

Making scholarships integral to India's academic culture

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Economic and Social Development-Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2

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

1. Context: GER and Need for Scholarships

- India aims to raise **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** in higher education to **50%**.
- Number of institutions increased from **51,534 (2014-15) to over 70,000 (2025-26 Economic Survey)**.
- However, GER remains low at **29.5 (2022-23)**.
- Indicates that **infrastructure expansion alone is insufficient**.
- Core issue is not aspiration but **limited access, affordability, and risk of participation**, especially in smaller towns.
- Hence, scholarships must shift from being **peripheral support to a central pathway** in higher education.

2. Key Challenges in Higher Education

- **Access challenge:** Regional and social inequalities restrict entry into higher education.
- **Affordability challenge:** High costs make education a **long-term financial burden** for families.
- **Quality challenge:** Enrolment does not always ensure **learning outcomes or employability**.
- Large pool of **talented students remains excluded** due to cost, distance, and uncertainty.
- Scholarships can act as a **critical enabler**, not just financially but also through:
 - ➔ Academic support and mentoring

- ➔ Leadership development
- ➔ Exposure and career guidance

3. Existing Framework and Lessons

- Government support includes:
 - ➔ Scholarships, **interest subsidies**, and **credit guarantees**.
 - ➔ National Scholarship Portal acts as a unified platform for schemes.
 - ➔ Central Sector Scheme provides **upto 82,000 scholarships annually**.
- Private sector (corporates, trusts, NGOs) also offers **merit-cum-means scholarships**.
- However, scholarships remain **limited and treated as financial add-ons**.
- Historical lesson from Takshashila:
 - ➔ Multiple fee options (pay upfront, deferred payment, work-study, regional support, charity).
 - ➔ Principle: **No student should be denied education due to lack of means**.
- Institutional examples:
 - ➔ **Ashoka University:** About 20% students get **100% scholarships**, roughly 50% receive aid; need-sensitive process of granting scholarship
 - ➔ **Indian School of Business:** **250–280 scholarships annually**, ~40% of newly launched PGP-Young Leaders program is supported.
- Global practices:
 - ➔ U.S. universities: **multidisciplinary scholarship ecosystems**.
 - ➔ China: **region-specific scholarships aligned to development needs**.

4. Way Forward: Making Scholarships Central

Shift from limited aid to structured pathways:

- Multi-year scholarships instead of annual renewals.
- Region-based scholarships targeting **underserved districts**.
- Programme-linked scholarships in sectors like **AI, manufacturing, healthcare**.

Policy measures:

- **Tax incentives and matching grants** to encourage philanthropy.
- Build **endowment-based sustainable funding systems**.
- Introduce **performance-linked frameworks** for institutions (merit + need + outcomes).

Broader impact:

- Scholarships enhance **equity, quality, and enrollment simultaneously**.
- Improve **social mobility, campus diversity, and institutional credibility**.
- Essential for achieving **GER 50% with meaningful learning outcomes**.

Nari Shakti, India's defining reform for the next decade

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

1. Policy-Driven Women Empowerment in India

- Shift from **intent to infrastructure** in women empowerment
- Women placed at the **centre of development policy**
- Major achievements:
 - ➡ **PM Jan Dhan Yojana** → over **55% accounts held by women**
 - ➡ **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** → promote **grassroots entrepreneurship**

- ➡ **Ujjwala Yojana** → reduces **health risks & hard labour**
- ➡ **MUDRA loans** → **70% to women entrepreneurs**
- **Female Labour Force Participation** increased to **37%**

2. Social Sector Improvements & Structural Change

- Expanded healthcare access via:
 - ➡ **Ayushman Bharat**
 - ➡ **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan**
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** → changing **social attitudes**
- Women seen as **drivers of growth**, not just beneficiaries
- Emphasis on **policy design + delivery + accountability**

3. Challenges: Last-Mile Delivery & Policy Penetration

- Persistent **awareness gaps** and **uneven enrolment**
- **Last-mile delivery** depends on local administrative capacity
- Need to shift from:
 - ➡ **Announcements** → **Full coverage**
 - ➡ **Outputs** → **Actual impact**
 - ➡ **Eligibility on paper to access in practice**
- Importance of:
 - ➡ **District-level ownership**
 - ➡ **Data-driven monitoring**
 - ➡ **Inter-departmental convergence**

4. Way Forward: Representation, Leadership & Institutional Support

- **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam** → enhances **women's political representation**
- Potential **multiplier effect**:
 - ➡ Better **policy responsiveness**
 - ➡ Increased **participation & leadership pipelines**
- Focus areas for future:
 - ➡ **Capacity building & mentorship**

- ➡ **Simpler and faster policy delivery systems**
- ➡ Strong **feedback mechanisms**
- Women’s empowerment is **central to India’s 2047 development vision**
- If India can achieve saturation in access, strengthen participation, and enable leadership, **it will not just empower its women ,it will redefine its growth trajectory.**

What does the Jan Vishwas Bill do?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
 Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
 Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures

1. Context: Jan Vishwas Bill and Decriminalisation Push

- The **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025-26** aims to shift India’s regulatory framework from a **punitive to trust-based governance model.**
- It builds on the **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023**, which decriminalised **183 provisions across 42 Central laws.**
- India’s regulatory system has historically imposed **criminal penalties for minor procedural lapses**, affecting businesses.
- The Bill addresses **over-criminalisation**, which hampers ease of doing business.

2. Rationale and Objectives of the Bill

- The Bill proposes amendments to **784 provisions across 79 Central Acts** under **23 ministries.**
- **717 provisions are to be decriminalised**, while others improve ease of living.
- Core principle: **Proportionality**—punishment must match the gravity of the offence.
- Key objectives:
 - ➡ **Separation of offences:** Distinguishes serious crimes (fraud, wilful evasion, public safety threats) from procedural lapses.

- ➡ **Equity for MSMEs:** Small firms face higher compliance risks due to limited capacity.
- ➡ **Judicial efficiency:** Reduce burden of over **4.8 crore pending cases (NJDG, Dec 2025).**

3. Key Features of the Bill

- **Decriminalisation:** Removal of imprisonment for minor violations.
- **Civil penalties:** Monetary fines based on severity.
- **Graded response:** Warnings and advisory notices for minor/first-time defaults.
- **Compounding provisions:** Faster resolution without full trials.
- **Administrative adjudication:**
 - ➡ Officers decide cases within timelines
 - ➡ Appellate mechanisms ensure fairness
- **Periodic revision of penalties** and focus on **digitisation and simplification.**

4. Impact, Significance, and Concerns

- **Judiciary:** Reduces case burden, allowing focus on serious matters.
- **Regulators:** Greater responsibility with need for strong oversight.
- **Businesses (MSMEs):** Reduced fear of prosecution → better compliance and formalisation.
- **Justice system:** Promotes **proportionate and predictable regulation.**
- **Concerns:**
 - ➡ Excessive administrative discretion
 - ➡ Weak appellate safeguards
 - ➡ Monetary penalties may not reduce burden
 - ➡ Lack of uniformity across laws
- **Conclusion with Way Forward:**
- The Bill is a **significant reform**, but its success depends on **clear guidelines, strong oversight mechanisms, effective appellate systems, and uniform implementation standards to ensure accountability while promoting ease of doing business.**

How will Gaganyaan astronauts return safely to earth?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3
Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1. Context

- The **Gaganyaan crew module will orbit Earth at about 7,800 m/s** and must slow down when coming back to Earth.
- **Aerobraking slows the capsule down as it re-enters Earth**, removing most of its speed.

Aerobraking: It is the process of using air resistance (atmospheric drag) to slow down a spacecraft when it enters a planet's atmosphere.

- **Parachutes open when it is close to Earth (around 12 km)** to reduce speed for a safe landing.
- It also has **devices to locate it, keep it stable, and braking rockets for land landing**, like Soyuz spacecraft and Shenzhou spacecraft.

2. Why Parachutes Alone Are Not Sufficient?

- Parachutes **alone are not enough because landing on land needs a very low speed** (1–2 m/s).
- In water, higher speed (7–9 m/s) is okay because water absorbs impact better.
- To reduce speed further using only parachutes, they would need to be extremely large and heavy.
- A **very large parachute is hard to deploy** and can get tangled.
- So, **for land landing, extra braking systems are needed** along with parachutes.

3. Why is the Landing Zone Elliptical?

- The module **moves at hypersonic speed**, so most energy is in the forward direction.
- Small changes in speed or atmosphere can make it land far ahead or behind.
- It has **very little ability to move sideways during re-entry**.

- So, the **landing area becomes long in one direction and narrow sideways**.
- Hence, the **landing zone is elliptical, helping easy prediction** and recovery.

4. Recovery of Gaganyaan Crew Module

- The **Indian Navy will lead the recovery operation**.
- The module will slow down with parachutes and splash down in the Bay of Bengal.
- **Parachutes will be released** and flotation bags will inflate.
- **Naval divers will secure the module** with a flotation collar.
- The module will be lifted onto a ship and the crew will be extracted.

KEYWORDS

Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients

- Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) are the **main components in a drug that produce the intended therapeutic effect in the body**.
- They are **created by processing chemical compounds and directly interact with biological targets** like receptors or enzymes.
- APIs determine the strength, quality, and efficacy of a medicine.
- Every medicine consists of two parts: **the API (active part) and excipients (inactive supporting substances)**.
- Excipients, such as lactose or mineral oil, help in drug delivery, stability, and absorption but do not have therapeutic effects.

Operation Eternal Darkness

- Operation Eternal Darkness is **the name given by the Israel Defense Forces to a major military campaign targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon**.
- It involved large-scale coordinated airstrikes and artillery attacks on Hezbollah's command centres, infrastructure, and military assets.

- While Israel stated the strikes were aimed at Hezbollah, **reports indicate heavy civilian casualties and damage to urban areas, especially in Beirut.**
- The **operation has escalated regional tensions, raising concerns about wider conflict in West Asia** and violations of international humanitarian law.

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)

- The **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)**, launched by the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW)**, aims to ensure **free, assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care** for **all pregnant women.**
- Services are provided **universally on the 9th of every month** at designated **government health facilities.**
- The programme guarantees a **minimum package of antenatal services** specifically for women in their **2nd and 3rd trimesters** of pregnancy.
- It adopts a **systematic approach to private sector engagement**, encouraging **private practitioners to volunteer**, creating **awareness strategies**, and promoting their participation in **government health facilities.**
- To strengthen monitoring, **e-PMSMA (Extended PMSMA)** was launched in **January 2022** for **tracking High-Risk Pregnancies (HRP)** and ensuring timely care and intervention.

Places in news

Thitu Island

- Thitu Island (also called **Pag-asa meaning Hope**) is part of the **Spratly Islands** in the **South China Sea.**
- It is **occupied and administered by the Philippines**, though it is also **claimed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam.**
- The island is **strategically important** due to its location along **major shipping routes** and within a **geopolitically sensitive region.**
- It is one of the **largest naturally occurring islands** in the Spratly group and has an **airstrip, basic infrastructure, and a small civilian population.**
- Thitu Island is central to the **South China Sea dispute**, involving **overlapping territorial claims** and competition over **maritime control and resources.**

