



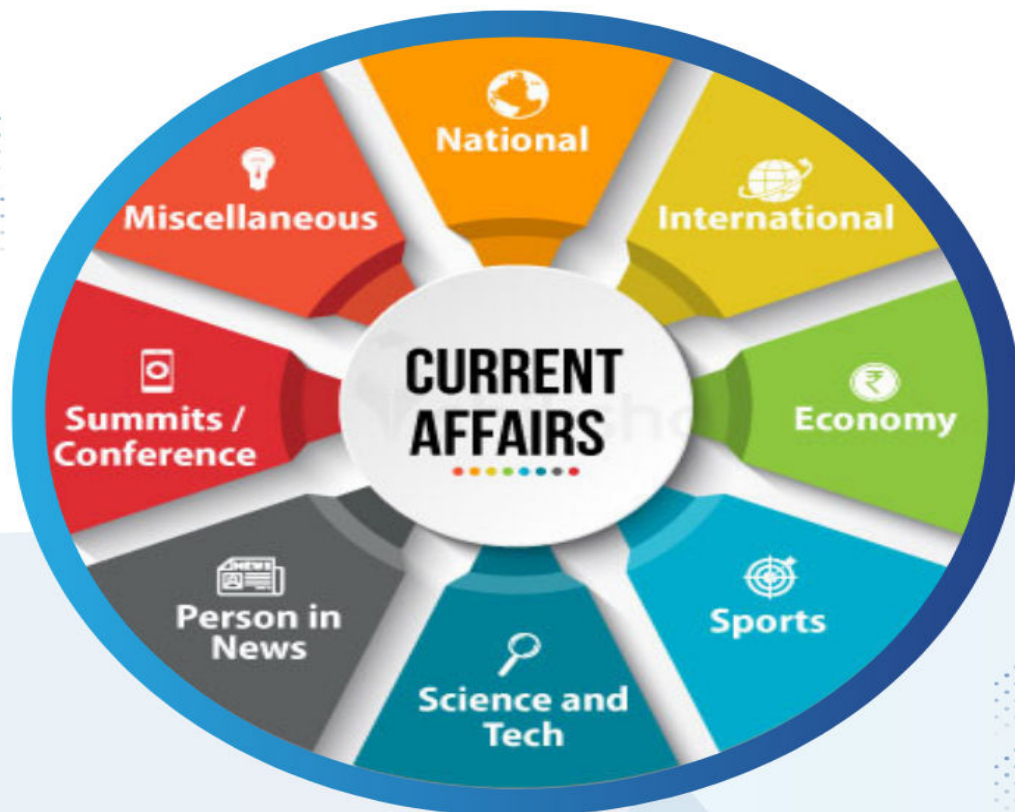
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**VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY
&
STUDY CENTRE**

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 22/06/2026 (MONDAY)



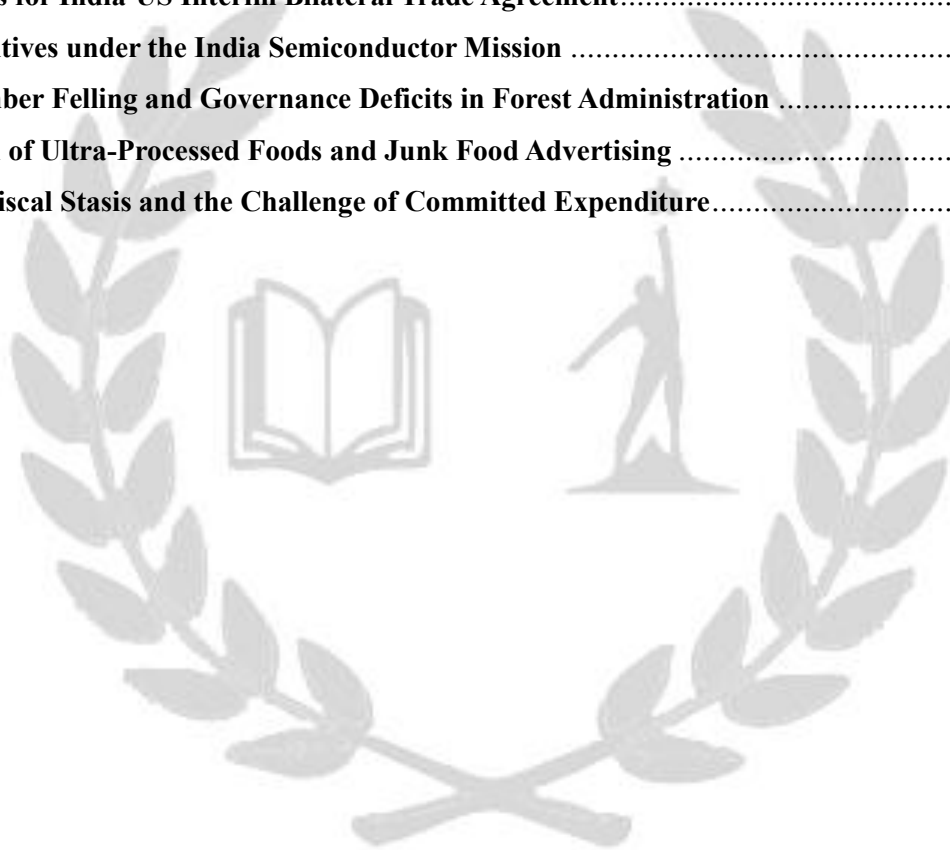
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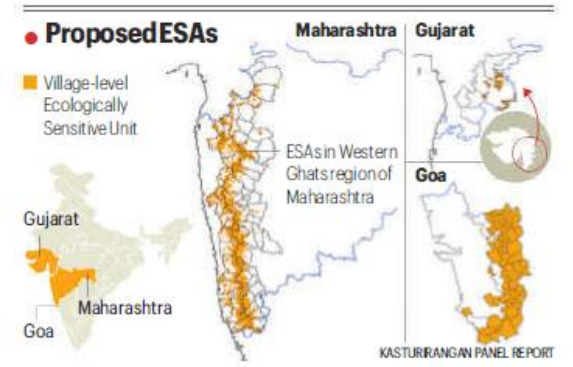


VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Notification of Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs)

- **Finalisation of Draft:** Twelve years after the initial draft notification, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is set to finalise the demarcation of ESAs in the Western Ghats for at least three states: Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa.
- **Geographical Scope:** The broader proposal encompasses over 56,000 square kilometres of land spanning six states (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu) to protect the ecological integrity of this global biodiversity hotspot.
- **The Kasturirangan Foundation:** The current demarcation exercise is heavily based on the 2013 recommendations of the High-Level Working Group chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, which succeeded the more stringent Madhav Gadgil report (Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel).
- **Federal Challenges:** While consensus has emerged in three states, unresolved disagreements persist with Kerala and Karnataka regarding the exact village-level boundaries, socioeconomic impact on local communities, and restrictions on developmental activities.
- **Prohibited Activities:** Once formally notified, high-impact activities such as mining, quarrying, setting up of highly polluting industries, and large-scale township or construction projects will be strictly banned within the designated ESAs.



Key Definitions

- **Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA):** A bio-geographic area designated by the central government where anthropogenic activities are regulated or restricted to prevent ecological degradation of fragile ecosystems.
- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** A region with significant levels of biodiversity that is under threat from human habitations and industrial development.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** Section 3(2)(v) empowers the Central Government to restrict areas in which any industries, operations, or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards.
- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Mandates that the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Imposes a duty on every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.

Conclusion

The notification of ESAs represents a crucial equilibrium between environmental sustainability and regional development. Resolving center-state friction through scientific consensus and community participation remains vital for the long-term survival of the Western Ghats ecosystem.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Geography of India (Physical features and critical geographical features under threat).



- **GS Paper II:** Federalism and center-state relations in environmental governance.
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental conservation, biodiversity, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and related legislation.

2. Scientific Analysis of Rakhigarhi Harappan Skeletons

- **Advanced Scientific Testing:** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has initiated DNA profiling, anthropological examinations, and facial reconstruction of approximately 5000-year-old skeletons unearthed at Rakhigarhi, Haryana.
- **Institutional Collaboration:** Skeletons have been dispatched to the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), Kolkata, while critical DNA samples have been forwarded to the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, for paleogenomic analysis.
- **Demographic Profile:** Preliminary assessments indicate that the five recovered skeletons belong to individuals aged between 30 and 40 years, comprising three females and two males, buried at Mound Number 7 (the ancient cemetery area).
- **Research Objectives:** The study aims to accurately reconstruct the physical features, height, ancestry, social status, and genetic lineage of Harappan inhabitants, alongside determining whether mortality was caused by specific paleopathologies or natural causes.
- **Environmental Reconstruction:** Anthropologists seek to map the palaeo-environment of the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) period to evaluate the precise climatic conditions and environmental pressures faced by ancient human populations.
- **Site Significance:** Rakhigarhi is recognized as the largest geographic site of the Harappan civilization, spanning over 350 hectares, outsized even Mohenjo-daro, making its funerary remains invaluable for mapping South Asian genetic history.

ASI unearths 8 Harappan-era skeletons, pottery offerings at Rakhigarhi



Key Definitions

- **Facial Reconstruction:** A scientific process combining anthropology, anatomy, and artistic techniques to recreate the facial appearance of an individual from their skeletal remains.
- **Paleogenomics:** The study of ancient DNA preserved in the biological remains of organisms from past historical and geological periods.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958:** Regulates archaeological excavations and protects historical sites, sculptures, and remains of national importance.
- **Article 49 (DPSP):** Obligates the State to protect every monument or place or object of artistic or historic interest declared to be of national importance from spoliation, disfigurement, or destruction.
- **Article 51A(f) (Fundamental Duties):** Prescribes that it is the duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.



Conclusion

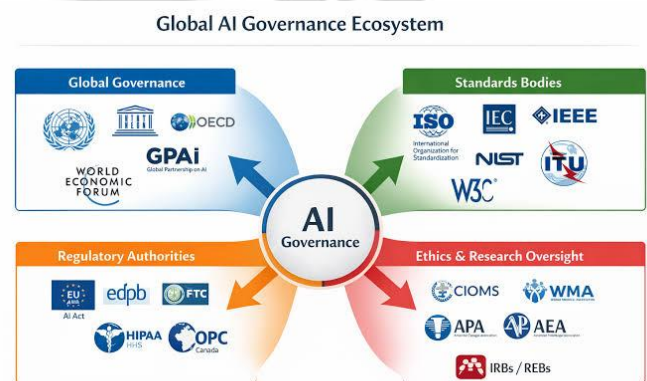
The multidisciplinary analysis of Rakhigarhi skeletal remains bridges the gap between material culture and biological history. By unveiling the genetic and physiological reality of Harappans, India strengthens its scientific framework for heritage conservation and historical historiography.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper I:** Indian Culture, Ancient Indian History (Salient features of Indus Valley Civilization, major burial practices, and technological advancements).
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology (Applications of biotechnology and genetics in archaeology and historical research).

3. Global AI Governance and Developing Nations

- **Need for Global AI Regulation:** As artificial intelligence expands rapidly, there is an urgent need for an international regulatory architecture to balance innovation with safety and prevent technological concentration among a few resourceful nations.
- **Institutional Architecture:** The United Nations General Assembly has established the Global Dialogue on AI, supported by an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, to perform periodic scientific and risk assessments without stepping directly into political policymaking.
- **Current Landscape:** Existing frameworks remain fragmented. While the European Union AI Act of 2024 stands as the most comprehensive legislative model focusing on safety and transparency, many international initiatives still rely on voluntary compliance and non-binding ethical standards.
- **Risks of Fragmentation vs. Sovereignty:** Fragmented national regulations can stiflingly slow down global innovation, whereas absolute data sovereignty demands might restrict infrastructural deployment, potentially turning non-developer countries into digital colonies.
- **The Trusted AI Commons:** Formulated during the New Delhi AI Impact Summit, this initiative acts as a repository of open-access tools, benchmarks, datasets, and deployment protocols, ensuring developing nations can test and deploy AI safely and equitably.
- **Risk of Non-Proliferation Models:** A critical concern is that international AI regulations might mirror nuclear non-proliferation treaties, effectively restricting advanced AI development to a small group of countries and shutting out developing states.



Key Definitions

- **Data Sovereignty:** The principle that digital data is subject to the laws and governance structures of the nation-state within whose geographic borders it is generated.
- **Digital Colonialism:** A modern geopolitical situation where powerful tech conglomerates or nations exploit the data, digital infrastructure, and market dependencies of developing countries without equitable resource sharing.



Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 21 of the Indian Constitution:** The right to life and personal liberty encompasses the right to privacy (as held in the K.S. Puttaswamy judgment), which is directly impacted by algorithmic bias and automated AI profiling.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** India's foundational legislative framework regulating the processing of digital personal data, ensuring individual rights while establishing obligations for data fiduciaries.
- **Article 51 (Directive Principles):** Directs the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations, providing a constitutional basis for India's participation in global AI governance forums.

Conclusion

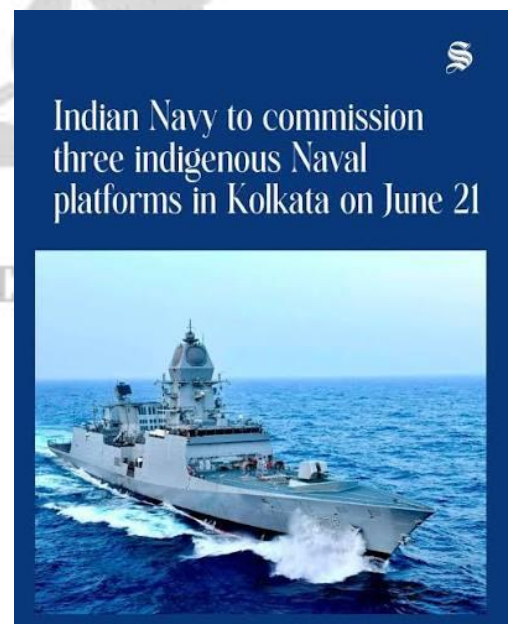
Equitable global AI governance requires moving away from exclusionary, non-proliferation-style frameworks toward inclusive platforms like the Trusted AI Commons. India's leadership in this domain is vital to ensuring that technology serves as an equalizer rather than an instrument of digital division.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India; effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests; statutory and regulatory bodies.
- **GS Paper III:** Science and Technology (Developments and their applications in everyday life, awareness in the fields of IT and Computers, and ethical challenges associated with AI).

4. Layered Induction of Three Indigenous Naval Warships

- **Historic Tri-Commissioning:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over the joint commissioning of three domestically built warships—INS Dunagiri, INS Sanshodhak, and INS Agray—at Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata, drastically expanding the Indian Navy's multi-layered operational reach.
- **INS Dunagiri (Combat Capability):** The fifth stealth frigate under Project 17A, this Nilgiri-class vessel is armed with BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles and MFSTAR sensors, specifically engineered for blue-water deep-sea multi-mission operations to counter conventional and non-conventional threats.
- **INS Sanshodhak (Maritime Domain Awareness):** The final Survey Vessel Large (SVL) under the Sandhayak-class, it is equipped with autonomous underwater vehicles and multi-beam echo sounders designed to gather precise hydrographic, oceanographic, and geospatial data to chart underwater battlefields.
- **INS Agray (Coastal Submarine Hunter):** An Arnala-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW SWC), this platform specializes in locating and neutralizing hostile submarines in noisy, cluttered shallow coastal waters, littoral zones, and naval base entry approaches using lightweight torpedoes and sonar.





- **Industrial & Strategic Signal:** Constructed entirely by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), the simultaneous induction showcases the high maturity of India's domestic shipbuilding, boasting over 75% indigenisation content and involving over 200 MSMEs.

Key Definitions

- **Blue-Water Navy:** A maritime force capable of operating across deep waters of open oceans globally, projecting power far beyond its home territorial waters.
- **Hydrographic Intelligence:** The systematic collection, analysis, and mapping of physical features of oceans, seabed topography, currents, and water depth necessary for safe naval navigation and underwater warfare.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Union List (Seventh Schedule):** Entry 1 and Entry 4 assign the exclusive legislative domain of Defense of India and Naval forces to the Parliament.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Explicitly states that protecting and improving the natural environment, including lakes and rivers, is a basic duty, aligning with the hydrographic conservation role of survey vessels.

Conclusion

The simultaneous integration of offensive, defensive, and exploratory naval vessels highlights India's transition to a layered maritime defense network. This strategic stride successfully actualizes the dual goals of net security provider status in the Indian Ocean Region and indigenous industrial self-reliance under Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Security challenges and their management in border/maritime areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Science & Technology achievements of Indians in indigenisation.

5. Constitutional Promise of Fraternity and National Integration

- **Neglected Constitutional Ideal:** While the ideals of justice, liberty, and equality have seen exhaustive jurisprudence and academic analysis, the concept of fraternity has historically remained largely peripheral in Indian socio-political discourse.
- **Core Structural Distinction:** Liberty and equality principally regularise the bilateral dynamics between the individual citizen and the state. Conversely, fraternity defines the horizontal relationship and mutual social compact among the citizens themselves.
- **Ambedkar's Vital Warning:** In his final address to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar cautioned that without fraternity, equality and liberty would remain as superficial as "coats of paint," emphasizing that a deeply fractured caste society cannot inherently function as a cohesive nation without active fraternity.





- **Social Infrastructure of Trust:** Fraternity functions as the unwritten infrastructure of a stable democracy, serving as a social stabilizer. When civic disagreement hardens into systemic hostility, institutional or legal remedies alone cannot restore democratic equilibrium.
- **Socioeconomic Consequences:** Persistent social polarization and a deficit of fraternity cause deep economic harm. Historical precedents demonstrate that prolonged communal friction and a climate of civic anxiety actively degrade the regional investment climate and lead to long-term economic deceleration.

Key Definitions

- **Fraternity:** A foundational constitutional value denoting a sense of common brotherhood, mutual respect, and psychological oneness among all citizens, ensuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation.
- **Social Capital:** The network of relationships, shared values, and mutual trust within a society that enables its members to cooperate effectively for the collective public good.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **The Preamble:** Explicitly resolves to secure to all Indian citizens fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.
- **Article 51A(e) (Fundamental Duties):** Mandates that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic, and regional or sectional diversities.
- **IPC Sections 153A, 153B, 295A, and 505:** Statutory criminal law provisions enacted to penalize hate speech, protect places of worship, and prevent actions that disrupt public tranquility or communal harmony.

Conclusion

Fraternity cannot be legislated into existence through state statutes or judicial enforcement alone; it requires an active societal commitment. Reclaiming this foundational pillar is imperative to sustain democratic stability, preserve social cohesion, and ensure equitable economic development.

UPSC Relevance

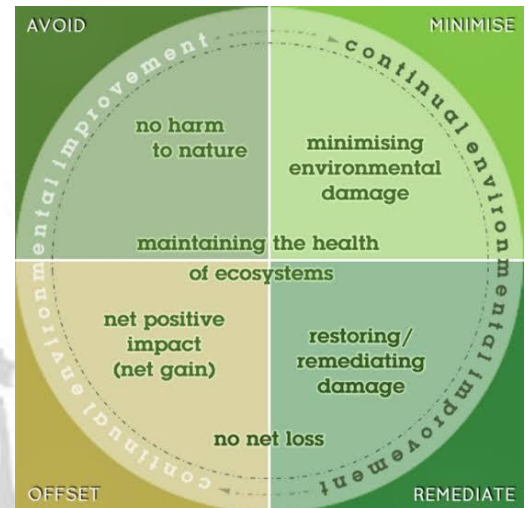
- **GS Paper I:** Indian Society (Communalism, regionalism, secularism, and challenges to social harmony).
- **GS Paper II:** Indian Constitution (Preamble, Fundamental Duties, basic structure, and the philosophical vision of the founding fathers).

6. Ecological Thresholds and Lindeman's Law in Sustainable Development

- **The Development-Conservation Dilemma:** India's rapid infrastructure expansion and green energy transitions increasingly intersect with ecologically sensitive landscapes, such as tiger reserves and wildlife corridors, necessitating a definitive macro-benchmark to quantify sustainable trade-offs.
- **Lindeman's 10% Law as a Paradigm:** In ecological systems, energy transfers through trophic levels with an efficiency where only about 10% of energy is passed to the next level. This foundational principle demonstrates that natural ecosystems possess inherent limits and can absorb only finite systemic stress before collapsing.



- **The Macroeconomic Cost:** Reliable assessments place the economic cost of environmental degradation in India at approximately 9-11% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), indicating that the country is operating right at its critical ecological threshold.
- **The Proposed 10% Regulatory Rule:** To operationalise Green GDP, the author suggests a strict threshold benchmark: if the cumulative ecological cost of developmental activities within a specific landscape exceeds a notional 10% of its total valuation (or a more conservative 5-8% in ultra-fragile corridors), it must trigger an automatic "policy pause."
- **Systemic Consequences of Breach:** Exceeding these ecological margins leads to a depletion of natural capital, manifested clearly through accelerating human-wildlife conflicts, severe fragmentation of contiguous wildlife corridors, and sudden ecosystem collapses.
- **Methodological Integration:** This threshold-based precautionary approach can be integrated directly into national Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes, strategic landscape-level planning, and standardized green accounting frameworks.



Key Definitions

- **Green GDP:** An economic growth index that adjusts a nation's standard Gross Domestic Product to account for the environmental costs, resource depletion, and ecological degradation incurred during production.
- **Ecological Threshold:** The breaking point at which a relatively small change in external conditions causes a rapid, irreversible, and disruptive change in an ecosystem's structure and functionality.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Directs the State to make continuous endeavours to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the country's forests and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Explicitly mandates that every citizen maintains a constitutional duty to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.
- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 & EIA Notification:** Provides the primary statutory mechanism for regulating industrial and infrastructure projects through mandatory environmental clearances and impact mitigation protocols.

Conclusion

Transitioning from absolute reliance on post-facto compensatory tools to a proactive, threshold-driven "policy pause" model is essential to protect India's biological security. Operationalising ecological thresholds within economic planning ensures long-term wealth creation without bankrupting the nation's natural capital.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Environmental conservation, degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), sustainable development models, and the economics of climate change.



- **GS Paper I: Indian Geography** (Distribution of key natural resources, forest ecosystems, and wildlife conservation landscapes).

7. Enactment of the SHANTI Act and Nuclear Liability Reform

- **Overarching Legislative Shift:** The President has granted assent to the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, which comprehensively repeals and replaces the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), 2010.
- **Opening to Private Capital:** Breaking the decades-old public monopoly, the Act explicitly permits private sector entities to build, own, operate, or decommission nuclear power facilities under strict central licensing, ending exclusive state control over generation.
- **Supplier Indemnity & Recourse:** A defining reform is the complete elimination of the operator's "right of recourse" against domestic and global technology suppliers for defective equipment, channeling entire civil liability directly to the plant operators.
- **Graded Liability Architecture:** The framework establishes a tiered structural cap on operator liability for nuclear incidents: ₹3,000 crore for large conventional installations, ₹1,500 crore for medium setups, and a reduced ₹100 crore for nascent Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).
- **State Underwriting Reserve:** The overall liability limit for any severe nuclear contingency is set at the rupee equivalent of 300 million Special Drawing Rights (approximately ₹3,900 crore), with the Central Government stepping in to fund damage claims exceeding operator caps via a specialized Nuclear Liability Fund.
- **Strategic Reservation:** To preserve absolute national security, critical upfront and downstream nuclear fuel-cycle operations—such as uranium-235 enrichment beyond specified thresholds, reprocessing, and spent-fuel management—remain reserved strictly under state-owned enterprises.



Key Definitions

- **Operator Liability:** A legal principle where civil liability for any localized or widespread radioactive damage is channeled exclusively to the entity licensed to run the facility.
- **Small Modular Reactor (SMR):** Advanced, factory-assembled nuclear reactors with a maximum generation capacity capped at 300 MWe per unit, offering faster deployment footprints.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Seventh Schedule (Union List):** Entry 6 vests the exclusive legislative domain over atomic energy and mineral resources necessary for its production within the Parliament.
- **Article 21 (Right to Life):** Incorporates environmental safety, public health, and right to clean surroundings, making standard emergency-adjudication commissions under the Act legally vital.

Conclusion

The SHANTI Act marks a pivotal transition towards a decentralized, market-driven civil nuclear strategy aimed at scaling India's clean energy grid. While the removal of supplier liability bridges international legal



gaps to attract foreign capital, maintaining strict regulatory vigilance through the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board remains indispensable.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Statutory, regulatory, and various quasi-judicial bodies; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure (Energy), Science and Technology (Indigenisation of technology, developments in nuclear energy, and safety regulations).

8. Negotiations for India-US Interim Bilateral Trade Agreement

- **High-Level Ministerial Talks:** US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer is visiting New Delhi for crucial discussions with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to finalize the first phase of the India-US Interim Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).
- **Framework of the Pact:** The deal builds upon a framework established in February 2026, accelerated after recent diplomatic discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Evian, France.
- **Reciprocal Tariff Adjustments:** Under the proposed terms, the US intends to reduce additional duties on Indian goods to 18% from 50%, while India will grant tariff concessions or duty-free access for a wide range of American manufactured, industrial, and agricultural products.
- **Import Commitments:** The interim framework outlines India's intent to diversify its imports by purchasing approximately \$500 billion worth of American energy, information and communication technology, coal, and agricultural goods over a five-year period.
- **India's Core Objective:** New Delhi's primary focus is securing a definitive tariff edge over competing nations in the US market, ensuring Indian exports remain highly competitive before the formal rollout of the wider trade architecture.
- **The Section 301 Challenge:** The negotiations are unfolding amidst a lingering US Section 301 investigation concerning industrial overcapacity and forced labor, with India actively seeking legal resolution and exemptions to prevent the imposition of non-tariff barriers.



Key Definitions

- **Interim Trade Agreement:** A preliminary, transitional pact signed between two nations to lower tariffs on a selective basket of goods while comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations continue.
- **Section 301 Investigation:** A statutory provision under the US Trade Act of 1974 that empowers the US President to investigate and impose retaliatory tariffs or trade sanctions against foreign nations deemed to be engaging in unfair or discriminatory trade practices.



Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Union List (Seventh Schedule):** Entry 16 of the Constitution of India vests the exclusive power regarding treaties and agreements with foreign countries, and implementing treaties, agreements, and conventions with foreign countries, entirely with the Parliament.
- **Article 253:** Empowers Parliament to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement, or convention with any other country or countries.

Conclusion

The finalization of the India-US interim trade agreement marks a major milestone in commercial diplomacy, shifting bilateral ties toward pragmatic reciprocity. While market access for American agricultural products and Section 301 probes remain complex pressure points, balancing tariff advantages with domestic manufacturing interests is vital for sustaining India's export momentum.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and international trade.

9. Fiscal Incentives under the India Semiconductor Mission

- **Enhanced Financial Outlay:** The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) plans to disburse ₹7,100 crore in fiscal incentives during FY27 to catalyze the domestic semiconductor fabrication, design, and packaging ecosystem.
- **Investment and Employment Targets:** This fiscal push is strategically projected to attract fresh commercial investments worth approximately ₹15,000 crore and directly generate around 4,700 high-skilled industrial jobs across the electronic value chain.
- **Targeted Sectoral Allocation:** The Modified Programme will support one flagship semiconductor fabrication unit (allocated ₹2,000 crore), nine specialized compound semiconductor and ATMP/OSAT facilities (allocated ₹5,000 crore), and 30 domestic design firms.
- **Fostering Intellectual Property:** Under the Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme, ₹100 crore is earmarked to empower homegrown semiconductor design startups to develop 10 critical semiconductor intellectual property (IP) cores.
- **Strategic Infrastructure Foundations:** This capital deployment builds on the broader ₹76,000-crore India Semiconductor Mission launched in December 2021, reinforcing major under-construction projects like the Tata-PSMC fab in Dholera, Gujarat, and the packaging facilities in Assam.



Key Definitions

- **Semiconductor Fabrication (Fab):** A highly specialized manufacturing plant where raw silicon wafers are processed through complex photolithographic sequences to create integrated circuits.



- **OSAT/ATMP:** Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test / Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging; the crucial downstream phase where fabricated dies are packaged and tested before market deployment.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Union List (Seventh Schedule):** Entry 52 vests the regulation and development of controlled industries in the public interest entirely within the legislative jurisdiction of the Parliament.
- **Article 301:** Guarantees freedom of trade, commerce, and intercourse across the territory of India, which is strengthened by building resilient internal supply chains in foundational technologies.

Conclusion

The strategic allocation of ₹7,100 crore for FY27 accelerates India's transition from a technology consumer to a semiconductor manufacturing hub. Strengthening the domestic chip ecosystem mitigates critical geopolitical vulnerabilities and solidifies the nation's digital sovereignty.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Infrastructure, Economics, and Science & Technology (Effects of industrial policy, indigenisation of technology, manufacturing sector growth, and electronic supply-chain resilience).

10. Illegal Timber Felling and Governance Deficits in Forest Administration

- **Severe Ecological Malpractice:** A preliminary investigation by the Flying Squad of the Forest Department revealed that 273 massive teak trees were illegally felled and sold within the territorial limits of the Chalakudy Forest Division in Kerala.
- **Severe Revenue Under-valuation:** The trees, earmarked for removal along an 18-km stretch to clear a path for the State Hill Highway, were sold to a private firm for a mere ₹8.52 lakh against an officially assessed value of ₹41.55 lakh, causing a substantial loss to the state exchequer.
- **Procedural and Regulatory Violations:** A Forest Range Officer issued a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for timber transit under the Kerala Promotion of Tree Growth in Non-Forest Areas Act, 2005. However, this statutory framework explicitly mandates that transit passes apply solely to trees legally felled by the actual landholder.
- **Vesting of Assigned Land Ownership:** Vigilance reports emphasized that trees located on government-assigned lands remain the absolute property of the State. Any authorized felling mandates that the timber be moved directly to state depots for public auction, with revenues credited to the government.
- **Institutional Administrative Deficits:** The probe highlighted a critical breakdown in administrative transparency, noting that no official files, survey numbers, land status records, or inventories of the axed timber were maintained by local forest range or social forestry divisions.
- **Accountability and Recovery Mechanisms:** The Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Vigilance) has recommended initiating formal financial recovery proceedings against errant entities and implementing stringent enforcement to prevent illegal logging on revenue and forest lands.





Key Definitions

- **Assigned Land:** Public revenue land allotted by the government to individuals or communities for specific uses (like farming or housing) under strict conditions, where rights over high-value timber frequently remain vested in the State.
- **Transit Pass (Forestry):** A mandatory statutory document issued by competent forest authorities to track, regulate, and verify the legal origin of forest produce during transportation.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Indian Forest Act, 1927 / Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023:** Provides the overarching federal legal architecture for protecting forest areas, regulating timber transit, and penalizing unauthorized logging.
- **Article 48A (DPSP):** Instructs the State to protect and improve the natural environment and safeguard the country's forests and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties):** Obligates every Indian citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.

Conclusion

The illegal logging incident in Chalakudy underscores how infrastructure execution can run parallel to regulatory evasion and institutional corruption. Redressing these vulnerabilities requires absolute administrative transparency, strict digitized tracking of timber, and a clear demarcation of state-owned natural resources during public land acquisitions.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Governance, accountability, institutional checks and balances, and administrative corruption.
- **GS Paper III:** Environmental degradation, infrastructure development versus conservation trade-offs, and internal security challenges related to resource exploitation.

11. Regulation of Ultra-Processed Foods and Junk Food Advertising

- **Pervasive Unregulated Marketing:** Despite initial administrative goals to curb advertisements for products high in fat, sugar, and sodium (HFSS), ultra-processed foods (UPFs) continue to be aggressively promoted across mainstream print, digital, and social media platforms.
- **Misleading Endorsements and Omissions:** Industrial marketing campaigns frequently deploy selective health claims (e.g., highlighting "baked" or "multigrain" attributes) and utilize high-profile celebrity endorsements, while deliberately omitting material disclosures regarding high refined carbohydrate, salt, or trans-fat compositions.
- **Severe Public Health Implications:** Rigorous medical studies, including the landmark November 2025 Lancet Series, establish a direct scientific link between rising UPF consumption and the acceleration of critical non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as childhood obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.
- **Growing Institutional and Judicial Push:** In February 2026, the Supreme Court of India emphasized that mandatory front-of-pack warning labels are essential to protect the citizen's right to health, echoing structural concerns detailed in the Economic Survey 2025-26 regarding unhealthy national dietary patterns.



- **Failure of Voluntary Industry Self-Regulation:** Global empirical evidence from jurisdictions like Chile and Mexico demonstrates that voluntary industry guidelines are structurally ineffective, highlighting the urgent need for enforceable legal prohibitions to insulate vulnerable populations, particularly children, from commercial exploitation.

Key Definitions

- **Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs):** Industrially formulated food products derived from substance extractions (e.g., fats, starches, hydrogenated oils) containing advanced chemical additives like emulsifiers, artificial flavors, and stabilizers to maximize palatability and shelf life.
- **Front-of-Pack Labelling (FOPL):** A simplified nutrition regulatory system placed on the principal display area of pre-packaged food items to provide consumers with clear, immediate diagnostic warnings about elevated levels of sugar, salt, or fats.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 21 of the Indian Constitution:** The judicial interpretation of the right to life encompasses the right to health and access to safe, unadulterated, and nutritionally transparent food options.
- **Article 47 (Directive Principles):** Explicitly mandates that the State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people, alongside the improvement of public health, as among its primary duties.
- **Consumer Protection Act, 2019:** Empowers the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to regulate and penalize false or misleading advertisements that compromise informed consumer choice.

Conclusion

Insulating the domestic food environment from aggressive UPF marketing requires transitioning from passive advisory guidelines to strict, statutory advertising bans. Comprehensive legislative amendments to advertising laws will protect national human capital, lower public health expenditure, and incentivize food corporations to pivot toward sustainable, minimally processed nutritional models.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Health.
- **GS Paper III:** Economics and regulatory frameworks (Consumer protection, food processing industry, and corporate accountability).

12. Kerala's Fiscal Stasis and the Challenge of Committed Expenditure

- **White Paper Diagnostics:** The United Democratic Front (UDF) government's white paper, 'Kerala's Fiscal Health — A Status Report', has highlighted severe treasury stress, revealing that committed expenditure pre-empts nearly 78% of the State's total revenue receipts.
- **The Structural Rigidity:** Kerala's spending on public salaries and pensions as a share of revenue receipts stands as the highest among all Indian states, creating an acute public expenditure rigidity that leaves minimal fiscal space for capital expenditure.
- **The Human Development Trade-off:** While economists point out that this massive payroll budget underpins the state's celebrated welfare model—employing a high density of teachers and healthcare professionals—it simultaneously traps the state in persistent structural revenue deficits.



- **Alternative Fiscal Metrics:** Experts suggest that evaluating committed expenditure against total revenue expenditure (where it constitutes 58-60%) rather than revenue receipts provides a more accurate diagnostic of budgetary health than using data purely for its shock value.
- **Budgetary Silence and Projections:** Despite the white paper advocating for hard political decisions like increasing the retirement age, the 2026-27 budget remained silent on expenditure compression, choosing instead to rely on an optimistic 14.15% nominal GSDP growth and a 23.8% surge in revenue receipts to lower the debt-to-GSDP ratio to 33.5%.



Rs 5.07 lakh crore debt, Rs 48,733 cr pending bills: Kerala's White Paper flags deep fiscal stress



Key Definitions

- **Committed Expenditure:** Unavoidable, non-discretionary budgetary allocations that a government is legally or contractually bound to pay, principally consisting of salaries, pensions, and interest payments on past borrowings.
- **Tax Buoyancy:** An economic indicator that measures the responsiveness of tax revenue growth relative to national or state income (GDP/GSDP) growth; a buoyancy above 1 indicates tax collection is growing faster than the economy.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 293(3):** Imposes a constitutional restriction requiring states to obtain the mandatory consent of the Central Government to raise fresh loans if there are any outstanding central dues.
- **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act:** Statutory state and central legislations that mandate targeted caps on fiscal deficits, revenue deficits, and total outstanding debt-to-GSDP ratios to preserve macro-fiscal stability.

Conclusion

Kerala's fiscal dilemma highlights the classic conflict between sustaining a high-performing social welfare architecture and maintaining structural fiscal discipline. Relying solely on revenue buoyancy without initiating long-term expenditure reforms risks exposing the state to systemic debt traps during economic downturned phases.

UPSC Relevance

- **GS Paper III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and fiscal policy; Government budgeting and federal fiscal management challenges.