naval platforms (like INS Arihant class), and basic mandate of SIPRI.

Supreme Court Upholding of Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

The Supreme Court of India delivered a definitive 124-page judgment on May 27, 2026, validating the Election Commission of India's (ECI) framework for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, reinforcing the commission's sweeping regulatory powers.

Key Summary Points

- **Judicial Endorsement of ECI:** The top court rejected all contentions raised by petitioners against the SIR conducted ahead of the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections, completely accepting and further elucidating the legal arguments presented by the ECI.
- **Statutory Misalignment Claims:** Critics argue that intensive revisions under Rule 25 are bound to Section 21(2) of the RP Act 1950 and meant only when elections are not due, whereas the judgment traced the SIR to Section 21(3), which deals strictly with localized special revisions.
- **Jurisdictional Expansion on Citizenship:** The verdict empowers the ECI to autonomously determine and mandate the list of verification documents required to prove citizenship for electoral rolls, a function traditionally under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- **Massive Voter Deletions:** Implementing the compressed SIR timeline across Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala led to the deletion of millions of voters from the electoral rolls, sparking serious concerns regarding immediate and effective grievance redressal.
- **Indictment of Past Rolls:** To legally justify the massive 2025 overhaul, the apex court's judgment highlighted past "cumulative inaccuracies" and "structural deficiencies," inadvertently delivering a severe indictment of the ECI's historical voter roll management.



Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** A comprehensive, time-bound electoral verification process combining door-to-door enumeration with specialized field verification to purge and update voter lists.
- **Summary Revision:** A regular, less rigorous updating mechanism of electoral rolls that invites claims and objections based on existing data, usually preferred right before a major election due to compressed timeframes.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 324:** Confers the absolute power of superintendence, direction, and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of all elections on the ECI.
- **Articles 325 & 326:** Mandate a single general electoral roll for every constituency free from discrimination, and guarantee universal adult suffrage for every citizen aged 18 years and above.
- **Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950:** Outlines the legislative framework for the preparation and periodic revision of electoral rolls under sub-sections 21(2) (routine/general) and 21(3) (special exigencies).

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling solidifies the ECI's absolute operational autonomy under Article 324. However, by legally blurring the distinction between localized special revisions and statewide intensive overhauls, the judgment creates an executive precedent that could risk short-term voter disenfranchisement during rushed pre-election exercises.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Election Commission; Significant judgments on democratic processes).
- **Prelims Focus:** Mandate of Articles 324-327, structure of the RP Act 1950 vs RP Act 1951, and voter eligibility criteria.

6. India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) officially entered into force on June 1, 2026, marking a milestone in India's strategic integration with West Asian markets and global value chains.

Key Summary Points

- **Exponential Trade Growth:** The trade pact builds upon a robust foundation, with bilateral trade between India and Oman expanding from \$8.94 billion in FY2023-24 to \$11.18 billion in FY2025-26.
- **Unprecedented Tariff Elimination:** Oman has granted immediate duty-free market access on 98.08% of its tariff lines, which effectively covers 99.38% of Indian exports by value, up from a mere 15.33% zero-duty access under previous terms.
- **Strategic Sectoral Gains:** The deal significantly boosts Indian textile manufacturers by removing the 5% tariff, increases competitive depth in engineering and chemicals, and establishes fast-tracked regulatory approvals for Indian pharmaceuticals.



- **Protection for Sensitive Sectors:** To insulate domestic agrarian economies, India has intentionally excluded sensitive domestic sectors, including dairy, cereals, edible oils, and major agricultural commodities, from any tariff concessions.
- **Services and Professional Mobility:** The agreement unlocks bilateral services by raising quotas for intra-corporate transferees and establishing binding commitments for Indian professionals in accounting, IT, healthcare, and traditional AYUSH systems.

Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** An expansive bilateral pact that goes beyond traditional free trade agreements to lower tariffs, liberalize services, ease investment flows, and align regulatory standards.
- **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) Regime:** A status given by one country to another in international trade, ensuring equal treatment without discriminatory advantages over third nations.

Institutional & Regulatory Framework

- **Export Inspection Council (EIC):** The statutory body under India's Export (Quality Control and Inspection) Act, 1963, whose certifications Oman will now directly accept to eliminate duplicative testing.
- **National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP):** India's regulatory framework for organic certifications, fully recognized under the CEPA alongside domestic halal verification protocols to streamline customs.



Conclusion

The operationalisation of the India-Oman CEPA underscores a qualitative evolution in India's external trade policy, shifting toward holistic partnerships that synchronize goods, services, and regulatory frameworks. Leveraging Oman's strategic ports like Duqm and Salalah will allow Indian industries to establish a permanent logistical gateway to the wider GCC and East African markets.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy, and growth/export strategies).
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India and affecting India's interests).
- **Prelims Focus:** Difference between CEPA, CECA, and FTA; location of major Omani ports (Sohar, Duqm, Salalah); and key export bodies of India.

7. Supreme Court Upholding of Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

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UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Election Commission; Significant judgments on democratic processes).



- **Prelims Focus:** Mandate of Articles 324-327, structure of the RP Act 1950 vs RP Act 1951, and voter eligibility criteria.

8. Key Structural Changes in National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6)

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the preliminary fact sheets of NFHS-6 (2023-24), showcasing notable demographic gains alongside a structural contraction in its core indicators.

Key Summary Points

- **Subtractive Survey Design:** Unlike previous additive rounds, NFHS-6 presents a thinner preliminary fact sheet with 101 indicators, marking a net reduction of 30 metrics from the 131 indicators tracked in NFHS-5.
- **Exclusion of Core Metrics:** Major long-running socio-economic indicators, including anemia prevalence, infant/child mortality rates, sex ratio at birth, sanitation coverage, clean cooking fuel usage, and cancer screenings, have been systematically dropped.
- **Socio-Health Gains and Declines:** Preliminary data shows significant expansion in maternal care (four antenatal check-ups), institutional deliveries, and women's internet usage, juxtaposed against a sharp decline in exclusive breastfeeding and modern contraception usage.
- **Methodological Pivot on Anemia:** Anemia tracking was removed due to long-standing scientific debates over the finger-prick capillary blood method, which critics argue overstated prevalence; it is being shifted to a dedicated survey using venous blood collection.
- **New Digital and Financial Metrics:** The survey updated its scope by introducing 13 new indicators tracking digital literacy, mobile financial transactions, membership in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), and biological testing for Hepatitis-B and Hepatitis-C.



Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Sample Registration System (SRS):** A large-scale demographic survey in India that provides annual estimates of infant mortality, birth rates, and death rates at national and sub-national levels.
- **Biomarkers:** Objective, quantifiable biological characteristics used to accurately measure the presence or progress of a physical condition or disease state within an organism.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 47 (Directive Principles):** Directs the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and to improve public health as among its primary duties.
- **Seventh Schedule (Concurrent List - Entry 20 & 25):** Covers "Economic and social planning" and "Education, including technical education, medical education and universities," enabling federal data collection on health and family welfare.



Conclusion

The streamlining of NFHS-6 introduces vital metrics on digital financial inclusion and advanced viral biomarkers. However, the deletion of foundational decadal indicators like the sex ratio at birth and sanitation creates critical data gaps at the district level, shifting the burden of tracking signature welfare schemes onto disparate institutional mechanisms.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, and Human Resources.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, and development.
- **Prelims Focus:** Mandate of the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), administrative mechanisms of the Anaemia Mukht Bharat campaign, and the structural differences between NFHS and SRS data sets.

9. India's Evolving FTA Landscape and Core Structural Challenges

With the India-Oman agreement operationalized, India possesses 15 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) covering 27 nations. As trade negotiations expand to cover a potential 69 countries, critical structural asymmetries underscore the need for a strategic re-evaluation of India's external trade architecture.

Key Summary Points

- **Trade Deficit Asymmetry:** India's trade deficits with key FTA blocs have widened dramatically. Between 2007-09 and 202-25, the trade deficit soared by 381% with ASEAN, 318% with Japan, and 268% with South Korea, averaging an annual deficit of \$62 billion.
- **Low FTA Utilization Rates:** Indian exporters heavily underutilize FTA preferences, with utilization rates hovering at a low 20-30%. This stems from high compliance costs, complex Rules of Origin documentation, and tedious bureaucratic paperwork.
- **Tariff and Market Asymmetries:** Most of India's FTA partners are already highly open economies with low baseline Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) tariffs (near zero to 4%). Consequently, tariff cuts under FTAs offer negligible additional market edge to Indian exporters, whereas India's deep tariff cuts grant foreign exporters disproportionate access to the Indian market.
- **Exacerbated Inverted Duty Structures:** FTAs frequently trigger or worsen inverted duty anomalies. Finished products enter India at low or zero duties, while the domestic raw materials and industrial inputs required to manufacture those same goods locally are taxed at much higher rates.
- **Outbound Shifting of Manufacturing:** Distorted tariff structures diminish the domestic value addition goals of the 'Make in India' initiative. Prohibitive domestic input costs incentivize firms to relocate manufacturing hubs to partner nations like ASEAN and export finished products back to India duty-free.





Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A treaty between two or more countries to reduce or eliminate trade barriers, quotas, and tariffs on goods and services to encourage cross-border commerce.
- **Inverted Duty Structure:** A tax situation where the import duty on finished consumer products is lower than the import duty levied on the raw materials or intermediate inputs used to manufacture them.
- **Rules of Origin:** Structural criteria needed to determine the national source of a product, preventing third-party countries from routing goods through FTA partner nations to bypass standard customs duties.

Constitutional & Legislative Provisions

- **Article 246 (Union List - Entry 11):** Grants the Parliament exclusive jurisdiction over "Trade and commerce with foreign countries."
- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to enact any law for implementing international treaties, agreements, and conventions, ensuring federal compliance with global trade commitments.
- **Customs Act, 1962:** Provides the core legal framework for managing import-export duties, preventing dumping, and enforcing rules of origin guidelines negotiated under bilateral trade agreements.

Conclusion

While expanding the FTA network offers geopolitical leverage, the widening trade deficit and persistent inverted duty anomalies highlight severe underlying domestic competitiveness gaps. Enhancing trade utilization requires matching tariff concessions with systematic internal regulatory relief, streamlined compliance, and structural corrections in input taxation to prevent the hollowing out of India's manufacturing ecosystem.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy, and issues relating to planning, growth, and mobilization of resources).
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and affecting India's interests).
- **Prelims Focus:** Difference between FTAs, CECAs, and CEPAs; core mechanisms of inverted duty structures; and institutional mandate of the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR).

10. Restructuring India's Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) Model

The Government of India is remodelling its Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) framework to balance investor protections with state sovereignty, modifying stringent clauses that previously stalled international trade and investment talks.

Key Summary Points

- **Mandatory Local Remedies Window:** The Centre is introducing a minimum two-year cooling period requiring foreign investors to exhaust domestic judicial and administrative remedies before triggering international arbitration.



- **Removal of MFN Clause:** The revised model explicitly excludes the Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) provision to prevent foreign entities from borrowing more favorable arbitration terms from India's treaties with third nations.
- **Exclusion of Tax Matters:** The updated architecture completely isolates tax-related regulatory provisions from the scope of international investment disputes, insulating sovereign fiscal policy.
- **Flexible Country-Specific Tailoring:** Moving away from a rigid boilerplate template, the Centre is willing to calibrate local remedy windows down to one year based on strategic engagements with specific partner nations.
- **Protection of National Sovereignty:** The primary driver behind these structural adjustments is protecting the country's legal sovereignty from predatory external litigation while maintaining an open investment climate.

•STATUS OF FLAGSHIP PROGRAMMES



PM Suryaghar: Better performers

State/UT	Installations	Households connected	Power subsidy bill*
Gujarat	681,180	977,754	9,277
Maharashtra	604,522	942,378	23,149
UP	562,656	577,103	19,095
Kerala	252,803	258,959	382
Rajasthan	215,842	223,066	30,597

PM Suryaghar Yojana

Target	Achieved
Connection to 1 crore households	40.52 lakh
30 GW of installed capacity	12 GW

(AS ON MAY 31, 2026). SCHEME RUNS TILL MARCH 2027 SOURCE: PM SURYAGHAR PORTAL

PM-KUSUM

Target	Achieved
10 GW of decentralised solar capacity	1.2 GW
14 lakh standalone solar water pumps	10.9 lakh
Solarisation of 2.5 lakh grid pumps	15,000

SOURCE: PM-KUSUM PORTAL

PM Suryaghar: Underperformers

State/UT	Installations	Households connected	Power subsidy bill*
West Bengal	1,695	1,758	1,868
Punjab	14,470	16,641	20,693
Karnataka	19,793	30,395	27,725
Bihar	20,272	20,905	15,405
Tamil Nadu	72,988	85,743	15,701

*IN 2025-26 (IN CR)

Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT):** An agreement between two countries establishing the terms and conditions for private investments by nationals and companies of one state in another state.
- **Exhaustion of Local Remedies:** A principle in international law stipulating that a foreign investor must seek redress through the host state's domestic legal system before pursuing international remedy.
- **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) Clause:** A treaty provision prohibiting a host country from treating investors from one partner country less favorably than investors from any other third country.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Union List - Entry 14):** Confers exclusive power upon Parliament over entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing treaties.
- **Article 297:** Establishes sovereign authority over all lands, minerals, and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters, contiguous zone, or continental shelf of India.
- **Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996:** The principal statutory regime governing domestic arbitration, international commercial arbitration, and enforcement of foreign awards in India.

Conclusion

The recalibration of India's BIT architecture represents a pragmatic middle path in international economic diplomacy. By strictly isolating taxation and mandating local dispute resolution timelines, the framework safeguards domestic regulatory space without alienating foreign capital.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy (Changes in industrial policy and their effects on economic growth, mobilization of resources, and Foreign Direct Investment inflows).
- **GS Paper II:** International Relations (Bilateral groupings and agreements involving India or affecting India's sovereign interests).



- **Prelims Focus:** Differences between MFN and National Treatment principles, structure of Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), and India's model BIT provisions.

11. Strategic Imperatives of Census 2027 for Indian Democracy

The eighth decadal Census since Independence commenced on April 1, 2026, marking a critical transition in India's statistical architecture after an unprecedented fifteen-year delay. This exercise shifts from the historical focus on colonial control to a rights-based framework for inclusive governance.

Key Summary Points

- **Unprecedented Chronological Delay:** The Census is being conducted after a fifteen-year hiatus instead of the statutory ten-year cycle, driven by COVID-19 disruptions and general elections. This leaves public policy dependent on outdated 2011 parameters.
- **Two-Phase Enumeration Structure:** Phase one maps household assets, utilities, and living amenities. Phase two targets complex demographic indicators, including migration patterns, fertility dynamics, and specific caste data.
- **Historic Inclusion of Caste Data:** For the first time in post-Independence regular census history, a comprehensive caste evaluation is integrated, providing empirical baselines for affirmative action and restructuring social justice debates.
- **Anchoring Representative Democracy:** The resulting data will directly govern the upcoming delimitation of legislative constituencies and operationalize the 33% women's reservation legislative mandate.
- **Digitalization and Self-Enumeration:** The survey introduces online self-enumeration to protect individual privacy while leveraging digital data collection to minimize systemic errors and audit administrative claims.

Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Delimitation:** The statutory act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats to reflect recent demographic shifts based on the latest census.
- **Self-Enumeration:** A digital framework allowing citizens to securely log, review, and populate their family's demographic records online before physical data collectors arrive.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 246 (Union List - Entry 69):** Vests the exclusive legislative mandate of planning and executing the national census with the Parliament of India.
- **Article 82 & Article 170:** Mandate the readjustment of legislative seats allocations in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies following the completion of each census.
- **The Census Act, 1948:** Provides the statutory backbone guaranteeing absolute confidentiality of individual information, protecting personal records from judicial disclosure or misuse.

Conclusion

Census 2027 transcends simple population metrics to establish a vital baseline for welfare distribution and democratic equilibrium. By resolving data gaps and integrating caste metrics, it acts as a non-partisan mechanism for resource allocation and political representation.



UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Significant provisions, federal structure, devolution of finances via Finance Commission, and welfare schemes for vulnerable sections).
- **GS Paper I:** Social Issues (Demography, urbanization, caste dynamics, and poverty assessments).
- **Prelims Focus:** Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, historical evolution of the census since 1872, and the statutory scope of the Census Act, 1948.

12. Strategic Significance of the Zojila Tunnel Breakthrough

On June 9, 2026, India's infrastructure landscape achieved a landmark milestone with the final breakthrough blasting of the ambitious Zojila Tunnel, constructed through the mighty Himalayas at an altitude of 11,578 feet.

Key Summary Points

- **All-Weather Connectivity Mandate:** The 13.14-km-long project establishes permanent, all-weather road connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh (Kargil), bypassing the highly vulnerable and weather-dependent Zojila Pass.
- **Geostrategic Logistics Boost:** The tunnel enables the military to transport troops, heavy machinery, and vital supplies to forward bases near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) during peak winter for the first time, removing the limitation of seasonal stock accumulation.
- **Engineering and Terrain Scale:** Recognized as the world's longest single-tube bi-directional road tunnel at an altitude exceeding 11,500 feet, the 7.57-metre-high horseshoe-shaped structure was engineered across a volatile seismic zone IV landscape.
- **Unprecedented Travel Time Reduction:** Commencing operations under the executing agency Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd. (MEIL) since 2020, the ₹6,800-crore project slashes commuting times between Ganderbal in Kashmir and Drass/Kargil in Ladakh from three hours down to just 20 minutes.
- **Socio-Economic Integration:** Beyond territorial defense, the seamless transit alternative resolves the multi-month economic isolation of Ladakh, guaranteeing uninterrupted flow of commerce, essential medicines, and regional tourism.



Definitions & Key Concepts

- **Single-Tube Bi-Directional Tunnel:** A passage engineered within a single structural shell or tube that accommodates traffic flowing simultaneously in opposite directions using dedicated lanes.
- **Seismic Zone IV:** A high-damage risk classification under India's macro seismic zoning map, indicating areas prone to severe earthquake activity and structural disruption.

Legal & Institutional Framework

- **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) Act, 1988:** The primary statutory framework governing the development, maintenance, and management of national highways and strategic transit corridors.



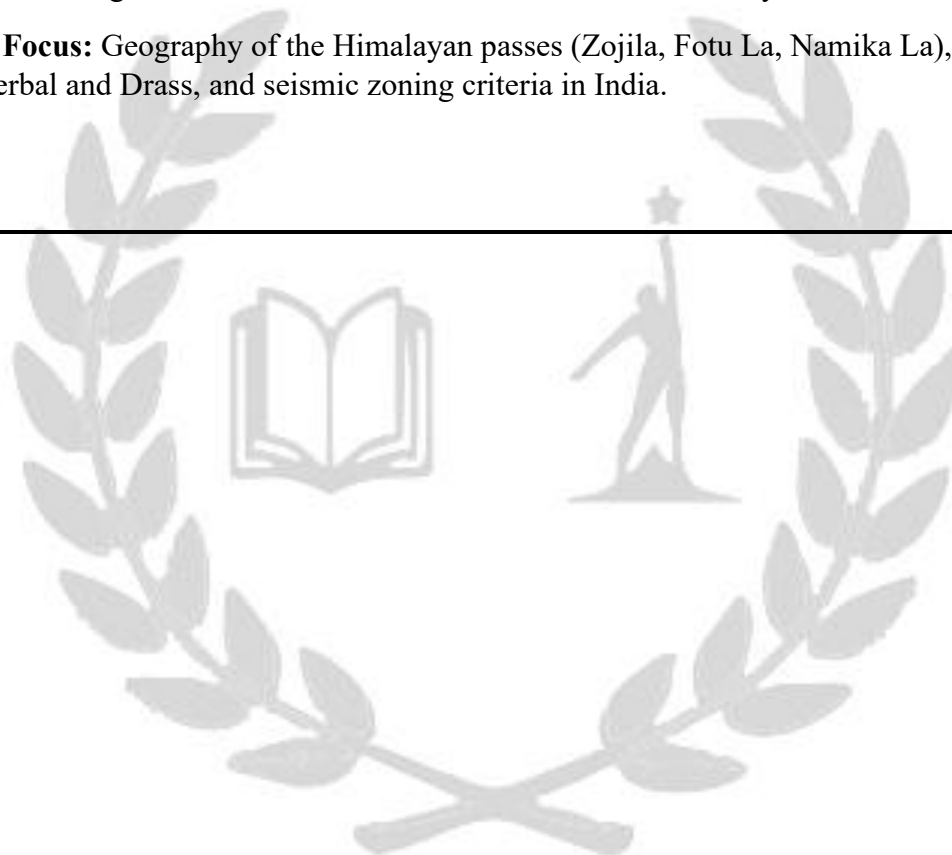
- **Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Guidelines:** While executed via corporate partnership, project planning integrates defense engineering frameworks mandated for critical border-infrastructure fortifying regional sovereignty.

Conclusion

The successful breakthrough of the Zojila Tunnel represents an engineering triumph over hostile Himalayan terrain. By bridging the structural gap between Kashmir and Ladakh, it successfully balances India's dual priorities of socio-economic development and robust territorial defense along its northern frontiers.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Roads, Tunnels), Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas, and Linkages of Frontier Infrastructure with National Security.
- **Prelims Focus:** Geography of the Himalayan passes (Zojila, Fotu La, Namika La), relative location of Ganderbal and Drass, and seismic zoning criteria in India.



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