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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

DATE: 29/09/2026 (TUESDAY)



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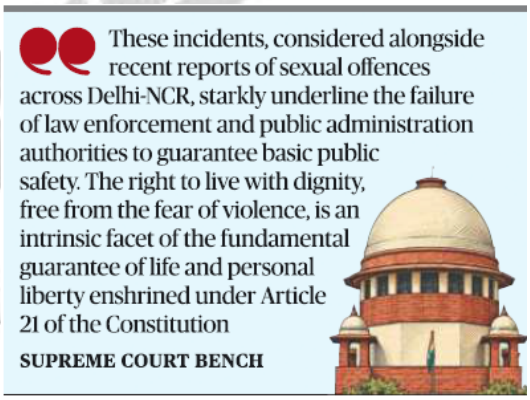
1. Supreme Court Flags Lax Enforcement on Women's Safety in Delhi-NCR

Key Highlights & Summary

- Taking suo motu cognisance of a spate of sexual assault incidents against minors and women in Delhi-NCR, a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran held that authorities have failed to guarantee basic public safety.
- The Court directed the Delhi Police to identify vulnerable pockets, step up patrolling, and audit lighting and CCTV coverage in public spaces within four weeks.
- It observed that parks, buses and Metro stations cannot become "zones of high risk" because of deficiencies such as grossly inadequate illumination and lax patrolling.
- The Bench stated that the right to live with dignity, free from fear of violence, is an intrinsic facet of the fundamental guarantee of life and personal liberty under Article 21.
- It took note of recent cases, including the rape of a 17-year-old at Astha Kunj park, the gang-rape of a minor at Swaroop Nagar, and the assault of another minor on a bus from Greater Noida to Delhi.
- The Delhi Police and other authorities must file a detailed response on measures for safety at parks, educational institutions and other areas frequented by women and children.

Essential Definitions

- Suo motu cognisance: A court's power to initiate proceedings on its own, without a formal petition, on the basis of media reports or public interest.
- Zones of high risk: Public spaces where structural lapses (poor lighting, absent patrolling, no surveillance) expose citizens, especially women and children, to a heightened threat of crime.
- Safety audit: A systematic assessment of physical infrastructure and security arrangements to identify vulnerabilities in public spaces.
- Positive obligation of the State: The duty of the State not merely to refrain from violating rights but to take active steps to protect them.



Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty, expanded through judicial interpretation to include dignity, privacy and a safe environment.
- Article 14 and Article 15(3): Equality before law, and enabling the State to make special provisions for women and children.
- Article 32 and Article 226: Constitutional remedies before the Supreme Court and High Courts for enforcement of fundamental rights.
- Article 51A(e): Fundamental duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997): Laid down guidelines against sexual harassment, recognising gender equality and dignity as fundamental rights.
- Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (post-Nirbhaya): Widened the definition of sexual offences and enhanced penalties.

- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and POCSO Act, 2012: Substantive laws on sexual offences, with POCSO specifically protecting children.
- Nirbhaya Fund: Central fund for women's safety initiatives, including Safe City projects.

Conclusion

The order underlines that safety is a State responsibility rooted in Article 21, not a favour. Strong laws alone are insufficient without effective policing, infrastructure and accountability. Time-bound audits, gender-sensitive urban planning and community participation are essential to make public spaces genuinely safe.

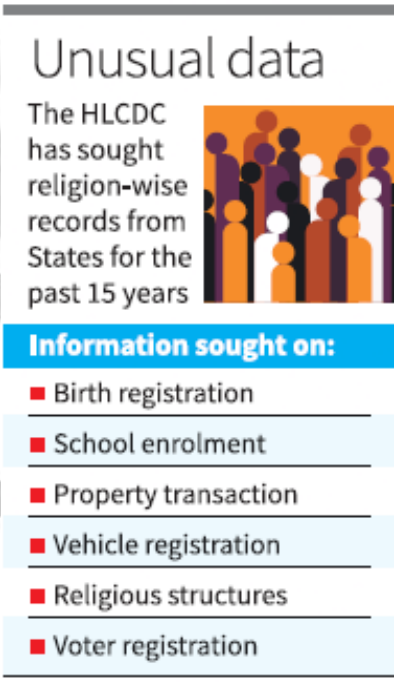
UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Article 21, suo motu powers, POCSO Act, Nirbhaya Fund, Vishaka guidelines.
- Mains GS-II: Judicial activism and overreach, government policies for vulnerable sections, police reforms and accountability.
- Mains GS-I: Issues of women's safety, violence against women and urban social challenges.
- Mains GS-IV: Ethics of public service, accountability and sensitivity towards women and children.
- Essay and Interview: Themes such as "Safe cities for women" and "Rights versus enforcement gap".

2. States Struggle to Answer Demography Panel's Religion-wise Data Queries

Key Highlights & Summary

- State governments are unable to answer most queries of the High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC), set up under the Union Home Ministry, as departments do not ordinarily maintain data on a religion-wise basis.
- The panel has sought religion-wise records for the past 15 years on birth registrations, school enrolment, vehicle registrations and property transactions.
- It has also asked for district-wise details of religious structures, unusual increases in Aadhaar registrations and voter ID registrations.
- States have been asked to collate data on Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Parsis and Buddhists across all categories.
- State officials said the set of 35 questions was difficult to answer, as the secular construct of the Constitution prohibits the collection of data under religious categories.
- The exercise raises concerns over data privacy, administrative feasibility and the possible communal profiling of citizens.



Essential Definitions

- Demographic change: Shift in the size, composition and distribution of a population, driven by fertility, mortality, migration and conversion.
- Secularism: The principle that the State maintains neutrality towards all religions and does not discriminate on grounds of faith. It is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

- Disaggregated data: Information broken down by sub-categories such as religion, gender or district, used for targeted policy design.
- Civil Registration System (CRS): Compulsory registration of births and deaths in India, which does not record religion-wise statistics in aggregate reports.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Preamble: Declares India a secular republic, inserted through the 42nd Amendment, 1976.
- Articles 25 to 28: Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion; State has no official religion.
- Article 15(1): Prohibits discrimination by the State on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 14: Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
- Article 21: Right to privacy recognised in K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), which affects collection and use of personal data.
- S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994): Secularism held to be a Basic Structure feature.
- Census Act, 1948 and Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969: Statutory basis for population and vital statistics.
- Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023: Governs processing of digital personal data, including sensitive information.

Conclusion

Data is essential for evidence-based policy, but collecting it along religious lines requires clear purpose, safeguards and transparency. The State must balance legitimate demographic analysis against constitutional secularism, privacy and social harmony, ensuring data is never used for profiling or discrimination.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Secularism, Articles 25 to 28, Census Act, HLCDC, Puttaswamy judgment, DPDP Act.
- Mains GS-I: Population and associated issues, communalism, diversity of India.
- Mains GS-II: Federal issues between Union and States, fundamental rights, data governance and privacy.
- Mains GS-IV: Ethics in public administration, objectivity and non-partisanship.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Data versus dignity" and "Secularism in a diverse democracy".

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3. CAG Flags Irregularities in Use of DMF Funds in Odisha

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has found irregularities in the utilisation of District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds, meant to benefit people and areas affected by mining, with funds spent without adherence to rules and ineligible utilisation.
- The report is a performance audit of the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY), including the functioning of DMFs in Odisha, for the year ended March 2024.

- The CAG noted that identification of directly and indirectly affected people and areas was delayed by mineral-bearing districts.
- Under Rule 10(D) of the Odisha DMF Rules, 2015, not more than 40% of funds may be used in indirectly affected areas.
- Keonjhar and Sundargarh showed spending of 30.67% and 22.67% under a new category called "common affected areas". Once this is added, spending in indirectly affected areas rose beyond the limit to 45.68% in Keonjhar and 41.10% in Sundargarh. Jajpur spent 19.86% under the same head.
- Projects worth ₹4,541.66 crore were sanctioned in "common affected areas" across three DMFs, and ₹2,578.73 crore was spent without any provision in the rules. The CAG said the new category only helped accommodate ineligible utilisation within prescribed limits.

Essential Definitions

- District Mineral Foundation (DMF): A non-profit trust set up in mining districts to work for the interest and benefit of persons and areas affected by mining-related operations.
- Directly affected areas: Areas where mining operations, such as blasting, transport and dumping, cause direct impact on people and the environment.
- Indirectly affected areas: Areas that are not directly impacted by mining but suffer its wider social and economic effects.



CAG Flags Odisha DMF Fund Diversion and Irregularities

- Performance audit: An audit by the CAG assessing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of a programme, beyond mere financial compliance.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 148 to 151: Constitutional provisions on the CAG's appointment, duties and audit reports, which are laid before Parliament and State Legislatures.
- Article 149: Duties and powers of the CAG in relation to accounts of the Union and States.
- Section 9B, Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957: Introduced by the 2015 Amendment, mandates establishment of DMFs in mining districts.
- PMKKKY (2015): Scheme under which DMF funds are to be used, with high priority sectors like drinking water, health, education, women and child welfare, and environment protection.
- Fifth and Sixth Schedules: Protect tribal areas, and are relevant as many mining districts are Scheduled Areas.
- PESA Act, 1996: Gram Sabha consultation in Scheduled Areas.
- Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1997): Restricted transfer of tribal land to non-tribals for mining.

Conclusion

The audit shows that good schemes fail without robust monitoring and fund discipline. Creating unauthorised spending heads defeats the objective of DMF. Transparent planning, gram sabha participation, online tracking of projects and strict adherence to priority sectors are essential to ensure that mining benefits reach the affected communities.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: DMF, PMKKKY, Section 9B of the MMDR Act, CAG's constitutional provisions, PESA Act.
- Mains GS-II: Accountability of institutions, role of the CAG, transparency in governance and welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.
- Mains GS-III: Mining sector, resource governance, inclusive growth and environmental concerns.
- Mains GS-I: Tribal displacement, regional development issues.
- Mains GS-IV: Public fund probity, integrity and accountability.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Resource curse versus resource blessing" and "Mining and community welfare".

4. Few Judicial Officers Reach High Courts Despite Years of Experience

Key Highlights & Summary

- The elevation of seven district judges to the Delhi High Court has drawn attention to the narrow path from the subordinate judiciary to the higher Bench. Judicial officers account for only a fraction of High Court judges despite spending decades deciding cases at the trial-court level.
- Delhi High Court's working strength has risen to 50 against a sanctioned strength of 60, of which 19 judges have been drawn from the subordinate courts.
- Article 217 provides two streams for High Court appointments, members of the Bar and judicial officers, but prescribes no fixed ratio. A conventional norm holds that two-thirds of vacancies go to the Bar and one-third to the judicial service cadre.
- The one-third norm is not met in most States. Of the 1,114 sanctioned High Court judges, only 233 (about 21%) are elevated from the district judiciary. Tripura (40%), Himachal Pradesh (35.29%) and Delhi (31.67%) meet or exceed the norm, while service judges form just 9.09% in Uttarakhand, 11.90% in Chhattisgarh and Sikkim has zero representation.

Uphill climb

Judges elevated from subordinate courts comprise less than one-third of the sanctioned strength of several HCs

High Court	Sanctioned strength	Current strength	Elevated from judicial services
Tripura	5	4	2
Himachal Pradesh	17	15	6
Delhi	60	50	19
Bombay	94	75	16
Orissa	33	17	5
Telangana	42	27	5
Uttarakhand	11	8	1
Sikkim	3	2	0

Source: Department of Justice website
Data as of September 1; Delhi figures as of September 27

- Career bottlenecks are severe. Most law graduates join judicial service in their late twenties, take about 10 years to become a senior civil judge and another decade to become a district judge. They are often in their late fifties at the time of consideration, leaving a few years before retirement at 62. The Supreme Court currently has no sitting judge who began in the trial court judiciary, the last being Justice Bela M. Trivedi (appointed August 2021, retired June 2025).
- In 2023 the Judicial Service Association of Delhi sought a direction to fill 50% of High Court seats from the service quota. A Bench led by Justice B.R. Gavai declined, leaving the association free to pursue other remedies. Justice R.K. Gauba suggested that recommendations from the service cadre be processed in advance, so that vacancies are not left open for years.

Essential Definitions

- Subordinate judiciary: Courts below the High Court, including district courts and lower courts, staffed through judicial service.
- Judicial service quota: The customary share of High Court vacancies reserved for judicial officers, generally one-third.
- Collegium system: The mechanism by which the Chief Justice of India and senior judges recommend appointments and transfers of judges to the higher judiciary.
- Career progression bottleneck: Stagnation in promotion due to limited posts and late age of elevation.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 217: Appointment and conditions of the office of a High Court judge. The eligibility requirement is ten years as a judicial officer or ten years as an advocate of a High Court.
- Article 124: Appointment of Supreme Court judges, in consultation with judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- Article 233 and Article 235: Appointment of district judges by the Governor and High Court control over subordinate courts.
- Article 50: Separation of the judiciary from the executive, a Directive Principle.
- Second Judges Case (1993) and Third Judges Case (1998): Established the collegium system and the primacy of the judiciary in appointments.
- National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, 2014: Struck down in 2015 by the Supreme Court as violating the basic structure.
- All India Judges Association v. Union of India: Directions on service conditions and career progression of judicial officers.
- Memorandum of Procedure: Guides the process of appointing High Court judges.

Conclusion

A diverse Bench that draws on both the Bar and the service cadre strengthens the quality and legitimacy of the judiciary. Timely recommendations, transparent criteria and adherence to the one-third norm can motivate talented law graduates to join the lower judiciary and improve access to justice.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Article 217, Article 124, collegium system, NJAC, Article 50, judicial service.
- Mains GS-II: Judiciary structure, appointments, transparency and accountability, judicial reforms.
- Mains GS-II: Pendency of cases and vacancies in High Courts.
- Mains GS-IV: Merit, integrity and institutional fairness.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Judicial diversity" and "Reforming judicial appointments in India".

5. Time Runs Short for Iran and America: Prospects of a West Asia Truce

Key Highlights & Summary

- Negotiations between Iran and the United States have resumed after the June 17 Islamabad Memorandum unravelled within weeks, leading both sides to resume their blockades of the Strait of Hormuz and Iranian ports. The war is now seven months old.
- Both sides realise that time is not on their side. Domestic pressures, including the November 3 US mid-term elections and anti-establishment unrest in Iran, make a prolonged conflict costly. President Trump dismissed Iran's seven-point proposal on September 26, which may be an opening gambit for better terms.
- The US has a clear quantitative edge (three times the population, 85 times the GDP, 20 times the military budget), yet Iran has not capitulated. Its asymmetric strategy and a historical memory of being an underdog have hardened its resolve, while the US faces inflation, ammunition depletion and isolation.
- The path ahead is uncertain. The exact contents of the Iranian proposal are unclear, and mistrust has deepened after tit-for-tat attacks and the US "Operation Economic Outcast". Positive signs include Qatari mediation, Iranian flexibility on Hormuz and an interim supervisory arrangement with Oman.



- Any deal is likely to be a temporary "Hudna" (truce) lasting till the elections. Contentious issues such as nuclear and missile programmes and proxy groups could bring a "high noon" by mid-November. Iran may also use a possible al-Houthi blockade of Bab al-Mandeb as an escalatory lever.
- The Israel-Iran rivalry will outlast any US-Iran deal. Gulf states, Iraq and Jordan suffered collateral damage, and their long-standing security reliance on the US needs reappraisal. Oil is now tied more to geopolitics than to supply-demand balance.

Essential Definitions

- Strait of Hormuz: A narrow waterway between Iran and Oman connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil trade passes.
- Bab al-Mandeb: A strait between Yemen and Djibouti linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, critical for Suez Canal traffic.
- Hudna: An Arabic term for a temporary truce or ceasefire.
- Modus vivendi: A practical arrangement allowing conflicting parties to coexist while disputes remain unresolved.
- Asymmetric warfare: Strategy in which a weaker party uses unconventional means, such as proxies, drones and missiles, to offset a stronger adversary.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- UN Charter, Article 2(4) and Article 51: Prohibition on use of force and the right of self-defence, central to legality debates on the war.

- UNCLOS, 1982: Provides the right of transit passage through international straits like Hormuz.
- JCPOA (2015): The Iran nuclear deal, from which the US withdrew in 2018.
- Article 51 of the Indian Constitution (Directive Principle): Promotion of international peace and security, and peaceful settlement of disputes.
- Article 253: Parliament's power to legislate for implementing international treaties.
- India's energy security: Dependence on West Asia for crude oil and diaspora remittances shapes India's strategic autonomy and balanced diplomacy.
- Related initiatives: India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and Chabahar Port.

Conclusion

Both Tehran and Washington face mounting costs and shrinking room for manoeuvre. A short-term truce is possible, but lasting peace needs trust-building, clarity on nuclear and proxy issues, and regional buy-in. For India, a stable Gulf is vital for energy, trade and the diaspora.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb, JCPOA, Chabahar Port, IMEC, Qatar and Oman on the map.
- Mains GS-II: India and West Asia, effect of policies of developed countries on India, bilateral and regional groupings, diaspora.
- Mains GS-III: Energy security, oil price volatility and its impact on the economy.
- Mains GS-I: Post-war geopolitical realignments and the balance of power.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Wars of choice and their costs" and "Energy security in a fragmented world".

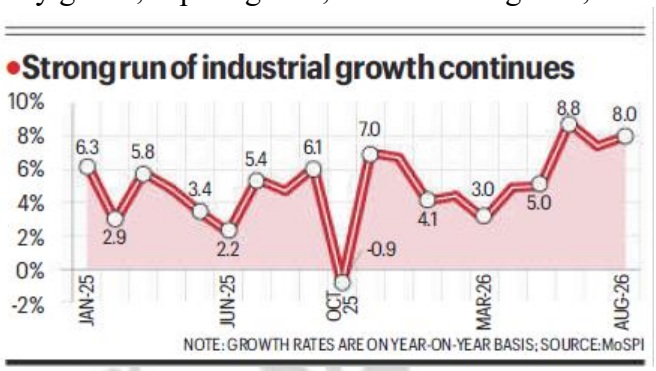
6. Industrial Output Rises 8% in August, FMCG a Slow Spot

Key Highlights & Summary

- Data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) shows that industrial production, measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), was 8% higher in August 2026 than in the same month last year.
- The growth was driven by a favourable base effect and the manufacturing sector, whose output rose 9%.
- Durable goods output rose 11.1% in August, following a 12% increase in July.
- Non-durable goods, which are primarily fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), grew by only 2.1%, making the consumer goods segment a concern for policymakers.
- The IIP has remained strong through 2026, with growth of 8.8% recorded in one of the earlier months, after a contraction of 0.9% in October 2025.
- Rajani Sinha, Chief Economist at CareEdge Ratings, said the industrial performance is in line with GDP growth, lending and exports. All eyes are now on festival season demand to sustain the momentum.

Essential Definitions

- Index of Industrial Production (IIP): A monthly index compiled by MoSPI that measures changes in the volume of production in mining, manufacturing and electricity sectors.
- Base effect: The impact of the previous year's low or high value on current growth rates. A weak base inflates present growth, while a strong base suppresses it.
- Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG): Products sold quickly at relatively low cost, such as food, toiletries and household items. Weak growth in this segment signals subdued mass consumption.
- Use-based classification: Grouping of IIP into primary goods, capital goods, intermediate goods, infrastructure goods, consumer durables and consumer non-durables.



Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Entry 94, Union List (Seventh Schedule): Enables the Union to conduct surveys and statistics for any Union List matters.
- Statistics Collection Act, 2008: Provides the legal basis for collection of statistics by the Central and State Governments.
- National Statistics Office (NSO): Under MoSPI, it compiles the IIP, GDP estimates and the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951: Framework for regulation and development of industries.
- Article 39(b) and 39(c): Directive Principles on equitable distribution of resources and prevention of concentration of wealth.
- Related schemes: Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, National Manufacturing Mission and Make in India, aimed at raising manufacturing's share in GDP to 25%.
- Base year of IIP: Revised to 2011-12, with a further revision to a newer base year under consideration.

Conclusion

Strong manufacturing and durable goods output reflect resilient industrial activity, but weak FMCG growth points to uneven consumption, especially in rural and lower-income households. Sustaining growth needs job creation, wage growth, easing of input costs and effective use of policy tools such as PLI and infrastructure spending.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: IIP, base effect, MoSPI, NSO, use-based classification, core industries, PLI Scheme.
- Mains GS-III: Indian economy, growth and development, industrial policy, manufacturing sector, inclusive growth and employment.
- Mains GS-III: Effects of liberalisation on industry, infrastructure and investment models.
- Mains GS-II: Government policies and interventions for development.

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- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Manufacturing-led growth" and "Consumption versus investment as growth drivers".

7. Tamil Nadu Launches Gold Ring Scheme for Newborns in Government Hospitals

Key Highlights & Summary

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay launched the Thaimaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam (Maternal Uncle's Gold Ring Scheme) at Government Rajaji Hospital, Madurai, fulfilling one of the TVK government's prominent election promises.
- Every eligible baby born in a government health institution receives a one-gram, 22-carat gold ring. The scheme applies retrospectively to babies born in government hospitals and primary health centres from June 22, and both boys and girls are eligible.
- The state has earmarked Rs 755.83 crore annually, estimated to cover about 4.42 lakh deliveries in government health facilities each year.
- The mother must be a Tamil Nadu resident, registered under the Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation (PICME) system, and hold a Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) ID.
- The government has procured 1.28 lakh rings in the first phase. Each BIS-hallmarked ring carries a unique serial number and is supplied in tamper-proof packaging. At the launch, rings were presented to 27 infants.



- The scheme borrows its name from the Tamil tradition of a maternal uncle gifting to his sister's child. It aims to encourage institutional deliveries, though the rollout has been temporarily withheld in Maduranthakam and Dharapuram Assembly constituencies.

Essential Definitions

- Institutional delivery: Childbirth taking place in a recognised health facility under the supervision of trained health personnel, which reduces maternal and infant mortality.
- PICME: A Tamil Nadu health information system that tracks pregnant women and infants from registration to the child's first year.
- Hallmarking: Certification by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) that guarantees the purity of gold jewellery.
- Conditional cash or in-kind transfer: Benefit given to a beneficiary on fulfilling a specified condition, here a birth in a public facility.
- Freebie or welfare debate: The question of whether populist benefits amount to legitimate welfare or fiscally unsound electoral inducements.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 47: Directive Principle making improvement of public health and nutrition a primary duty of the State.
- Article 21: Right to life, which includes the right to health and reproductive healthcare (Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity, 1996).

- Article 15(3) and Article 39(f): Special provisions for women and children, and healthy development of children.
- Seventh Schedule: Public health is a State List subject (Entry 6), giving states the freedom to design such schemes.
- National Health Mission and Janani Suraksha Yojana: Central schemes promoting institutional deliveries with cash incentives.
- S. Subramaniam Balaji v. State of Tamil Nadu (2013): The Supreme Court held that promises in manifestos are not corrupt practices under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, while recommending guidelines.
- Article 293 and FRBM framework: Limits on state borrowing and fiscal discipline.
- Model Code of Conduct: Explains the withholding of the rollout in the two constituencies.

Conclusion

The scheme reflects a culturally rooted approach to encouraging institutional births, and Tamil Nadu already performs well on maternal health indicators. Its long-term value will depend on service quality in public hospitals, fiscal prudence and outcomes such as lower infant mortality, rather than symbolic gifts alone.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Article 47, Janani Suraksha Yojana, National Health Mission, BIS hallmarking, PICME, Model Code of Conduct.
- Mains GS-II: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections, health, issues relating to development and management of social sector services.
- Mains GS-II: Federalism and state-level welfare innovations.
- Mains GS-III: Fiscal prudence and the freebie debate.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Welfare versus populism" and "Incentives and institutional deliveries".

8. Tackling Food Loss and Waste: India's Opportunity

Key Highlights & Summary

- Food loss and waste have severe consequences for climate, food security, economic costs and use of natural resources. India produces enough to feed 1.4 billion people, yet a significant share of produce is lost across the value chain. Reducing it can deliver a triple win: better food security and nutrition, lower pressure on resources and emissions, and improved incomes and productivity.
- India is the only country to have conducted three national post-harvest loss surveys, led by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries. They covered 45, 45 and 54 commodities in 2005-07, 2012-14 and 2020-22, and a fourth round is under way. This supports India's reporting of the Food Loss Index under the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Data gaps persist. Estimates cover mainly farm and supply chain losses, while data on food waste in retail, hotels, restaurants and households remains far less developed.
- Losses can be cut most through better storage, drying, cooling, moisture management and processing. Digital traceability systems can improve supply chain management, and circular

approaches can redistribute surplus food and convert organic residues into compost, biogas or energy.

- Major wholesale markets can generate up to 100 tonnes of organic waste a day, adding up to about 3.5 million tonnes a year nationally. Treating it can offset roughly 3.3 million tonnes of CO2-equivalent emissions annually. A 50-tonne-a-day bio-CNG plant in Surat, run through a private partnership, cuts about 7,500 tonnes of methane-related emissions a year.
- The FAO and SIDBI are linking food-loss hotspots with climate-resilient technologies and arranging finance for MSMEs. The FAO is also preparing a "Package of Practices" for urban food loss and waste management. The International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste is observed on September 29.

Essential Definitions

- Food loss: Reduction in the quantity or quality of food at production, post-harvest, storage and processing stages, before it reaches retail.
- Food waste: Food discarded at retail, food service and household level.
- Food Loss Index (FLI): An indicator tracking losses along the supply chain, used for SDG Target 12.3.
- Circular economy: A model that reuses, recycles and recovers resources to minimise waste.
- Bio-CNG: Compressed biogas, purified from organic waste, used as a clean fuel.
- Valorisation: Converting waste into products of economic value.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- SDG 12.3: Aims to halve per capita global food waste at retail and consumer level and reduce food losses along production and supply chains by 2030.
- Article 47: Directive Principle on raising nutrition levels and public health.
- Article 21: Right to life, interpreted to include the right to food (PUCL v. Union of India).
- Article 48A and Article 51A(g): Protection of the environment, and the fundamental duty to protect natural resources.
- National Food Security Act, 2013: Legal entitlement to subsidised foodgrains for about two-thirds of the population.
- Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006: Framework that also enables food donation and recovery guidelines (Save Food, Share Food).
- Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016: Segregation and processing of organic waste by local bodies.
- Related initiatives: Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana, Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, SATAT scheme for compressed biogas, and GOBARdhan.

Conclusion

India has the data, technology and viable models to cut food loss and waste. The priority is to close data gaps in retail and households, direct finance towards affordable technologies for farmers and small businesses, and integrate loss reduction into agriculture, urban and climate policy.

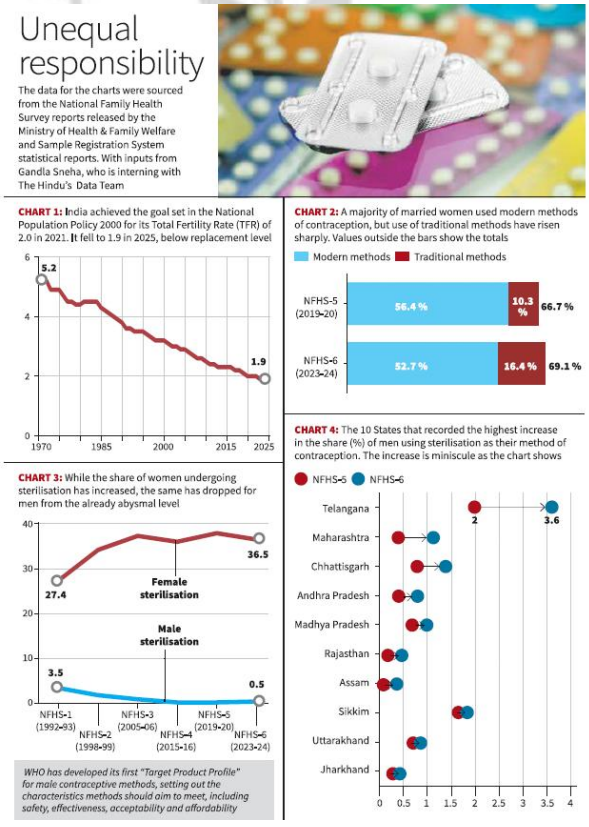
UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Food Loss Index, SDG 12.3, FAO, SIDBI, bio-CNG, SATAT, PM Kisan SAMPADA Yojana, Agriculture Infrastructure Fund.
- Mains GS-III: Food processing, storage and supply chain, agricultural marketing, post-harvest losses, waste management and climate change.
- Mains GS-II: Food security, hunger and nutrition, role of international agencies.
- Mains GS-III: Conservation and environmental pollution.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Wasted harvests, hungry nations" and "Circular economy as a development model".

9. Gender Disparities in Contraceptive Use and Sterilisation in India

Key Highlights & Summary

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued new guidelines on expanding contraceptive options and, for the first time, set benchmarks for a new generation of reversible male contraceptives. The timing is significant for India, where fertility has already fallen below the replacement level.
- NFHS-6 (2023-24) shows that the unmet need for family planning among married women fell by one percentage point from NFHS-5 (2019-21). The use of any contraceptive method among currently married women aged 15-49 rose from 66.7% to 69.1%.
- The use of modern methods declined from 56.4% to 52.7%, while traditional methods (rhythm and withdrawal) rose by 6 percentage points, the largest rise in any method. Possible reasons include fear of side-effects, privacy, partner preferences, access issues and a desire to avoid hormonal or invasive methods.
- Sterilisation remains overwhelmingly female. Female sterilisation stood at 36.5% in NFHS-6 (37.9% in NFHS-5), against only 0.5% for male sterilisation (0.3% in NFHS-5). Female sterilisation has remained at about 36-38% since NFHS-3, while male sterilisation fell from 3.4% in NFHS-1 to 0.5%.



- Even States that achieved low Total Fertility Rate early were no exception. Male sterilisation rose in 22 States between NFHS-5 and NFHS-6, but no State except Telangana recorded a rise of more than one percentage point. Vasectomy has moved from a visible component of family planning to a marginal one, though it is less invasive and can be done under local anaesthesia.
- Pascale Allotey of WHO said that choice is a gender equality issue. WHO research has challenged the long-held assumption that men would not use new contraceptives, and India can use the guidelines to correct the imbalance.

Essential Definitions

- Total Fertility Rate (TFR): Average number of children a woman would bear in her lifetime, given current age-specific fertility rates.
- Replacement level fertility: A TFR of about 2.1, at which a population replaces itself without migration.
- Unmet need for family planning: Share of women who want to delay or stop childbearing but do not use any contraception.
- Vasectomy and tubectomy: Permanent methods of male and female sterilisation respectively.
- Modern and traditional methods: Modern methods include pills, condoms, IUDs and sterilisation. Traditional methods include rhythm and withdrawal, which have higher failure rates.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 21: Right to life and personal liberty, including reproductive choice and bodily autonomy (Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration, 2009).
- Article 14 and Article 15(3): Equality before law and special provisions for women.
- Article 47: Duty of the State to improve public health.
- Entry 20A, Concurrent List (Seventh Schedule): Population control and family planning.
- Devika Biswas v. Union of India (2016): The Supreme Court condemned sterilisation camps and directed safe, voluntary and informed practices.
- National Health Policy, 2017, and National Population Policy, 2000: Emphasise voluntary and informed choice, and promote male participation.
- Related schemes: Mission Parivar Vikas, Antara injectable contraceptive, and the Family Planning Indemnity Scheme.
- Vasectomy Fortnight and compensation for sterilisation acceptors: Efforts to encourage male participation.

Conclusion

India's demographic success has not translated into shared contraceptive responsibility. The burden still falls on women, reflecting social norms, misconceptions and weak male outreach. Male-focused counselling, better service delivery, a wider method mix and the new WHO benchmarks can shift the approach towards equitable, voluntary and rights-based family planning.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: NFHS, TFR, replacement level fertility, unmet need, Mission Parivar Vikas, Antara, Entry 20A.
- Mains GS-I: Population and associated issues, role of women, social empowerment and gender roles.
- Mains GS-II: Health, government policies for vulnerable sections, and women-centric issues.
- Mains GS-IV: Ethics of choice, consent and gender justice.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Reproductive rights and gender equality" and "Population stabilisation and shared responsibility".

10. A New Governance Model for Ladakh: Article 371-K Proposal

Key Highlights & Summary

- Ladakh's demand for Sixth Schedule status and the Union Home Ministry's proposal for a directly elected legislative body have raised the question of whether a Union Territory can be granted such status. The Centre has proposed inserting Article 371-K in Part XXI of the Constitution (Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions).
- Ladakh became a Union Territory without a Legislative Assembly under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. Local groups seek protection of language, culture and customary practices, safeguards against outsiders acquiring land, and better political representation.
- The Sixth Schedule, governed by Article 244(2) and Article 275(1), covers only Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, areas that were "Excluded" or "Partially Excluded" under British rule. The Governor can create Autonomous Districts, each with a district council of a maximum of 30 members.



- The Centre is reluctant to extend the Sixth Schedule, as high autonomy could affect national security given Ladakh's strategic location near China. The proposed elected body may sit above the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs), while retaining panchayats and district institutions.
- Key uncertainties remain, including the role of the Lieutenant Governor and the extent of the body's powers, particularly financial autonomy, since financial and residuary powers rest with the Union.
- The author argues that granting a sui generis model to a UT is constitutionally valid, citing the special provisions for Delhi under Articles 239AA and 239AB. In State of Rajasthan v. Union of India (1977), the Supreme Court described Indian federalism as "Amphibian", federal in normal times and unitary during an Emergency.

Essential Definitions

- Sui generis: A unique arrangement, tailored to a specific case and not modelled on any existing category.
- Autonomous District Council: A self-governing body in Sixth Schedule areas with legislative, judicial and financial powers over land, forests, customs and local administration.
- Union Territory: A centrally administered unit under Article 239, governed through an Administrator or Lieutenant Governor.
- Doctrine of Proportionality: Principle that State action must be balanced and suited to the objective pursued, applied here to differential governance arrangements.
- Rawlsian justice: The idea that social arrangements should give the greatest advantage to the least advantaged.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 244(2) and Article 275(1): Administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, and grants-in-aid for them.

- Fifth Schedule: Administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in other States.
- Articles 239 to 241: Administration of Union Territories.
- Article 239A, 239AA and 239AB: Special provisions for Puducherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- Articles 371 to 371-J: Special provisions for States such as Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, Mizoram and Karnataka.
- Article 3 and Article 4: Parliament's power to reorganise States and Union Territories.
- Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019: Created the UT of Ladakh without a legislature.
- Article 240: President's power to make regulations for certain Union Territories.
- Article 244A: Autonomous State within Assam.

Conclusion

Ladakh's case requires a balance between strategic security needs and the protection of a distinct ethno-cultural identity. An elected legislative body through Article 371-K could offer representation and local participation without weakening national integrity, but its success depends on clarity about the Lieutenant Governor's role, financial powers and safeguards for land and culture.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: Sixth Schedule, Article 244(2), Article 275(1), Articles 239AA and 239AB, Article 371 series, Autonomous District Councils, LAHDC.
- Mains GS-II: Federalism, Union Territories, special provisions for regions, Scheduled and Tribal Areas, devolution of powers.
- Mains GS-I: Regionalism, tribal identity and cultural preservation.
- Mains GS-III: Border management and internal security in strategic regions.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Autonomy versus national integrity" and "Asymmetric federalism in India".

11. Centre Lowers NEET-SS Qualifying Percentile to Fill Vacant Super-Speciality Seats

Key Highlights & Summary

VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY

- On September 17, 2026, the Union government agreed to the Supreme Court's suggestion to reduce the qualifying percentile for NEET-SS 2025 from 50% to 30%. The Medical Counselling Committee (MCC) began a stray round from September 25 to fill 1,857 vacant seats, and the Centre returned 40 vacant in-service seats to Tamil Nadu.
- NEET-SS is the sole entrance test for DM, MCh and DrNB super-speciality courses. It is conducted by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS), an autonomous body under the Union Health Ministry, for over 7,000 seats and about 15,000 applicants. It is divided into 15 groups, each with a separate paper and cut-off.
- Seats go vacant mainly because of market factors. Doctors prefer high-demand branches such as cardiology, neurosurgery, medical oncology and gastroenterology, and prefer to reattempt rather than take less lucrative seats. Demand is weak in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery and paediatric surgery.

- Vacancies are a recurring problem: 1,003 seats in 2023, when the Supreme Court called it a "wastage of resources", and about 600 in 2024, which led to mop-up rounds after court intervention.
- The Tamil Nadu Medical Officers Association moved the Court. Under G.O. Ms. No. 462, Tamil Nadu reserves 50% of NEET-SS seats for in-service doctors, a quota upheld by the Supreme Court in 2022. In 2025, only 68 of 219 reserved seats were filled, and 152 seats were diverted to the All-India Quota. A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi found the case for reducing the percentile "compelling".
- Experts say a lower cut-off alone cannot stop vacancies. Fewer government seats in States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and the northeast, limited posts and promotions for super-specialists, low stipends and heavy workload also discourage candidates.

Essential Definitions

- Super-speciality: Advanced postgraduate medical training beyond MD or MS, offered through DM and MCh courses.
- Qualifying percentile: The minimum score percentile a candidate must attain to be eligible for counselling.
- Stray vacancy round: A final counselling round to fill seats left vacant after regular and mop-up rounds.
- In-service quota: Seats reserved for government doctors serving in public health institutions.
- All-India Quota: Seats filled on a national merit basis across States.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 21: Right to life, including access to quality healthcare, which depends on trained specialists.
- Article 47: Directive Principle on raising public health standards.
- Entry 25, Concurrent List: Education, including medical education. Entry 66, Union List: Standards in higher education.
- National Medical Commission Act, 2019: Governs medical education standards, replacing the Medical Council of India, and provides for NEET.
- Modern Dental College v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2016): Upheld NEET-based admissions as a valid regulatory measure.
- Dr. Preeti Srivastava v. State of Madhya Pradesh (1999): Higher standards apply in super-speciality courses, and lower reservation is permitted.
- Tamil Nadu Medical Officers Association v. Union of India (2020): Recognised States' power to grant in-service incentives at the postgraduate level, but not in super-speciality courses.
- Article 142: Supreme Court's power to do complete justice.

Conclusion

Lowering the cut-off may fill seats in the short run and prevent waste of costly public resources, but it must not dilute quality. Long-term solutions include creating super-speciality departments in government hospitals, better stipends, career progression for specialists and balanced regional distribution of seats.

UPSC Relevance

- Prelims: NEET-SS, NBEMS, National Medical Commission Act, 2019, Entry 25 of the Concurrent List, MCC, Article 142.
- Mains GS-II: Health, education, issues in social sector services, judicial intervention in policy, Centre-State relations.
- Mains GS-II: Human resources in healthcare and government policies.
- Mains GS-IV: Public service ethos versus private profit, merit and quality.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Quality versus access in medical education" and "Bridging the specialist gap in public health".

12. Manipur Crisis Turns: Naga-Kuki Clashes Add a New Layer of Violence

Key Highlights & Summary

- The death toll in clashes between the Nagas and Kukis since the recast BJP government took over in Manipur in February has risen to over 50, following fresh killings in Kamjong and Senapati. This marks a shift away from the Meitei-Kuki conflict that has been centred in the valley and hills since May 2023.
- The conflict is harder to contain geographically. In the Meitei-Kuki clashes, communities separated within months and a buffer zone was created. In the Naga-Kuki areas of Ukhrul, Kamjong, Senapati and Kangpokpi, populations are mixed, so violence spreads over roads and highways and disrupts supplies and movement.
- Key flashpoints include the killing of three Kuki church leaders in Kangpokpi on May 13, followed by the abduction and killing of six Naga men from the Leilon Vaiphei area. On March 11, 21 Nagas were abducted near Mongkot Chephu and later released after negotiations.
- Security officials link the conflict to a contest over the illicit drug trade and trafficking routes. Moreh, once the main transit point, has come under Kuki control since 2023, and routes via Kamjong have emerged as an alternative. The presence of armed groups based in Myanmar has widened the conflict.
- Political efforts have stalled. A Church-led dialogue attempt in Aizawl in July did not become a political dialogue. The United Naga Council (UNC) demands abrogation of the Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact with Kuki armed groups and action against those responsible, and it imposed an economic blockade of highways, suspended on September 26 after talks with the Home Ministry and the state government. The two Deputy CMs, Nemcha Kipgen (Kuki-Zo) and Losii Dikho (Naga), have emerged as opposing voices.
- Security forces describe their task as "managing" violence rather than ending it. One positive shift is that Kuki residents are increasingly being allowed into Imphal for healthcare and other services, with 40-50 Kukis reportedly visiting daily without resistance. Assembly polls due early next year add an electoral dimension.

Essential Definitions

- Ethnic conflict: Violence between groups defined by ethnicity, often linked to competition over land, identity and resources.

- Buffer zone: A demarcated area between conflicting communities, guarded by security forces to prevent clashes.
- Suspension of Operations (SoO): A tripartite ceasefire agreement among the Centre, the state government and militant groups, under which cadres stay in designated camps.
- President's Rule: Central takeover of a state's administration under Article 356 when constitutional machinery fails.
- Narco-terror nexus: Linkage between drug trafficking networks and armed insurgent groups.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 355: Duty of the Union to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance.
- Article 356: President's Rule on failure of constitutional machinery, with Parliamentary approval within two months and a maximum duration of three years.
- Entry 1 and Entry 2, State List: Public order and police are state subjects, while the Union may deploy armed forces under Article 355.
- Article 371C: Special provisions for Manipur, including a committee of legislators from the hill areas.
- Sixth Schedule and Article 244: Autonomous District Councils for tribal areas, though Manipur's hill councils fall outside the Sixth Schedule.
- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958: Applies in disturbed areas to help maintain public order.
- Article 3: Parliament's power to alter state boundaries, relevant to Naga demands for integration.
- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967: Used against unlawful associations and armed groups.

Conclusion

Manipur's crisis has expanded from a Meitei-Kuki divide to a multi-ethnic contest over land, routes and political voice. Force can only contain violence. Lasting peace needs inclusive dialogue with all communities, credible political accommodation, action against narco-networks, better border management and rebuilding trust through equitable governance.

UPSC Relevance

VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY

- Prelims: Article 355, Article 356, Article 371C, SoO agreement, Sixth Schedule, AFSPA, Moreh and the India-Myanmar border.
- Mains GS-III: Internal security challenges in border areas, linkages of organised crime with terrorism, role of external state and non-state actors.
- Mains GS-II: Federalism and Union-state relations, Article 356, governance issues, and role of civil society.
- Mains GS-I: Ethnicity, tribal identity and regionalism.
- Mains GS-IV: Ethics of peacekeeping, impartiality and conflict resolution.
- Essay and Interview: Themes like "Ethnic conflict and the limits of state power" and "Peacebuilding in the Northeast".