KERALA STATE
CIVIL SERVICE ACADEMY
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WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

MAGAZINE

July 26 to July 31, 2026

IN THIS MAGAZINE

SPECIAL ARTICLES

SECURING HOLISTIC ADVANCEMENT THROUGH NORMS, TRUST AND INTEGRITY (SHANTI)

The External Affairs Minister introduced **Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity (SHANTI) on 13 July while** launching India's candidature for the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 2028-29 term**, naming the Bay of Bengal as the region to operationalise it first.

The framework arrives in a region where growing naval and infrastructure capacity has outpaced any shared set of maritime norms among its littoral states.

What is SHANTI?

1. **Full form and origin**: SHANTI stands for Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity, introduced on 13 July alongside India's UNSC candidature announcement.
2. **Lineage**: It builds on Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), articulated in 2015 around the idea of equity in development, and Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR), announced in 2025 to widen that vision to the interconnectedness of security across the Indo Pacific and the Global South.
3. **Function**: SHANTI is presented as a normative framework, offering shared principles for maritime security, disaster response, the blue economy and environmental resilience, rather than a new institution or treaty.
4. **Rollout sequence**: The Bay of Bengal is named as the first region where SHANTI is meant to move from principle to practice, before any wider application across the Indo Pacific.

What is BIMSTEC?

1. The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** is a regional grouping of **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand**, connecting South and Southeast Asia around the Bay of Bengal.
2. At its National Security Advisers' meeting in New Delhi in July 2026, BIMSTEC members adopted **common principles for maritime law enforcement and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief**. They also agreed to hold their first joint maritime security exercise in the Bay in November 2026.

Why is the Bay of Bengal treated as SHANTI's proving ground?

1. **Strategic centrality**: The Bay links India's Act East policy with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), gives access to the Malacca Strait, and connects the eastern Indian Ocean to major global trade and energy routes.
2. **Comparative advantage**: The western Indian Ocean is marked by active conflict and fragile economies. The Bay's littoral states instead face similar, non military challenges such as cyclones, coastal erosion, fisheries management and undersea cable protection, which makes cooperation more feasible than confrontation.
3. **Institutional gap**: The region is not short of institutions but suffers from fragmentation among them, and SHANTI is framed as a common framework to align existing mechanisms rather than add another one.
4. **Geopolitical pressure**: China's reliance on the Malacca Strait, often called its Malacca dilemma, has driven an expanding Chinese presence through ports and infrastructure projects in the same littoral states SHANTI seeks to anchor.

Can SHANTI move beyond being another acronym?

1. **Fragmentation risk**: The region's stated problem is institutional fragmentation, and a new framework risks adding to that fragmentation unless it visibly aligns existing mechanisms.
2. **Stewardship versus dominance**: India's convening role depends on being accepted as a preferred security partner and first responder, a position that rests on restraint rather than the naval and economic weight India commands in the region.
3. **Early stage outputs**: Concrete outcomes so far are limited to a declaration of common principles, a first joint maritime exercise scheduled for November 2026, and a white shipping information sharing agreement still under discussion, none of which are yet operational.
4. **Norms without enforcement**: SHANTI rests on shared principles rather than a binding treaty, leaving compliance dependent on the willingness of littoral states rather than an enforceable obligation.

What are the challenges to SHANTI?

1. **Overlap with existing bodies**: SHANTI must coordinate with, rather than duplicate, existing mechanisms such as BIMSTEC, the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, each with its own membership and mandate.
2. **Financing gap**: Disaster response, undersea cable protection and blue economy cooperation require capital that several BIMSTEC members cannot supply on their own, raising the risk that shared projects become dependent on Indian or external financing.
3. **Limited replicability**: The Bay of Bengal is easier ground precisely because it lacks the active conflict of the western Indian Ocean, so success there does not guarantee the same framework will work in more contested Indo Pacific waters.

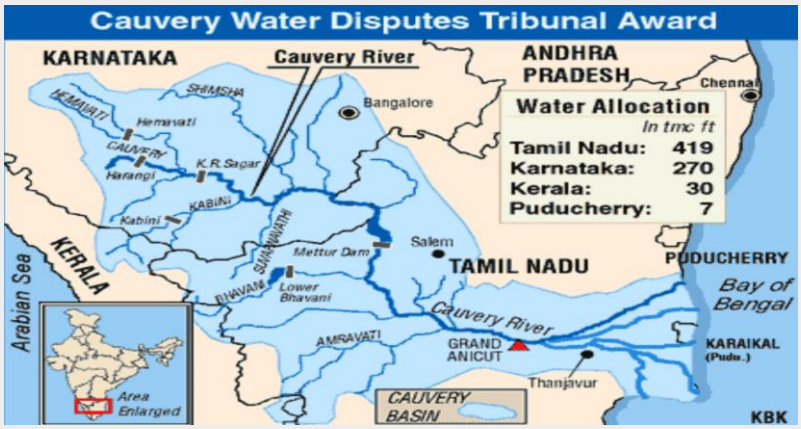
4. **Competing infrastructure presence**: Continued Chinese port and infrastructure investment in the same littoral states complicates India's claim to a natural convening role.
5. **Dependence on voluntary compliance**: Because SHANTI is a set of norms rather than a binding agreement, its durability depends on continued political will among BIMSTEC members rather than any enforcement mechanism.

SHANTI's substance will not be judged by its acronym but by whether the Bay of Bengal's BIMSTEC linked initiatives, the first joint maritime exercise due in November 2026 and the pending white shipping information sharing agreement, convert shared principles into functioning practice. Until those steps are completed, SHANTI remains a stated framework rather than a demonstrated one.

CWMA UPHOLDS CWRC'S ORDER TO KARNATAKA TO RELEASE WATER TO TAMIL NADU

Why in the News

The Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) on 30 July upheld an order of the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) directing Karnataka to release 3,500 cusecs of water a day to Tamil Nadu for 15 days despite Karnataka's own appeal citing drought. The ruling exposes that Karnataka and Tamil Nadu still have no agreed formula for sharing shortfalls in the Cauvery basin, years after the Supreme Court's final verdict on the dispute.



How does the Cauvery water sharing mechanism work?

1. **Two tier structure**: The **CWRC functions within the CWMA**, which implements the **2007 award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal** as modified by the Supreme Court in 2018.
2. **Composition**: The CWRC is headed by the Member (Water Resources) of the CWMA and includes Chief Engineers of all basin states along with representatives of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Central Water Commission and the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
3. **Monitoring role**: It tracks daily water levels, inflows and storage at eight reservoirs, four in Karnataka, three in Tamil Nadu and one in Kerala. It also issues seasonal water release directions for each basin state.
4. **Appeal route**: A state aggrieved by a CWRC order can appeal to the CWMA. The CWMA, as the apex body monitoring compliance with the Supreme Court's verdict, can uphold, modify or set aside the CWRC's order.
5. **Unit of measure**: Releases are set in cusecs, a rate of flow measured in cubic feet per second, while cumulative volume is tracked in thousand million cubic feet, referred to as tmc ft.

Why did the CWRC order the release now?

1. **Deficient inflows**: Karnataka's four reservoirs recorded a combined inflow shortfall of about 60% against the 30 year average, and the deficit at the Biligundulu gauge, where Karnataka's flow to Tamil Nadu is measured, was 90%.
2. **Storage position**: As on 30 July, Karnataka's four reservoirs held 65.34 tmc ft against a total capacity of 114.57 tmc ft.
3. **Forecast**: The IMD gave no optimistic outlook for the following weeks, which shaped the CWRC's view that Karnataka could still spare water.
4. **Buffer assessment**: The CWMA noted Karnataka's reservoirs stood to gain a minimum of 15 tmc ft in the next 15 days and that releasing 4.5 tmc ft would not affect Karnataka's drinking water needs.

Why do both states reject the outcome as unfair?

1. **Karnataka's distress claim**: Karnataka cited a **super El Nino effect**, said it had not begun irrigation releases this year, and argued Tamil Nadu would separately gain from the northeast monsoon later in the season.
2. **Karnataka's carryover argument**: Karnataka contended Tamil Nadu already held substantial carryover storage from earlier releases, reducing its immediate need.
3. **Tamil Nadu's shortfall claim**: Tamil Nadu sought 9.45 tmc ft over 15 days at 7,000 cusecs a day under the distress formula, arguing the ordered 3,500 cusecs was insufficient given a 90% deficit at Biligundulu.
4. **Tamil Nadu's cultivation needs**: Tamil Nadu's ongoing **kuruvai season needs** at least 30 tmc ft against a Mettur storage of about 36 tmc ft, of which 10 tmc ft is reserved for drinking water. The following samba thaladi season needs a minimum of 180 tmc ft.
5. **Political fallout**: Karnataka's Chief Minister called an all party meeting in Bengaluru on 2 August to consider legal options, and farmer protests have already begun in the Cauvery basin against the release order.

What are the challenges to the Cauvery dispute resolution mechanism?

1. **No distress sharing formula**: Both the CWRC chief and Tamil Nadu's position point to the absence of an agreed formula for splitting shortfalls in a deficient year, forcing an ad hoc order each time rainfall fails.
2. **Recurring litigation**: Karnataka has approached the CWMA and is weighing further legal options, repeating a cycle of appeals seen in nearly every distress year since the tribunal's award.
3. **Compliance risk**: The CWMA can direct a release, but implementation still depends on Karnataka's cooperation, a dependence that has previously produced Supreme Court contempt proceedings against Karnataka.
4. **Climate variability**: A pattern of super El Nino effects and deficient monsoons increases the frequency of distress years, straining a formula built around long term averages rather than year on year swings.
5. **Political cost**: A release ordered during an acknowledged drought risks becoming a flashpoint for farmer unrest and inter state friction, regardless of the technical merits of the CWRC's assessment.

The CWMA's ruling shows the institutional mechanism functioning as designed, yet satisfying neither riparian state. Karnataka calls the release unfair given its own distress, and Tamil Nadu calls the quantum inadequate for its cultivation needs. What remains unresolved is not whether the tribunal award should be enforced, but whether Karnataka and Tamil Nadu will ever agree on a distress sharing formula that removes the need for fresh litigation every deficient season. The CWRC is scheduled to meet again on 11 August to review compliance.

Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)

1. Established in June 2018 by the Union Jal Shakti Ministry to implement the final award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (2007) as modified by the Supreme Court's verdict of the same year.
2. Constituted under Section 6A of the Inter State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, following the Supreme Court's directions.
3. Composition includes a Chairman, a Secretary and Members, including a full time Member (Water Resources) who also heads the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee.
4. Jurisdiction covers water release, storage and supply regulation across the Cauvery basin states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.
5. Functions as the apex body for compliance with the Supreme Court's verdict, with the CWRC as its technical monitoring arm.

NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ON MANAGEMENT OF GENETIC RESOURCES (NABMGR)

Why in the News?

The **reconstituted National Advisory Board on Management of Genetic Resources (NABMGR)** held its **first meeting on 29 July 2026** at **ICAR–National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), New Delhi**, to strengthen India's **agrobiodiversity conservation** and promote the sustainable utilization of genetic resources for **food security, climate resilience, and Viksit Bharat**.

What is NABMGR?

- A national advisory body constituted by the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**.
- **First constituted:** 2011. **Reconstituted:** 2026.
- **Chairman:** Dr. R.S. Paroda. **Co-Chairman:** Dr. M.L. Jat (Secretary, DARE & DG, ICAR).

Objectives

- Recommend national policies on **agrobiodiversity**.
- Promote integrated management of Plant genetic resources, Animal genetic resources, Fish genetic resources, Microbial genetic resources, and Insect genetic resources
- Advise on national and international issues related to genetic resources.

Key Recommendations

- Strengthen **pre-breeding programmes** to utilize conserved germplasm.
- Identify **unexplored regions** for systematic germplasm collection (2026–2031).
- Develop an **integrated national genetic resources management framework**.
- Mainstream **traditional and underutilized crop varieties, animal breeds, fish species, microbes, and insects**.
- Strengthen implementation of **Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)** under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**.
- Expedite establishment of the **National Safety Genebank (NSG)** before **ICAR's centenary (2028–29)**.
- Enhance international collaboration, especially with **Central Asia** and **South-East Asia**, for germplasm exchange.

Significance

- Conserves India's rich **agrobiodiversity**.
- Broadens the genetic base for developing **climate-resilient, high-yielding crops and livestock**.
- Strengthens **food, nutrition and livelihood security**.
- Supports **sustainable agriculture** and achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- Promotes scientific collaboration and evidence-based policy making.

Value Addition

- **Agrobiodiversity**: It refers to the **variety and variability of plants, animals, fish, microorganisms and insects used directly or indirectly for food, agriculture and ecosystem services**.
- **Germplasm**: The **hereditary genetic material** (seeds, tissues, pollen, embryos, etc.) preserved for crop and livestock improvement.
- **Pre-breeding**: The process of transferring useful genes from **wild relatives or unadapted genetic resources** into breeding materials to develop improved varieties.
- **Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS):** A mechanism under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**, ensuring **fair and equitable sharing of benefits**arising from the use of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.
- **National Safety Genebank (NSG):** A secure backup repository for conserving valuable genetic resources against natural disasters or accidental loss.

[2012] How does the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) help in protecting the Indian agriculture?

1. NBA checks the biopiracy and protects the indigenous and traditional genetic resources.
2. NBA directly monitors and supervises the scientific research on genetic modification of crop plants.
3. Application for Intellectual Property Rights related to resources genetic/biological cannot be made without approval of NBA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 Only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

ISRO'S NAVIC SYSTEM CAN NO LONGER PROVIDE STANDALONE NAVIGATION SERVICES

Why in the News?

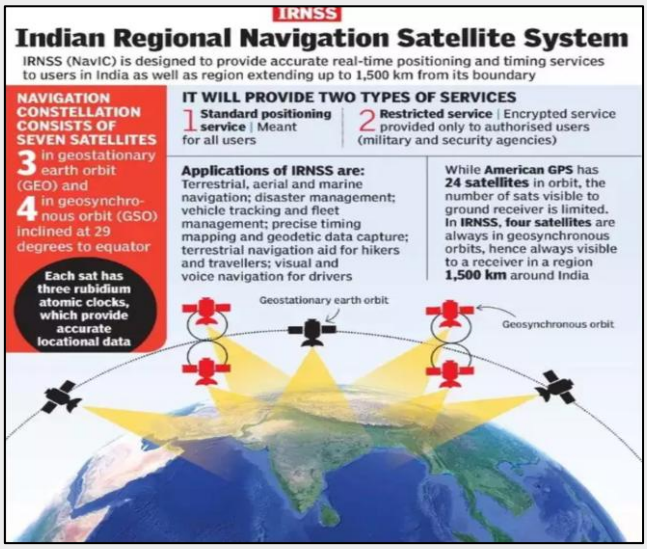
For the first time, the Government has admitted in Parliament that **India's NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) cannot currently provide standalone positioning services**, as only **3 operational satellites** are available for navigation, while **at least 4 satellites** are required.

What is the issue?

- **IRNSS-1F**, launched in **March 2016**, completed its mission life and its onboard **atomic clock failed**, reducing the operational navigation satellites.
- At present, only **IRNSS-1B, IRNSS-1I, and NVS-01** are providing Positioning, Navigation and Timing (PNT) services.
- As a result, **NavIC cannot independently provide positioning services**, though its **timing service remains functional**.

What is NavIC?

- **NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation)** is India's **regional satellite navigation system**, developed by **ISRO** under the **Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)**.
- It provides **Positioning, Navigation and Timing (PNT)** services over:
  - India, and
  - up to **1,500 km beyond its borders**.
- The original constellation was designed with **7 satellites**.



Why are four satellites necessary?

- A navigation receiver determines its position through **trilateration**.
- At least **4 satellites** are required to accurately calculate Latitude, Longitude, Altitude, and Time correction
- Without four operational satellites, **standalone navigation becomes unreliable**.

Does this affect users?

- **No major impact** on most users.
- Smartphones, aircraft, ships and vehicles use **multi-constellation GNSS receivers**, combining signals from **GPS (USA)**, **Galileo (European Union)**, **GLONASS (Russia)**, **BeiDou (China)**, and **NavIC (India)**
- Hence, navigation services continue without significant disruption.

Current status

- **Standalone positioning:** Not available.
- **Timing service:** Functional.
- **Emergency message broadcasting:** Functional.
- **Armed Forces:** Continue using NavIC as part of a **multi-constellation GNSS** framework.

Future roadmap

- **NVS-03** is ready for launch.
- **NVS-04** and **NVS-05** are in advanced stages of development.
- These satellites are expected to restore NavIC's independent navigation capability.

Significance of NavIC

- Enhances **strategic autonomy** by reducing dependence on foreign navigation systems.
- **Supports:** Defence operations, Disaster management, Maritime navigation, Aviation, Railways, Road transport, Precision agriculture, and Surveying and mapping
- Provides **secure and reliable navigation** during emergencies or geopolitical conflicts.

[2023] Which one of the following countries has its own Satellite Navigation System?

[A] Australia
[B] Canada
[C] Israel
[D] Japan

CLOUDBURSTS IN INDIA

Why in News?

Recent flash floods in Himalayan States have brought **cloudbursts** into focus. The IMD has clarified that many reported "cloudbursts" do not meet its scientific definition, highlighting the need for accurate terminology and better disaster planning.

What is a Cloudburst?

- According to the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, a cloudburst is **100 mm (10 cm) or more rainfall in one** hour over a **20 to 30 sq. km area**.
- **Key Features**
  - Highly localized and short-duration event.
  - Causes sudden flash floods and landslides due to rapid runoff.
  - Much rarer than normal heavy monsoon rainfall.
  - **Mini-cloudburst (proposed):** Some scientists suggest a category of **50 mm rainfall in one hour** over the same area, as it can also cause severe damage.

How Common are Cloudbursts in India?

- Cloudbursts are **rare**, but their frequency is increasing due to **global warming**, as warmer air can hold more moisture.
- IMD recorded **around 30 cloudbursts between 1970 and 2016**, though experts believe many events went unrecorded.
- Most occur in **remote Himalayan regions**, where monitoring stations are sparse.
- Frequently reported in **Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, and the Northeast**, especially during **July-August**.

How Do Cloudbursts Form?

Why are Cloudbursts Difficult to Forecast?

- **Highly localized**, smaller than weather model grid sizes.

- Develop **rapidly**, leaving very little lead time.
- **Mountains block Doppler Weather Radar** signals, creating blind spots.
- Limited **Automatic Weather Stations (AWS)** in high-altitude areas reduce real-time observations.
- Hyperlocal prediction requires **high-resolution models and massive computing power**.

What is India Doing?

- **IMD Nowcasting** for short-term weather alerts.
- **Mission Mausam** to strengthen hyperlocal forecasting.
- Expansion of the **Doppler Weather Radar (DWR)** network.
- Installation of more **Automatic Weather Stations (AWS)**.
- Use of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** for improved weather prediction and early warnings.

Challenges

- Sparse observation network in mountainous terrain.
- Radar blind spots due to topography.
- Limited computing capacity for hyperlocal models.
- Growing climate change-induced extreme rainfall.
- Weak enforcement of land-use regulations.

[2026] Which of the following statements with regard to India's indigenous new high resolution weather model, the 'Bharat Forecast System,' is/are correct?

1. Its objective is to generate forecasts at the Panchayats cluster level.
2. It was developed by IIT Delhi.

Select the answer using the code given below:

[A] 1 only
[B] 2 only
[C] Both 1 and 2
[D] Neither 1 nor 2

E-ZERO FIR

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs informed Parliament that the e-Zero FIR system for cybercrime cases has been operationalized across 18 States and Union Territories, with over 12,000 e-Zero FIRs already registered.

The e-Zero FIR System

About The e-Zero FIR System:
What It Is?

- The e-Zero FIR system is a digital, borderless law enforcement framework designed to automatically generate a First Information Report (e-Zero FIR) for reported cyber financial crimes—regardless of territorial police jurisdiction.

Institutional Nodal Body: Developed by the **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)** under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
Legal Alignment: Leverages **Section 173(1)** of the **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023**, which mandates that information on cognizable offenses can be submitted electronically irrespective of location.
System Integration: Integrates three primary digital infrastructures:

- National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) / Helpline 1930
- State/UT e-Crime Police Stations
- National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS)

Aim: To accelerate law enforcement action against cybercriminals, eliminate jurisdictional delays in filing complaints, enable instant freezing of defrauded funds, and facilitate the swift restoration of lost money to victims.
Key Features:

- **Automated Threshold Triggers:** Complaints lodged via the 1930 helpline or NCRP portal that cross specified financial loss thresholds automatically generate an e-Zero FIR without requiring an initial physical station visit.
- **Seamless Jurisdictional Transfer:** Registered e-Zero FIRs at central e-Crime Police Stations are instantly routed to the exact territorial cybercrime police station holding local jurisdiction.
- **3-Day Conversion Window:** Complainants are required to visit the local territorial police station within **3 days** to complete formal verification and convert the e-Zero FIR into a regular, fully registered FIR.
- **Immediate Financial Lien Placement:** By generating an official e-FIR instantly, law enforcement and banking channels gain the immediate legal authority required to place a lien on suspect bank accounts and block the onward transfer of stolen funds.

Significance:

- The e-Zero FIR system removes jurisdictional delays, allowing cyber fraud complaints to be registered immediately from any location.
- Instant FIR registration through the 1930 helpline enables faster freezing of fraudulent accounts, increasing the chances of recovering stolen funds.

POLYMER (PLASTIC) BANKNOTES

The Union Government approved the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) proposal to conduct field trials for polymer (plastic) banknotes in ₹10 and ₹20 denominations.

RBI's ₹10 and ₹20 Polymer Notes

About RBI's ₹10 and ₹20 Polymer Notes:

What It Is?

- An official pilot initiative by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and its subsidiary, Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited(BRBNMPL), to introduce opacified polymer-substrate currency into public circulation alongside existing cotton-paper notes.

Regulatory Authority: Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
Currency Manufacturing Subsidiary: Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited (BRBNMPL).
Aim: To extend the lifespan of lower-denomination banknotes that wear out quickly due to frequent handling, thereby reducing long-term currency printing costs, curbing environmental waste, and improving overall currency durability.
Key Features:

- **Target Denominations & Volume:** Focuses on small-value notes (**₹10 and ₹20**), with an initial field trial batch consisting of **1 billion pieces per denomination**.
- **Non-Fibrous Polymer Substrate:** Unlike traditional Indian paper notes made from 100% cotton comber and linter fibers, polymer notes are printed on a non-porous, dirt- and moisture-resistant synthetic plastic film.
- **Significantly Extended Lifespan:** Polymer notes last between **2 to 6 times longer** than conventional cotton-paper notes, drastically reducing the frequency of replacement, transportation, and destruction of soiled currency.
- **Co-Circulation Framework:** Polymer notes will circulate in parallel with existing paper notes. The government has explicitly clarified that there is no proposal to replace existing paper currency entirely.
- **Environmental & Recycling Benefits:** According to studies highlighted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), polymer banknotes reduce global warming potential by 32% and primary energy demand by 30% compared to paper notes, and can be recycled into plastic pellets at the end of their life cycle.
- Under **Section 22 of RBI Act, 1934**, the RBI holds the exclusive legal monopoly to issue currency notes across India.
    - While ₹1 notes are issued directly by **the Ministry of Finance**, ₹10 and ₹20 notes are issued strictly under the authority of the RBI's Issue Department.

Global Adoption (Other Nations Using Polymer Notes):
Australia pioneered polymer banknotes in 1988, and today nearly **60 countries**utilize plastic currency in some capacity:

- **Full Series Transition:** Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Romania, and the United Kingdom.

TMANIRBHAR PANCHAYAT PROGRAMME

Union Minister of Panchayati Raj, launched the Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme and the SAMARTH Panchayat Portal.

About The Atmanirbhar Panchayat Programme:

What It Is?

- An initiative by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj anchored under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA). It assists Gram Panchayats and Block Panchayats in identifying idle local assets and untapped opportunities, converting them into bankable, revenue-generating projects.

Ministry: Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

Aim: To build sustainable Own Sources of Revenue (OSR) for Panchayati Raj Institutions, reducing their fiscal dependency on central and state grants.

Key Features:

- **Project Scale & Phasing:** Targets the development of **350 projects over 4 years** (50 projects in Year 1, followed by 100 projects annually in Years 2, 3, and 4).
- **Eligibility Thresholds:** Open to Gram Panchayats with a minimum annual OSR of **₹50 lakh** and Block Panchayats with a minimum annual OSR of **₹1 crore**, provided they have at least 3 years of tenure remaining (with relaxed criteria for Special Category States).
- **Technical Guidance:** Offers dedicated technical assistance from the Ministry to structure local ideas into commercially viable, bankable project proposals.
- **Diversified Financing:** Leverages blended finance models including Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions, scheme convergence, and institutional bank credit.

About the SAMARTH Panchayat Portal:
What It Is?

- The **SAMARTH Panchayat Portal** is a unified, configurable national digital platform designed for end-to-end management of Own Sources of Revenue (OSR) for Gram Panchayats.

Aim: To digitize, streamline, and standardize the complete OSR lifecycle—improving fiscal transparency, tax collection efficiency, and accountability in rural tax administration.
Key Features:

- **Complete End-to-End Lifecycle Management:** Handles taxpayer registration, automated demand notice generation, online digital payment processing, receipt collection, and real-time revenue monitoring.
- **Standardization of Local Taxes:** Digitizes local revenue streams including property taxes, user charges, trade licenses, and non-tax fees.
- **Proven Onboarding Track Record:** Already active in **Chhattisgarh** and **Himachal Pradesh**, with over 51 lakh taxpayers registered, demand notices worth ₹95 crore generated, and more than ₹27 crore collected.
- **Phased Pan-India Expansion:** Onboarding is currently underway across Maharashtra, Mizoram, Assam, Haryana, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh.

LARGE HADRON COLLIDER (LHC)

CERN officially switched off the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) to begin its 4-year Long Shutdown 3 (LS3).

- The temporary pause allows engineers to perform a major $1.5 billion hardware upgrade, transforming the machine into the High-Luminosity LHC (HL-LHC).

the Large Hadron Collider (LHC)

About the Large Hadron Collider (LHC):
What It Is?

- The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is the world's largest, highest-energy, and most powerful particle accelerator. Built by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), it accelerates subatomic particles (protons or heavy lead ions) to near the speed of light and smashes them together to study fundamental physics and the origin of the universe.

Location:

- **Geographic Site:** Built in a circular underground tunnel situated approximately 100 meters (328 feet) beneath the France–Switzerland border near Geneva.
- **Facility:** Governed and operated by **CERN** (European Organization for Nuclear Research).

How It Works?

1. **Particle Injection & Acceleration:** Protons are separated from hydrogen gas, fed into a chain of pre-accelerators, and injected into two ultra-high vacuum beam pipes traveling in opposite directions.
2. **Superconducting Magnetic Guidance:** Over 1,200 dipole magnets—chilled to **-271.3°C (-456°F)** using liquid helium—generate powerful magnetic fields to bend and focus particle beams as they approach 99.9999991% of the speed of light.
3. **Collision & Detection:** Quadrupole magnets squeeze the beams together at four designated collision points, where massive particle detectors (**ATLAS, CMS, ALICE, and LHCb**) record subatomic debris from millions of collisions per second.

Key Features:

- **27-Kilometer Superconducting Ring:** Features a 26.7 km circular tunnel housing over 9,000 superconducting magnets cooled to temperatures colder than deep outer space (-271.3°C).
- **Massive Energy Output (13.6 TeV):** Operates at record collision energies up to **13.6 Teraelectronvolts (TeV)**, creating thermal conditions similar to those fractionally after the Big Bang.
- **Discovery of the Higgs Boson (2012):** Famous for experimentally confirming the **Higgs Boson** (God Particle) in 2012, completing the theoretical framework of the Standard Model of particle physics.
- **Four Flagship Detector Experiments:** Houses four giant subterranean detection stations—**ATLAS, CMS, ALICE, and LHCb**—each specialized in probing dark matter candidates, antimatter asymmetry, and quark-gluon plasma.
- **Global Science Collaboration:** Built and operated by an international network of over 10,000 scientists and engineers across more than 100 countries.

Why It Is Shutting Down (Long Shutdown 3)?

- **Transitioning to High-Luminosity LHC (HL-LHC):** Over the 4-year shutdown period, engineers will replace 1.2 kilometers of the tunnel to install new superconducting niobium-tin quadrupole magnets, advanced crab cavities, and updated subdetectors.
- **10x Increase in Luminosity & Data Generation:** The upgrade will increase collision rates from 60 to up to 200 simultaneous collisions per beam crossing.
- **Unlocking Dark Matter & Beyond-Standard-Model Physics:** Boosting total collision data by ten times enables physicists to study extremely rare subatomic events, measure Higgs boson properties with unprecedented accuracy, and search for dark matter particles when operations resume in 2030.

OIL AND NATURAL GAS CORPORATION (ONGC) COMMENCED DRILLING ITS FIRST DEEPWATER EXPLORATORY WELL

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) commenced drilling its first deepwater exploratory well (**MN-DW18-1-H-D**) in the offshore Mahanadi basin under the Union Government's Samudra Manthan mission (National Deep Water Exploration Mission).

The Mahanadi River

About The Mahanadi River:
What It Is?

- The Mahanadi (meaning Great River in Sanskrit) is one of the major peninsular river systems in east-central India. Spanning a total course of **560 miles (900 km)** with a drainage basin of over 1,32,100 sq km, it is renowned for its large silt-depositing capacity and extensive deltaic network along the Bay of Bengal.

Origin & Course:

- **Origin:** Rises in the Sihawa hill range in the Dhamtari district of **Chhattisgarh**.
- **Flow Direction:** Flows northward draining the eastern Chhattisgarh plain, turns eastward into **Odisha**, pierces the Eastern Ghats through a forested gorge, and empties into the **Bay of Bengal** at False Point near Paradip.

States Covered: Chhattisgarh and Odisha.
Drainage Basin Extent: Extends across small portions of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra.
Key Features:

- **Extensive Tributary System:** Feeder streams include the **Seonath(Shivnath)**, **Hasdeo**, **Mand**, and **Ib** on the left bank, along with the **Jonk**, **Ong**, and **Tel** rivers on the right bank.
- **Hirakud Multipurpose Dam:** Houses one of the world's longest earthen dams at Sambalpur, Odisha, forming a 55 km-long artificial reservoir that mitigates downstream floods and generates hydroelectric power.
- **Prolific Silt-Depositing Delta:** Enters the Odisha plains near Cuttack, splitting into major distributaries (such as the *Kathjodi* and *Birupa*) to form a fertile coastal delta plain rich in agricultural lands and mangroves.
- **Historical Hydrocarbon-Rich Offshore Basin:** The river's historical discharge has deposited thick sedimentary layers in the offshore Mahanadi Basin, making it an active zone for deepwater oil and natural gas exploration.

Significance of the MN-DW18-1-H-D Exploratory Well:

- The well advances the Samudra Manthan initiative (National Deep Water Exploration Mission) by exploring ultra-deepwater hydrocarbon reserves opened under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP).
- Successful exploration in the Mahanadi Basin can boost domestic oil and gas production, reduce import dependence, and support India's energy self-reliance goals.

About Samudra Manthan (National Offshore Exploration Scheme):

What It Is?

- *Samudra Manthan* is a comprehensive national initiative designed to de-risk and accelerate domestic offshore oil and gas exploration.
- It provides public financial backing across the upstream exploration value chain—spanning seismic data collection, deepwater exploratory drilling, frontier basin research, and common evacuation infrastructure.

Ministry: Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India.

Scheme Classification: Central Sector Scheme (100% centrally funded).

Implementation Timeline: Up to **FY 2030–31**.

Total Outlay: ₹84,084 crore.

Aim: To strengthen India's energy security, boost domestic oil and natural gas production, reduce heavy reliance on crude oil imports, and establish an indigenous, globally competitive ecosystem for offshore energy technologies.

Key Features:

- **Strategic Allocation for High-Risk Deepwater Drilling:** Earmarks **₹43,200 crore** to subsidize deepwater and ultra-deepwater exploratory drilling, covering up to **50% of the drilling cost** (or up to ₹650–₹675 crore per well) to offset high capital risks.
- **Comprehensive Data Acquisition:** Allocates **₹28,534 crore** for large-scale acquisition, processing, and interpretation of high-quality seismic data—specifically targeting previously unexplored frontier basins and former no-go offshore zones.
- **Common Production and Evacuation Hubs:** Earmarks **₹10,000 crore** to build shared offshore production and pipeline evacuation infrastructure, enabling faster commercialization of deepwater discoveries.
- **Manufacturing & Services Zones:** Directs **₹2,000 crore** toward setting up dedicated **Oil & Gas Manufacturing and Services Zones** to promote indigenous equipment production under Make in India.
- **Digital Governance & Capacity Building:** Integrates advanced digital program management, capacity-building frameworks, and technology adoption protocols via the National Data Repository (NDR) to streamline stakeholder engagement and global outreach.

Significance:

- Aims to add over 600 MMTOE of reserves, reducing crude oil imports and strengthening India's energy security.
- Co-funds costly deepwater wells, lowering investment risks and attracting exploration in KG, Cauvery, Mahanadi, and Andaman basins.

ANCIENT BUDDHIST SITE OF SARNATH

At the 48th Session of the World Heritage Committee in Busan, South Korea, India's official nomination Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

- It marks India's 45th World Heritage property, placing the nation 6th globally and 2nd in the Asia-Pacific region for total UNESCO sites.

Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath Inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List

About Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath Inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List:

What It Is?

- The Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath is a serial World Heritage property preserving one of the four principal destinations of Buddhist pilgrimage.
- It was inscribed under UNESCO **criteria (iii)** for its enduring spiritual tradition and **criteria (vi)** for its direct association with pivotal events in the life of Gautama Buddha—specifically his first sermon (Dharmachakra pravartana) and the establishment of the Buddhist Sangha.

Geographical Location:

Located within Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. The serial property comprises two primary components:

1. Chaukhandi Stupa
2. Archaeological Remains of Sarnath (encompassing Dhamekh Stupa, Dharmarajika Stupa, Mulagandhakuti Vihara, and the Ashokan Pillar site).

History & Sacred Context:

- **Ancient Nomenclature:** Known historically in Buddhist literature as Rishipatana, Ishipatana, and Mrigadava.
- **The First Sermon (6th Century BCE):** Gautama Buddha visited Sarnath in the 6th century BCE to deliver his first sermon, Turning of the Wheel of the Law (Dharmachakra pravartana), introducing the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path and the concept of Triratna.
- **Multifaceted Patronage & Decline:** Evolved over centuries through royal, monastic, and lay patronage from the pre-Mauryan era (5th–4th century BCE) up to its decline and destruction in the 12th century CE.
- **Rediscovery & ASI Excavations:** Fell into obscurity until its rediscovery in the 18th century. For over 150 years, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has conducted excavations revealing a continuous, stratified settlement spanning 16 centuries.

Architectural & Archaeological Features:

- **Dhamekh & Chaukhandi Stupas:** Massive structural stupas marking sacred spots where the Buddha met his first disciples and delivered core teachings.
- **Mauryan Ashokan Pillar & Lion Capital:** Features the historic Mauryan-era pillar carved from polished sandstone. Its polished **Lion Capital**, excavated during 1904–1906, was later adopted as the **National Emblem of India**.
- **Monastic Ensembles (Viharas):** Preserved brick foundations of ancient monasteries, temples, and Mulagandhakuti Vihara, showcasing structural evolution across Mauryan, Kushan, and Gupta periods.
- **Classic Gupta Art:** Yielded world-famous Masterpieces of Gupta art, including the Dharmachakrapravartan Buddha statue, currently housed at India's earliest site museum established in Sarnath in 1904.

Article I

The UPSC Mindset: Why Judgement, Not Information, Will Define the Next UPSC Topper

Why the future of UPSC preparation lies not in collecting more material, but in learning to think like a civil servant

[Nitin Chakravarthy]

The Real Intelligence Required to Clear UPSC

Every generation of Civil Services aspirants faces a distinctive challenge. Aspirants of an earlier era struggled to obtain information. Standard books were not always easily available, coaching facilities were concentrated in a few cities, and access to quality guidance was limited. For today's aspirant, the problem is almost exactly the opposite.

Information is everywhere. A student can access hundreds of lectures, digital newspapers, monthly compilations, government reports, podcasts, model answers, topper strategies, test series and artificial-
intelligence tools—often without leaving the study table. Yet this abundance has not necessarily made preparation easier. In many cases, it has produced greater confusion, anxiety and intellectual passivity.

The central challenge of UPSC preparation today is therefore not the acquisition of information. It is the development of judgement. The serious aspirant must learn:

- what to study;
- what to leave;
- how to connect different parts of the syllabus;
- how to distinguish facts from arguments;
- how to evaluate competing perspectives;
- and how to convert knowledge into an administratively mature answer.

This is not merely a useful preparation technique. It is closely aligned with what the Civil Services Examination is designed to assess. The UPSC syllabus and notification expect candidates to demonstrate an intelligent interest in events around them, modern currents of thought and discoveries that should engage the curiosity of an educated individual. The examination is therefore not intended to reward indiscriminate accumulation of material. It seeks evidence of awareness, comprehension, judgement and balanced expression.

The illusion of productive preparation

Many aspirants remain occupied throughout the day without making proportional progress. They watch several hours of classes, underline large portions of books, download compilations, subscribe to multiple current-affairs sources and continuously rearrange their schedules. At the end of the week, they have consumed a great deal of content but cannot recall, reproduce or apply much of it.

This happens because content consumption creates the feeling of learning without always producing the ability to perform. UPSC does not award marks for the number of lectures attended, pages highlighted or PDFs stored. It awards marks for what a candidate can retrieve, analyse and express under examination conditions.

A simple distinction is useful:- Preparation is not what enters your study room. Preparation is what becomes available to your mind inside the examination hall.

Every source must therefore justify its place in an aspirant's preparation. A book, lecture or compilation is valuable only when it improves one or more of the following:

1. conceptual clarity;
2. factual recall;
3. analytical ability;
4. elimination skills;
5. answer-writing quality;
6. decision-making under time pressure.

Material that does not improve these capacities becomes intellectual clutter.

UPSC is one examination, not three unrelated examinations

A persistent strategic mistake is to treat Preliminary Examination, Main Examination and the Personality Test as three separate worlds. They are different stages, but they emerge from a common intellectual foundation.

Consider a topic such as urban flooding. For the Preliminary Examination, the candidate may need to understand drainage patterns, wetlands, extreme rainfall, urban heat islands, disaster-management institutions or the functions of local bodies. In the Main Examination, the same issue may require an explanation of causes, institutional failures, environmental consequences, federal dimensions, technological interventions and policy solutions. During the Personality Test, the candidate may be asked how a district administration should respond to an extreme rainfall warning, whether construction should be prohibited in floodplains or how officials should balance ecological protection with housing requirements.

The factual base may remain similar, but the required intellectual operation changes:

- Prelims demands recognition and discrimination.
- Mains demands organisation and analysis.
- The interview demands judgement and articulation.

Preparation becomes efficient when the aspirant studies every major issue through all three lenses.

After studying a subject, the student should ask:

- What objective questions can emerge from this?
- What analytical question can be framed?
- What administrative dilemma does it contain?
- What constitutional values are involved?
- What practical solution would I recommend?

This integrated method reduces duplication and produces depth.

The syllabus must become a thinking framework

Most aspirants possess a copy of the syllabus. Far fewer use it as an active intellectual instrument. The syllabus should not remain a document consulted only while purchasing books or joining courses. It must become the architecture within which every piece of information is placed. When reading a news report on artificial intelligence, for instance, an aspirant should not merely prepare a list of advantages and disadvantages. The issue should be mapped across the syllabus:

- Polity: privacy, accountability and regulation;
- Economy: productivity, employment and concentration of market power;
- Society: digital exclusion and algorithmic discrimination;
- Ethics: transparency, autonomy and responsibility;
- Internal security: deepfakes, misinformation and cyber threats;
- International relations: technological competition and global governance;
- Essay: the relationship between intelligence, technology and human wisdom. Such mapping transforms current affairs from a collection of events into an interconnected body of knowledge.

A useful preparation principle is:- Static knowledge provides the structure; current affairs supply movement, illustration and contemporary relevance.

Current affairs without static foundations becomes shallow. Static study without contemporary application becomes lifeless. The examination rewards their synthesis.

From notes-making to knowledge compression

Aspirants are often advised to make notes, but the real objective should be knowledge compression. Ordinary note-making can become another form of copying. A student reads twenty pages and produces twelve pages of notes. This may reduce the volume slightly, but it does not necessarily improve understanding.

Effective compression requires the aspirant to identify the intellectual core of a topic. For every major issue, the candidate should be able to prepare a compact framework containing:

- definition or context;
- causes or drivers;
- major dimensions;
- consequences;
- constitutional or legal basis;
- institutional mechanisms;
- Challenges;
- examples or data;
- competing viewpoints;
- and a realistic way forward.

Let us take cooperative federalism as an example. The candidate should not maintain separate, disconnected notes for the Goods and Services Tax Council, centrally sponsored schemes, disaster management, health, education, inter-state river disputes and local governance. These examples should be organised under a larger federalism framework. This allows the same intellectual material to be used in multiple answers. The best notes are not miniature textbooks. They are retrieval devices. They should help the aspirant recall an entire line of reasoning with a few triggers. A well-designed one-page sheet revised ten times is usually more valuable than a fifty-page file read once.

Previous-year questions are the most authentic source of guidance

The syllabus tells the candidate what UPSC can ask. Previous-year questions reveal how UPSC thinks about the syllabus. They must therefore be treated as a primary source, not as material to be consulted after completing preparation. The Commission itself maintains an extensive repository of previous question papers, enabling candidates to examine the evolution of the examination directly rather than relying only on second-hand interpretations.

A serious analysis of previous questions must go beyond solving them. For each question, the aspirant should examine:

- The exact syllabus phrase from which it originates;
- the command word used;
- the dimensions required;
- The level of factual specificity expected;
- The balance between conceptual and current content;
- And the reason why attractive but incorrect options were included.

In Prelims, the candidate should study not only the correct option but also the design of the distractors. UPSC frequently tests whether the aspirant can recognise overstatement, identify conceptual inconsistency and distinguish what is possible from what is universally true.
In Mains, the candidate should study the demand of the question. "Discuss," "analyse," "evaluate," "critically examine" and "comment" do not require identical responses. A knowledgeable candidate may still receive modest marks when the answer does not perform the intellectual task specified in the question.

Previous-year questions should shape both content selection and revision priorities.

Current affairs must be studied as issues, not dates

A common misconception is that current-affairs preparation means remembering everything reported during a particular number of months. UPSC is rarely interested in news merely because it is recent. The Commission is interested in the issue underlying the news.
An election may bring attention to electoral reforms. A court judgement may revive questions concerning constitutional morality or separation of powers. A natural disaster may become the entry point for discussing urban planning, climate adaptation or administrative preparedness. A diplomatic visit may be used to test a longer relationship involving security, trade, technology and geopolitics.

The aspirant should therefore move through three levels: Event → Issue → Syllabus
For example:

- Event: A major heatwave affects several states.
- Issue: Heatwaves as public-health and disaster-management challenges.
- Syllabus connection: Geography, environment, health, vulnerable sections, urbanisation, disaster management and governance.

The final notes should be prepared around the issue, not merely around the event. Events change rapidly; analytical frameworks remain reusable.

The correct use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence has introduced a powerful but potentially dangerous instrument into UPSC preparation. Used intelligently, AI can assist an aspirant in:

- generating practice questions;
- simplifying a difficult concept;
- comparing two constitutional doctrines;
- identifying missing dimensions in an answer;
- creating revision quizzes;
- organising scattered notes;
- and providing feedback on structure and clarity.

But AI should never be treated as an unquestionable authority.mIt can produce factual errors, outdated information, fabricated examples and excessively generic arguments. It can also create a more subtle problem: the illusion that understanding has occurred merely because a polished explanation has been generated.

The governing principle should be:- Use artificial intelligence to accelerate intellectual work, not to outsource it.

An aspirant may ask AI to evaluate an answer, but must independently decide whether the feedback is valid. AI may help generate dimensions, but the candidate must verify facts through reliable sources. It may create a model response, but the student must learn to construct an answer without digital assistance.
The examination hall ultimately tests the candidate's mind—not the candidate's access to technology.

Answer writing is an exercise in prioritisation

Many aspirants assume that a good answer is one containing the maximum number of points. This is not always true. A good answer is one that contains the most relevant points in the most appropriate order, expressed with clarity and balance.

The first task is to identify the central demand of the question. The second is to create a structure. Only then should the candidate begin writing. A strong answer generally demonstrates four qualities:

1. Relevance

Every paragraph must contribute to the question. Knowledge that does not address the demand should be excluded, however impressive it may appear.

2. Structure

The examiner should be able to recognise the direction of the answer immediately. Subheadings, short paragraphs, logical sequencing and selective diagrams can improve readability.

3. Balance

Civil-service answers must avoid ideological rigidity. Balance does not mean avoiding a conclusion. It means acknowledging complexity before arriving at a reasoned position.

4. Administrative realism

Suggestions such as "create awareness," "ensure coordination" and "implement strictly" are incomplete unless the candidate explains who should act, through which institution and by what mechanism.

A mature conclusion should move from aspiration to implementation. For example, instead of writing that local bodies must be strengthened, the candidate may refer to predictable fiscal transfers, trained municipal cadres, ward-level planning, interoperable data systems and mechanisms for citizen accountability. Specificity gives credibility to an answer.

Ethics preparation cannot be reduced to quotations

Ethics is sometimes approached as a collection of definitions, quotations and case-study formats. This produces mechanical answers. Ethics preparation must develop moral reasoning. In an administrative case study, the candidate should identify:

- stakeholders;
- competing values;
- legal obligations;
- Institutional responsibilities;
- immediate and long-term consequences;
- vulnerable groups;
- available options;
- and safeguards against misuse.

The best option is not always the most dramatic or morally self-congratulatory one. It is generally the option that is legal, humane, proportionate, transparent and practically implementable. A future administrator must learn to distinguish among:

- what is personally desirable;
- what is legally permissible;
- what is institutionally appropriate;
- and what best protects the public interest.

This capacity cannot be developed through memorisation alone. Aspirants should regularly discuss real administrative dilemmas and defend their decisions against reasonable counterarguments.

Revision is not the final stage; it is the central process

Many aspirants create an unrealistic division between "completing the syllabus" and "beginning revision." In a vast examination such as UPSC, the syllabus is never completed in an absolute sense. There will always be another report, article, committee, judgement or example that can be added. Success depends on learning to stop expanding and start consolidating.

A sound preparation cycle is:
Study → Recall → Apply → Test → Review → Revise

Revision must involve active recall. Closing the book and attempting to reproduce the framework is more valuable than repeatedly rereading familiar pages. Testing should also be diagnostic rather than ceremonial. The purpose of a test is not merely to obtain a score. It is to identify:

- knowledge gaps;
- weak concepts;
- poor elimination habits; • time-management problems;
- misreading of questions;
- and recurring answer-writing deficiencies.

Every mistake should result in a specific correction. Otherwise, the same error will reappear in another form.

The three registers of preparation

Aspirants can organise preparation through three registers.

- The Knowledge Register - This contains facts, concepts, provisions, institutions, examples, reports and case studies.
- The Question Register - This contains previous-year questions, probable questions and alternative ways in which a topic may be tested.
- The Error Register - This contains recurring mistakes—incorrect assumptions, forgotten facts, weak introductions, excessive time spent on questions, poor choice of examples and flaws in judgement.

The error register is particularly valuable because it personalises preparation. Two aspirants may study the same books but require very different corrections.

Toppers do not necessarily make fewer mistakes at the beginning. They become better at preventing the repetition of mistakes.

The deeper purpose of preparation

The Civil Services Examination is intensely competitive, but preparation should not become an exercise in fear. At its best, the process introduces a young person to the Constitution, society, history, economy, environment, science, ethics and the complex machinery of governance. It teaches the student to examine public problems from multiple perspectives and to recognise the distance between attractive policy announcements and implementation on the ground.

Aspirants should therefore resist two extremes.

- The first is romanticism—the belief that passion alone will produce success.

- The second is cynicism—the belief that the examination is entirely unpredictable and that disciplined preparation has little value.

The correct approach lies between them: ambition supported by method, optimism disciplined by evidence and hard work guided by continuous evaluation.

A final message to aspirants

Do not attempt to know everything.
Know the syllabus. Understand the recurring themes. Build strong conceptual foundations. Follow current developments selectively. Analyse previous questions. Revise repeatedly. Practise under examination conditions. Learn from errors without allowing them to define you.
Above all, cultivate intellectual independence.nThe future civil servant will operate in an environment marked by technological disruption, ecological stress, social diversity, competing rights, fiscal constraints and rising public expectations. Such an officer cannot function merely as a storehouse of information. The officer must possess judgement—the ability to listen, distinguish, prioritise, decide and act responsibly.
The same is true of the successful aspirant. The decisive competitive advantage in the coming years will not belong to the student who possesses the largest collection of material. It will belong to the student who can transform limited, reliable knowledge into clear analysis and balanced judgement.That is not merely the path to clearing an examination. It is the beginning of becoming worthy of public service.

Article II

Art and Culture in Contemporary India: A Living Legacy of an Ancient Civilization

[Clipson Simon]

India is often described as one of the world's oldest living civilizations, where the past continues to breathe through the present. From the meticulously planned cities of the Indus Valley Civilization to the philosophical traditions of the Vedic age, the artistic brilliance of the Mauryas and Guptas, and the architectural splendour of the Cholas, Vijayanagara and Mughals, every era has contributed to a cultural mosaic that remains vibrant even today. Unlike many ancient civilizations that survive only in ruins, India's heritage continues to evolve through its festivals, languages, crafts, music, dance and living traditions.

In contemporary India, art and culture have assumed a significance that extends far beyond preserving history. They shape national identity, foster social cohesion and strengthen India's presence on the global stage. As the nation emerges as a major economic and geopolitical power, its cultural heritage has become an equally important source of soft power, enabling India to engage with the world through shared values, spirituality, art and knowledge traditions.

The recognition of Indian heritage by UNESCO reflects this global appreciation. The recent inscription of **Sarnath** as India's **45th World Heritage Site**, along with the inclusion of the **Maratha Military Landscapes**, demonstrates that India's cultural wealth is not confined to ancient monuments alone but encompasses diverse historical periods and regional identities. These sites are more than symbols of the past; they serve as centres of education, research and sustainable tourism while generating livelihoods for local communities. Likewise, natural World Heritage Sites such as the Western Ghats and Kaziranga National Park remind us that India's cultural and ecological heritage are deeply interconnected.

Rapid urbanisation, climate change and uncontrolled tourism pose significant challenges to the preservation of this legacy. Fortunately, conservation efforts are increasingly embracing technology through digital documentation, three-dimensional mapping and virtual museums, ensuring that future generations inherit an authentic record of India's civilisational achievements. At the same time, initiatives such as the repatriation of stolen antiquities and the promotion of Indian cultural traditions abroad reflect a renewed commitment to safeguarding and celebrating the nation's heritage.

Art and culture are, therefore, not merely reflections of India's glorious past but vital resources for its future. They inspire innovation while preserving identity, strengthen communities while embracing diversity, and remind a rapidly modernising nation that sustainable progress is rooted in cultural continuity. In preserving its heritage, India is not simply protecting monuments or traditions—it is safeguarding the living soul of one of humanity's oldest and most enduring civilizations.

Article III

Beyond Alliances: India's Architecture of Strategic Autonomy

[Jayakrishnan R]

Strategic autonomy has remained the cornerstone of India's foreign policy since Independence. It refers to a nation's ability to make sovereign decisions in accordance with its national interests without being constrained by formal military alliances or external pressures. Although its origins lie in India's policy of Non-Alignment during the Cold War, the concept has evolved significantly in response to changing geopolitical realities.

Today, strategic autonomy is no longer synonymous with neutrality or isolationism. Instead, it reflects a pragmatic and flexible approach of engaging with all major powers while avoiding excessive dependence on any one of them. In an increasingly fragmented international order characterised by great-power competition, technological rivalry, and economic interdependence, India seeks to maximise its strategic options through a policy of "multi-alignment" and issue-based cooperation.

This approach enables India to safeguard its sovereignty, enhance its global influence, and emerge as a leading power without compromising its independent decision-making.

Evolution of India's Strategic Autonomy

India's strategic autonomy has undergone a gradual transformation over the past eight decades, adapting to shifts in both domestic capabilities and the global strategic environment.

Phase I: Idealistic Neutrality (1947–1962)

During the early years after Independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru championed the policy of Non-Alignment. India consciously avoided joining either the United States-led Western bloc or the Soviet bloc during the Cold War. Instead, it advocated peaceful coexistence, decolonisation, disarmament, and respect for sovereignty. As a founding leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India sought to preserve its policy independence while promoting a rules-based international order rooted in moral diplomacy. However, the 1962 Sino-Indian War exposed the limitations of idealistic neutrality in addressing hard security challenges.

Phase II: Pragmatic Survival (1962–1991)

The security shocks of the 1962 war with China and subsequent conflicts with Pakistan compelled India to adopt a more pragmatic foreign policy. Recognising the need for reliable strategic support, India signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1971. While India remained formally non-aligned, it increasingly relied on Soviet military, diplomatic, and technological assistance to address regional security challenges. Thus, strategic autonomy during this phase was characterised not by strict neutrality but by calibrated partnerships necessary for national survival.

Phase III: Strategic Rebalancing (1991–2014)

The end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalisation marked another significant shift. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, India diversified its foreign relations and strengthened economic and strategic engagement with the United States, Europe, Japan, and Southeast Asia while preserving its longstanding partnership with Russia. India's nuclear tests in 1998 reaffirmed its sovereign decision-making despite international criticism, while the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement of 2008 demonstrated India's ability to integrate with the global order without sacrificing strategic independence.

Phase IV: Multi-Alignment and Issue-Based Coalitions (2014 – Present)

In the current era, India has moved beyond balancing major powers to actively shaping global governance. Rather than adhering to rigid alliance structures, India engages simultaneously with multiple partners based on specific national interests. This approach reflects a transition from non-alignment to multi-alignment, allowing India to collaborate with different countries across defence, technology, climate change, trade, and connectivity while retaining complete policy flexibility.

Pillars of India's Architecture of Strategic Autonomy

India's contemporary strategy rests upon several mutually reinforcing pillars that provide resilience, flexibility, and policy independence.

1. Multi-Alignment and Issue-Based Coalitions

Instead of joining exclusive military alliances, India participates in overlapping bilateral, mini-lateral, and multilateral forums based on shared interests.

In the Indo-Pacific, India works closely with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, to promote maritime security, resilient supply chains, disaster relief, and a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

Simultaneously, India remains an active member of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), strengthening cooperation with Eurasian partners on issues such as counterterrorism, energy security, financial reform, and regional connectivity. By participating in these diverse forums, India avoids being drawn into bloc politics while maximising diplomatic leverage.

2. Diplomatic De-hyphenation

A defining feature of India's foreign policy is its ability to manage multiple complex relationships independently.

India has continued purchasing discounted crude oil and defence equipment from Russia despite Western sanctions, thereby ensuring energy security and military preparedness. At the same time, India has significantly expanded defence, semiconductor, artificial intelligence, and critical technology cooperation with the United States through initiatives such as the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET).

Similarly, India has cultivated robust strategic ties with Israel in defence, agriculture, and innovation while simultaneously strengthening partnerships with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. This balanced approach demonstrates India's ability to pursue parallel partnerships without allowing one relationship to undermine another.

3. Leadership of the Global South

India increasingly positions itself as the voice of developing nations by acting as a bridge between advanced economies and emerging countries.

During its G20 Presidency, India successfully secured permanent membership of the African Union in the G20, thereby expanding the representation of developing countries in global governance. Furthermore, through the Voice of Global South Summits, India has highlighted issues such as development financing, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), food security, climate justice, and equitable access to technology. This leadership enhances India's diplomatic credibility while reinforcing its image as a responsible global power.

Structural Vulnerabilities and Emerging Challenges

Despite its successes, India's strategy of strategic autonomy faces several structural challenges.

First, India's defence sector continues to depend significantly on imported military platforms, particularly from Russia, making supply chains vulnerable during geopolitical crises.

Second, intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States and China reduces the diplomatic space available for maintaining balanced relationships with competing powers.

Third, technological competition in areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and telecommunications creates pressure to align with competing technological ecosystems.

Fourth, economic coercion, sanctions, and disruptions in global supply chains may constrain India's policy choices.

Finally, regional security challenges—including China's assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), instability in the Indo-Pacific, and cross-border terrorism—require India to continuously strengthen both military capabilities and strategic partnerships without compromising its autonomy.

The way Forward

To preserve and strengthen strategic autonomy in the coming decades, India must reinforce its domestic foundations alongside its external engagements.

The first priority is Aatmanirbharta in defence. Expanding the Positive Indigenisation Lists, increasing indigenous defence manufacturing, encouraging private-sector participation, and promoting defence exports will reduce dependence on foreign suppliers while strengthening national security.

Second, India must pursue geoeconomic hedging by diversifying trade and investment partnerships. Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the UAE, EFTA countries, Australia, the United Kingdom, and other partners can strengthen supply chain resilience and reduce excessive dependence on any single market.

Third, technology and digital sovereignty must become central to strategic autonomy. India's Digital Public Infrastructure, India Stack, semiconductor initiatives, trusted telecommunications networks, and critical mineral partnerships should be leveraged to secure technological resilience while maintaining collaboration with trusted international partners.

Finally, sustained economic growth, investment in research and innovation, human capital development, and institutional reforms will provide the material foundations necessary for India to exercise genuine strategic independence in an increasingly competitive world.

India's contemporary strategic autonomy represents the evolution of its foreign policy from the idealism of Non-Alignment to the pragmatism of multi-alignment. It is no longer about maintaining equal distance from competing powers but about maintaining independent judgement and choosing different partners for different purposes based on national interest. By combining flexible diplomacy, diversified partnerships, leadership of the Global South, and strong domestic capabilities, India seeks to maximise its strategic space in an era of geopolitical uncertainty. However, the long-term success of this approach will depend not merely on diplomatic balancing but on converting India's expanding economic strength, technological innovation, military self-reliance, and institutional capacity into enduring strategic influence. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar, India's architecture of strategic autonomy will remain a critical instrument for safeguarding sovereignty while advancing its aspiration to become a leading global power.

[Acknowledgment & References:

The essay, "Beyond Alliances: India’s Architecture of Strategic Autonomy," is a synthesis compiled from authoritative policy, journalistic, and academic streams. The core geopolitical frameworks—including the transition from classic Non-Alignment to issue-based Multi-Alignment and Diplomatic De-hyphenation—are drawn from the speeches, books (The India Way), and foreign policy readings of India’s External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar.

Primary event data, including updates on the G20 African Union inclusion, iCET technology pacts, and the Voice of the Global South Summits, are sourced directly from official press releases on the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) website. The analytical timeline tracking India's strategic shifts and contemporary structural vulnerabilities is informed by editorial perspectives, essays, and policy reportage from The Hindu newspaper and standardised civil services current affairs preparation frameworks]

Article IV

India embarks on historic Census 2027: World's first fully digital headcount begins

[Arun Sasi]

In a significant shift from paper-heavy processes, the 16th national census will feature comprehensive caste enumeration for the first time since 1931 and leverage satellite-based mapping tools.

India has officially commenced the first phase of its long-awaited 16th national census—rebranded as Census 2027—marking a historic transition as the world's first fully digital population enumeration exercise. Overseen by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (ORGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the mammoth operation to count over 1.4 billion citizens comes with a sanctioned financial outlay of ₹11,718 crore.

The decennial exercise, originally scheduled for 2021, faced indefinite delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to senior officials, the current roll-out represents a complete technological re-engineering of India's statistical infrastructure rather than a mere extension of previous operations.

A Two-Phase Operational Roadmap

The census is structured across two distinct phases designed to collect granular socio-economic indicators across every household in the country.

Phase I: House Listing Operations (HLO): Having officially commenced on April 1, 2026, the active field-listing process will kick off in mid-April. The initial batch covers a diverse array of states and Union Territories, including Karnataka, Odisha, Goa, Mizoram, Sikkim, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, and specific administrative zones in the national capital like the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Cantonment Board. Enumerators will systematically log residential structures, geo-tag assets, and record basic amenities such as clean drinking water access, energy usage, and digital connectivity.

Phase II: Population Enumeration (PE): The actual headcount will take place in February 2027, with March 1, 2027, set as the national reference date. To bypass severe winter disruptions, snow-bound regions—including Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand—will undergo an accelerated timeline with enumeration occurring in September 2026, tied to an October 1 reference date.

The Return of Caste Enumeration

In what political analysts and sociologists view as a landmark policy shift, Census 2027 will include a comprehensive count of all caste categories, including Other Backward Classes (OBCs), a practice abandoned after 1931. While Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been regularly counted to satisfy constitutional mandates, the lack of empirical numbers on other groups has long been a flashpoint in policy and judicial debates.

Following approval from the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA), the ORGI is designing a specialized classification methodology to untangle variations in regional sub-caste names. Officials emphasize that the resulting dataset will provide the objective reality necessary to design inclusive development strategies and fine-tune targeted welfare delivery.

Tech Infrastructure and Privacy Guards

To coordinate an estimated 3.2 million field personnel—largely comprising government officials and public school teachers—the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) has developed a four-tier digital ecosystem:

Platform Component	Primary Operational Function
Houselisting Block Creator (HLBC)	Uses satellite imagery and web-mapping tools to precisely define boundaries, replacing hand-drawn maps.
HLO Mobile Application	A secure multi-lingual application (16 languages) featuring offline modes to facilitate seamless field entry in remote regions.
Self-Enumeration Portal	Accessible via se.census.gov.in, allowing heads of households to securely pre-fill data online and generate a 16-digit verification ID.
Census Management System (CMMS)	A centralized dashboard enabling real-time monitoring of enumerator progress across all administrative tiers.

Addressing growing civil society concerns over data confidentiality, the Registrar General confirmed that the digital architecture features end-to-end encryption and multi-factor authentication. The data collection process is structurally bound by both the historical Census Act of 1948 and the newer statutory boundaries of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023.

Long-term Political and Welfare Implications

The data generated by Census 2027 will hold systemic consequences for India's governance trajectory over the next few decades. Most notably, the updated demographic figures will serve as the mathematical foundation for the upcoming delimitation exercise, which will redefine the boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies—a mechanism that has remained frozen based on 1971 population metrics.

Furthermore, the spatial archiving and geo-tagging of buildings will equip disaster management cells with precise structural density charts, while the granular household asset mapping will allow the state to transition toward precision governance for flagship initiatives like the Jal Jeevan Mission and housing welfare schemes.

To boost public cooperation, the government has launched a national awareness campaign anchored by two official mascots, Pragati and Vikas, emphasizing that the fidelity of the census directly dictates the quality of national infrastructure planning for the decade ahead.

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