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Reclaiming universities through trust, student voice

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in Focus?

- Recent student protests and the intervention of the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** have renewed debate on **academic freedom, student participation and university governance**.
- The issue highlights the need to shift from a **control-oriented model** to a more **participatory and student-centric model** of higher education.

Key Highlights:

- Academic freedom** is essential for universities as spaces for **inquiry, research, debate and knowledge creation**. Excessive state or administrative control can weaken this freedom.
- The Indian Constitution does not explicitly guarantee academic freedom, unlike countries such as **Germany, Japan, South Africa, Portugal and Spain**.

- Universities should have autonomy over **curriculum, teaching, research and academic decisions**, while reasonable regulation can apply to unlawful conduct.
- Indian universities are largely **Vice-Chancellor-centric**, with limited participation of students and faculty in academic, administrative and financial decisions.
- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** envisaged public investment in education at **6% of GDP**, but actual public spending has remained around **4-4.1% of GDP**.
- Problems such as **vacant faculty positions, poor infrastructure, hostel shortages, examination paper leaks and weak recruitment processes** contribute to student dissatisfaction.
- The proposed **"liberty model"** promotes trust, dialogue and student participation in **curriculum design, faculty appointments, procurement and university regulations**, instead of excessive surveillance and control.

Implications:

- Excessive centralisation** can reduce institutional autonomy and create a sense of alienation among students and faculty.
- Ideological influence** in curriculum, faculty appointments and research funding may undermine **merit, academic neutrality and intellectual diversity**.
- Weak grievance-redressal mechanisms can cause legitimate student concerns to escalate into protests and confrontations.



- **Underfunding and poor infrastructure** reduce the quality of higher education and limit research and innovation.
- Lack of transparency and adherence to **natural justice, accountability and institutional ethics** in appointments can weaken public trust.
- Academic freedom must be balanced with **reasonable restrictions against violence, defamation, discrimination and unlawful conduct**.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen **institutional autonomy** while ensuring transparency, accountability and constitutional oversight.
- Establish effective **student grievance-redressal systems**, regular open houses and institutional dialogue between students, faculty and administrators.
- Give students meaningful representation in **academic and administrative bodies**, while maintaining appropriate professional safeguards.
- Ensure **merit-based, transparent and independent recruitment** of Vice-Chancellors and faculty members.
- Increase public investment in higher education and improve **infrastructure, hostels, faculty strength, examination integrity and research funding**.

Mains Question:

“Academic freedom and participatory governance are essential for creating universities that foster innovation, critical thinking and democratic values.” Discuss the challenges facing university autonomy and student participation in India. Suggest measures to strengthen democratic and accountable higher education governance. (15 marks, 250 words)

India-Japan defence cooperation breaks new ground

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Why in Focus?

- **Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi's August 2026 visit to India highlighted efforts to turn long-standing strategic cooperation into stronger operational and defence-industrial capabilities.**

Key Highlights

- **India and Japan have developed defence cooperation through annual defence dialogues**, the 2+2 mechanism, military exercises, logistics arrangements and defence technology cooperation.
 - A **new maritime framework focuses on information sharing and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** to improve understanding of maritime activities across the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Both sides are exploring joint naval shipbuilding and design, combining Japan's technology with India's manufacturing capabilities.**
 - **India and Japan agreed to deepen ship-repair cooperation and explore Japan's use of Indian production facilities under Make in India.**
 - **Japan's UNICORN integrated communications antenna system is being pursued as the first defence equipment transfer project** between the two countries; an MoU on its co-development with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) was signed in 2024.
- Japan's UNICORN** (Unified Communications and Networking Radio) is an integrated communications antenna system developed to enhance secure and seamless military communications.
- **Cooperation between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Japan's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency (ATLA)** is also being strengthened.
 - **Japan participated in Veer Guardian 2026 with fighter aircraft for the first time**, while both sides agreed to make exercises more complex and include unmanned systems and special operations forces.



Veer Guardian-2026 is a bilateral air exercise between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF).

Implications

- **Defence cooperation has often been strong institutionally but weak in actual implementation.**
- The 2015 defence equipment and technology transfer agreement has **produced limited concrete outcomes.**
- Defence-industrial cooperation between the two countries **remains below its potential.**
- **Differences in defence procurement systems, technology standards and industrial capabilities** can slow joint projects.
- **Maintaining cooperation without making the partnership solely China-centric** remains important.

Way Forward

- **Focus on implementing existing defence agreements** rather than announcing only new initiatives.
- **Expand joint development and production of defence equipment** under Make in India.
- **Strengthen Maritime Domain Awareness and information-sharing mechanisms** across the Indo-Pacific.
- **Increase the complexity and frequency of joint military exercises**, including unmanned and special-operations capabilities.
- **Deepen cooperation in shipbuilding, logistics, repair facilities, critical technologies** and resilient supply chains.
- **Use the partnership to promote a free, open and resilient Indo-Pacific** while supporting broader regional cooperation.

Mains Question

India-Japan defence cooperation is gradually shifting from strategic convergence towards operational capability. Discuss its significance for India's security and the Indo-Pacific region. (250 words)

Concerns over the Census questions

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Why in Focus?

- The **2027 Census** questionnaire introduces several personal-identity details, raising concerns about **data confidentiality, privacy, purpose limitation and the possible linkage with the National Population Register (NPR).**
- The debate highlights the need to balance **accurate population data** with **individual privacy and the credibility of official statistics.**

Key Highlights:

- A **population census** is a comprehensive exercise to collect, process and publish **demographic, economic and social data** about every person at the smallest geographic level.
- The **2027 Census** includes new details such as **parents' names, permanent address, nationality, COVID-19 vaccination location, number of bank accounts, mobile number, Aadhaar, Voter ID, Passport and driving licence details.**
- The **United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics** emphasise **confidentiality of individual information** and state that such data should be used exclusively for statistical purposes.
- Many of the new personal details may have **limited statistical value**, while collecting them could significantly increase the workload of more than **30 lakh enumerators.**
- Information on **parents, permanent address and nationality** could potentially assist in preparing or updating the **National Population Register (NPR- A register that records all usual residents of India)**, which has implications for citizenship-related processes.



If a village has 1,000 people, the **Census** tells us how many are children, how many are educated, what occupations they have, etc. The **NPR** records who the usual residents of that village are.

- The Census questionnaire is expected to contain around **40 questions**, increasing the possibility of **respondent fatigue, casual responses and enumeration errors**.
- The article argues for a **clear legal and transparent process** if Census data is to be used for purposes beyond statistical compilation, so that **Census confidentiality** is not compromised.

Implications:

- **Privacy concerns** arise when sensitive identifiers such as Aadhaar, Voter ID, Passport and mobile numbers are collected during a statistical exercise.
- **Purpose limitation** may be weakened if information collected for the Census is subsequently used for other administrative purposes without clear safeguards.
- A lengthy questionnaire can cause **respondent fatigue and inaccurate reporting**, affecting the quality and reliability of Census data.
- Collecting information from **institutional households** such as hostels, prisons and old-age homes may be particularly difficult because respondents may not possess complete personal details.
- Linking Census information with the **NPR or other databases** could create concerns regarding **function creep, data security and public trust**.
- Excessive collection of non-essential information may shift the Census from a **statistical exercise towards an administrative or surveillance-oriented exercise**, potentially reducing cooperation from citizens.

Way Forward:

- Follow the principle of **data minimisation** by collecting only information that has a clear and legitimate statistical or administrative purpose.
- Clearly specify the **legal basis, purpose and permissible use** of every category of

information collected through the Census.

- Maintain strict **confidentiality and purpose limitation**, with safeguards against unauthorised sharing or linkage with other databases.
- Provide **clear instructions to enumerators and respondents** regarding optional fields, data protection and handling of personal information.
- Strengthen **digital and institutional data-security mechanisms** and ensure independent oversight to protect the credibility of Census operations.

Mains Question:

“The Census is primarily a statistical exercise, but the increasing collection of personal identifiers raises concerns about privacy and purpose limitation.” Discuss the challenges associated with the 2027 Census questionnaire and suggest measures to ensure both data quality and individual privacy. (15 marks, 250 words)

Postmemory: delineating the impact of trauma on the generation-after

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in Focus?

- The “**generation-after**” or **second generation** refers to people born after their previous generation experienced a major **war, genocide or collective trauma**.
- Their inherited memories can shape their **identity, lived experiences and understanding of history**, even though they did not directly experience the original event.

Key Highlights

- **Postmemory**, a concept coined by **Marianne Hirsch**, describes the relationship of the



generation-after with powerful and often traumatic experiences that occurred **before their birth**.

- These memories are transmitted through **photographs, oral narratives, videos and family stories**, and can sometimes feel more real than their own childhood memories.
- **Eva Hoffman** argues that large-scale loss can pass through **individual lives, decades and generations**, leaving the generation-after with memories of losses they never personally experienced.
- Memory can also become a **political tool** when official accounts fail to acknowledge the full human cost of war and violence.
- In the **Sri Lankan civil war**, a UN-ordered investigation estimated that up to **40,000 civilians** may have been killed during the **final month of the 2009 military campaign**, while the **Sri Lankan government rejected these findings**.
- The **Tamil diaspora** continues to observe **May 18 as Mullivaikkal Remembrance Day**, preserving memories of the victims and resisting the erasure of their lived experiences.
- The generation-after can therefore help preserve **historical memory and victims' stories**, while ensuring that future generations understand the past without being permanently paralysed by its trauma.

Implications

- **Generational trauma** can **influence people** who were not direct victims of war or genocide, shaping their identity, emotions and relationship with history.
- **Postmemory** shows how traumatic experiences can be **transmitted across generations** through families, communities and cultural representations.
- When states deny or minimise atrocities, **collective memory becomes an important means of preserving victims' experiences**.
- The generation-after can play a crucial role in preventing the **erasure of historical suffering** and passing these experiences to future generations.
- The impact of war therefore extends beyond immediate casualties and economic losses to

include **long-term psychological, social and historical consequences**.

Way Forward

- Recognise the **intergenerational impact of war and genocide** while documenting the experiences of affected communities.
- Preserve **oral histories, photographs, testimonies and other forms of collective memory** for future generations.
- Ensure credible investigations and **acknowledgement of victims' experiences** where official narratives remain contested.
- Encourage historical remembrance that preserves the past without allowing **inherited trauma to permanently paralyse future generations**.
- Include the experiences of the **generation-after** in discussions on conflict, reconciliation and transitional justice.

Mains Question

What is "postmemory"? Discuss how war, genocide and collective trauma can influence the lived experiences and historical consciousness of generations that did not directly experience these events. **(250 words)**



KEYWORDS

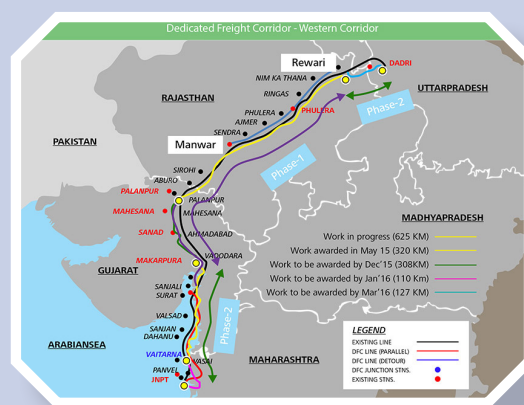
TRISHNA

- The **French space agency (CNES)** recently reaffirmed **complete trust in ISRO** and its workhorse **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)** to launch the joint **TRISHNA satellite mission** as scheduled.
- **TRISHNA (Thermal Infra-Red Imaging Satellite for High-resolution Natural Resource Assessment)** is designed to map the **Earth's surface temperature, evapotranspiration rates, and radiation budgets** at an unprecedented scale.
- The mission carries **two primary payloads** - a **4-channel Thermal Infra-Red (TIR) sensor** developed by France and a **7-band Visible, Near-Infrared, and Short-Wave Infrared (VNIR-SWIR) optical sensor** developed by India.
- The satellite will be placed in a **761-km Sun-synchronous orbit** (an orbit in which a satellite passes over the same region at nearly the same local solar time on each visit), providing a high **revisit frequency of every 3 days** and a **57-metre spatial resolution** for land and coastal areas.
- TRISHNA data will help assess **crop water stress in near real time**, optimise **agricultural irrigation**, map **urban heat islands**, and track **glacier dynamics**.
- The mission will support **water and food security** by improving the monitoring and management of **natural resources and climate-related changes**.

Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)

- The **Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)** spans about **1,506 km** from **Jawaharlal Nehru Port Terminal (JNPT)** in **Maharashtra** to **Dadri** in **Uttar Pradesh**.
- The **WDFC** passes through **Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh**.

- The **corridor facilitates the movement of containerized cargo, textiles, chemicals, industrial products** and export-import freight through western ports.
- The **WDFC is primarily funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**.
- The **WDFC is built and managed by the Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL)**, a public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Railways.



CosmoCube

- CosmoCube is a **UK-led lunar-orbiting satellite mission**, developed by an international team led by the University of Cambridge.
- **CosmoCube** is a proposed **small satellite** designed to orbit the **far side of the Moon**, with a **planned launch before the end of this decade**.
- The Moon will act as a **natural shield from Earth's radio interference**, providing a quieter environment for observations.
- It will use a **low-frequency radio radiometer** operating around **10-100 MHz**.
- The mission could help study the **Cosmic Dark Ages, first stars and galaxies**, and possibly the **Hubble tension**.
 - ◆ **Hubble tension** is the **disagreement between different methods of measuring the Universe's expansion rate (Hubble constant)**.

Places in News

- ◆ The **Cosmic Dark Ages** refers to a time in the early universe when there were no stars or galaxies to emit light.

PRATUSH(Probing ReionizATIOn of the Universe using Signal from Hydrogen)

- PRATUSH is being developed by the **Raman Research Institute (RRI)**, with support from the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**.
- It is a proposed **radio telescope and radiometer in lunar orbit** designed to study the formation of the **first stars in the Universe**.
- PRATUSH will detect the faint **21-cm radio signal from hydrogen atoms**, which carries information about events during the **Cosmic Dawn**.
 - ◆ **Cosmic Dawn** is the period, roughly **50 million to 1 billion years after the Big Bang**, when the **first stars, black holes, and galaxies formed** in the Universe.
- The mission ultimately **envisions observations from the far side of the Moon**, one of the quietest radio environments in the inner Solar System.
 - ◆ The lunar far side **will shield observations from Earth's radio interference and ionospheric distortion**.

Jeju Island

- **Jeju Island** is a **volcanic island and a special autonomous province of South Korea**.
- The island was formed through **volcanic activity approximately two million years ago**.
- It contains four major ecosystems: **alpine coniferous forests, temperate broadleaf forests, warm-temperate evergreen forests, and temperate grasslands**.
- Its **core area is protected as a national park**, which supports many **endangered plants and animals**.
- **Jeju City** is the island's principal **port and transport hub**, with its main airport handling **domestic and international flights**.



Orangutans (Pongo)



- **Five young orangutans** were recently rescued by the forest department after being found abandoned in a casuarina plantation in **Balasore, Odisha**. Authorities suspect a **botched illegal wildlife transit operation**, as orangutans are not native to India.
- **Orangutans (genus *Pongo*)** are **great apes** naturally found in the tropical rainforests of **Indonesia and Malaysia**, mainly on **Borneo and Sumatra**.
- They are the **world's largest arboreal (tree-dwelling) mammals** and are highly intelligent, sharing **over 96% of their DNA with humans**.
- All three surviving species - **Bornean, Sumatran and Tapanuli orangutans** - are classified as **Critically Endangered** on the **IUCN Red List**.
- Orangutans have an **extremely slow reproductive rate**, making population recovery difficult after severe declines.
- Major threats include **habitat loss and fragmentation** caused by deforestation for **palm oil and agricultural plantations**, along with **poaching and the illegal exotic pet trade**.

Buellia maharajensis

- *Buellia maharajensis* is a **newly discovered species of lichen** found in **Mathikettan Shola National Park, Kerala**.
- It is a **saxicolous lichen**, meaning it **grows directly on rock surfaces**.
- The species was **recorded at an elevation of approximately 1,351 metres**.
- The discovery was **made during a lichen diversity survey in the park**.
- The species was **named maharajensis in honour of Maharaja's College, Ernakulam**.

