

Equality of treatment for Persons with Disabilities

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

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

Mains: General Studies - 3

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. What are the major shortcomings of the current disability pension system in India?

- India has an **estimated 4.5-6 crore Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)**, but only a **small fraction receive benefits under the Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)**
 - Pension amounts in **most States range from just ₹300 to ₹500 a month**, with a few offering ₹1,000-₹3,000.
- Disability pension benefits **differ from one State to another** because of different **State government policies, and complex administrative procedures**.
- Despite protections under the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, disability welfare remains **fragmented and inadequate**.
- India spends barely **0.02% of GDP** on disability welfare, far below many other countries.
 - Example: South Africa spends 0.12%-0.15% of GDP, Brazil 0.45%-0.50%, Australia 0.35%-0.40%.

2. Why does India need a Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate (MUDPFR)?

- To guarantee a **minimum pension for all eligible PwDs**, regardless of where they live.
- It would fulfil the State's constitutional obligation under **Article 41** to provide public assistance to persons with disabilities.

- It would also implement **Section 24 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, which guarantees adequate social security, including pension benefits.

- Countries such as **South Africa, Brazil, and Australia** demonstrate that national disability pension standards **promote uniform and portable social security benefits for all eligible persons**.

Portable social security means workers can keep and transfer benefits such as pensions, healthcare, and disability insurance when they change jobs or move to another place or country.

3. What economic and administrative benefits would a MUDPFR bring?

Economic Benefits

- The World Bank and UNDP estimate that low- and middle-income countries **lose 3% -7% of GDP when PwDs are excluded from education, employment, and social security**
- Enhances **household stability, rural consumption, and labour participation**.

Administrative Benefits

- Streamlines the current fragmented system.
- Supports the creation of a **National Disability Pension Authority (NDPA)** for:
 - **Uniform eligibility norms.**
 - **National registry and portability.**
 - Digital integration through **Direct Benefit Transfer**.
 - Grievance redressal and monitoring.
- Creates **"One Standard, One System, One Nation"** for disability pensions.

4. How would a MUDPFRR strengthen constitutional rights and inclusive development?

- Upholds the constitutional values of **equality, dignity, and the right to life**.
- Ensures that disability pensions are not determined by **State boundaries or political priorities**.
- Recognises PwDs as **rights-bearing citizens**, not recipients of charity.
- Supports **India's commitments** under:
 - **UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities**
 - **International Labour Organization (ILO) Recommendation No. 202**
 - **SDG 1.3**
 - **G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration**
 - All of which **endorse social protection as a cornerstone of inclusive development**.
- Contributes to a more **inclusive, equitable, and rights-based welfare state** consistent with the vision of **Viksit Bharat**.

- **The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) - provides guidance to member States in building comprehensive social security systems and extending social security coverage** by prioritizing the establishment of national floors of social protection accessible to all in need.
- **Social protection floors** are nationally-defined sets of basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion.
- **Sustainable Development Goals 1.3** - Calls upon countries to **implement nationally appropriate social protection systems** for all, for reducing and preventing poverty.

The 8th CPC — a chance to reform pay commissions

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
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Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. What are the key issues in the existing Pay Commission framework?

The **Central Pay Commission (CPC)** is a periodic body set up by the **Government of India** to review and recommend changes in the **salary structure, allowances, and pensions of central government employees and pensioners**. It is headed by a **Chairman** and includes **experts in administration, finance, and economics**, aiming to ensure **fair pay, inter-service parity, and fiscal sustainability**.

- Discussion on the **8th Central Pay Commission (CPC)** focuses only on salary increase, fitment factor, and arrears, ignoring bigger issues.
- Pay Commissions **affect salary balance between services and government spending**, not just pay revision.
- The process is **time-bound and representation-driven**, lacking a **common evaluative framework**.
- There is **no clear method** to compare jobs in terms of risk, responsibility, skills, and career growth.
- This leads to similar pay for very different jobs, creating confusion and unfairness.

2. What are the structural challenges in ensuring equity?

- **Civil-military differences:**
 - Military jobs have early retirement and fewer promotions.
 - Civil services have longer careers and more promotion chances.
- **Reduced experience for senior roles** risks weakening **institutional memory and judgment**.
- Allowances (extra pay) are not based on a clear system, even though they are meant for hardship and risk, leading to inequality.
- Non-Functional Upgradation (NFU) gives higher pay without extra responsibility, breaking the link between work and salary.

3. What are the fiscal and pension challenges?

- India has **multiple pension systems:**
 - **Defined-benefit (old):** Government pays a fixed pension based on salary and service.

- ⊖ **Contributory schemes (new entrants):** Pension depends on employee-government contributions and market returns.
- ⊖ Separate pensions for elected leaders
- As per **RBI State Finances Report (2023)**, salaries, pensions, and interest payments take a large share of State expenditure.
- This reduces **development spending space** and raises concerns of **fiscal sustainability and inter-generational equity**.

4. What reforms are needed in public compensation?

- Many countries use a continuous system to review salaries, instead of waiting many years.
- India's decadal Pay Commission model needs reconsideration.
- A **National Compensation Authority** can create a clear and fair system to decide pay.
- Reforms must respect **federal autonomy** of States.
- There should be **better coordination between different branches of government** without affecting their independence.
- Pay systems must be affordable, fair, and easy for people to understand.
- The **8th CPC is an opportunity to address structural issues and improve public trust in governance**.

Long overdue: On coal exchanges

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

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

1. What are the Coal Exchange Rules, 2026?

- The **Coal Exchange Rules, 2026 provide a framework for regulated coal trading through market-based exchanges**.
- The new rules aim to enable transparent, market-based coal trading beyond traditional contracts and auctions.

- The **Coal Controller Organisation (CCO) has been designated as the nodal authority** to register, regulate, and oversee coal exchanges.
- Coal exchanges will **be granted authorization for 25 years**, with provisions for renewal.
- **Exchanges must maintain a minimum net worth of ₹50 crore** and adhere to strict anti-manipulation measures, including prohibitions on insider trading, circular trading, and artificial price distortion.

2. Why are Coal Exchanges Needed?

- Current coal trading is largely dependent on long-term contracts and auctions.
- **Lack of transparent market-based pricing mechanisms**.
- **Small consumers face difficulties** in accessing coal supplies.
- **Opaque transactions can lead to inefficiencies** and market distortions.
- **Better allocation of coal is needed to balance demand** and supply across the country.

3. How Will the New Coal Exchanges Function?

- The new coal exchanges are **modeled on the successful framework of power exchanges**.
- **Coal exchanges will provide an electronic platform where coal producers and consumers** can buy and sell coal transparently.
- **Prices will be determined through market-based bidding**, improving price discovery and competition.
- After a trade is finalized, the exchange will facilitate settlement and ensure physical delivery of coal to buyers.

4. What are the Key Challenges for Coal Exchanges?

- **Variations in coal quality and grades** across different sources.
- **Absence of standardized quality norms** for trading.
- **Need for reliable quality testing and assurance mechanisms**.
- **Complexity in designing and enforcing** delivery-based contracts.

- **Limited participation by producers, consumers, and small buyers** could affect market liquidity

5. Way Forward for Successful Coal Exchanges

- **Ensure active participation of Coal India Limited** to enhance market liquidity and credibility.
- Establish **safeguards against excessive price volatility.**
- **Develop effective dispute-resolution mechanisms** for market participants.
- **Strengthen transportation and delivery infrastructure for smooth physical** coal movement.
- Ensure adequate trading volumes and robust regulatory oversight for efficient market functioning.

KEYWORDS

Coal Controller Organisation (CCO)

- The Coal Controller Organisation (CCO) is in the news as it has been designated as the regulatory authority for registering and overseeing coal exchanges under the Coal Exchange Rules, 2026.
- The Coal Controller Organisation (CCO) is a **subordinate office under the Ministry of Coal, Government of India.**
- It is **headed by the Coal Controller** and acts as the nodal authority for coal quality surveillance and regulation in the country.
- The **CCO monitors coal production, dispatch, stock levels, and maintains important coal sector** statistics.
- It is **responsible for settling disputes related to coal grading and ensuring compliance** with quality standards.
- The **organisation also supports transparency and efficiency in coal marketing and commercial transactions**, including emerging market mechanisms such as coal exchanges

Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994

- Recently, the Supreme Court observed that sex-selection practices continue despite improvements in India's child sex ratio while upholding proceedings against a doctor under the PCPNDT Act.
- The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 was **enacted to prevent sex selection and female foeticide and to improve the declining child sex ratio in India.**
- The **Act bans sex determination and sex selection both before and after conception and regulates the use of ultrasound and other diagnostic technologies.**
- The **amendment of 2003 expanded the law to cover pre-conception techniques and strengthened its implementation** through Central and State Supervisory Boards.

(Pre-conception techniques refer to methods used before pregnancy to influence or select the sex of a child, which are prohibited under the Act.)

- Violations of the Act **can result in imprisonment up to 3 years and a fine for the offence, along with suspension or cancellation of the medical practitioner's license**, while repeat offences attract stricter penalties.

Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)

- The **Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)** was launched in **February 2009** by the **Ministry of Rural Development** under the **National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP).**
- The scheme provides a **monthly pension** to persons with disabilities to support their livelihood and social security.
- **Persons aged 18 years and above, with 80% or more disability** and belonging to a **Below Poverty Line (BPL) household**, are eligible to receive benefits under the scheme.

Global Gender Gap Report

- The report is in the news as the **Supreme Court of India highlighted India's declining rank, pointing to the persistent preference for a male child and continued sex selection practices.**
- Published annually by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**, the report measures gender parity across **Economic Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.**
- In **2025, India ranked 131st out of 148 countries (down from 129 in 2024)** with a score of **64.1%**, showing near parity in **education (97.1%)** and improvement in **health**, but decline in **political empowerment.**
- In **South Asia, India ranks among the lowest, behind Bangladesh (24), Bhutan (119), Nepal (125), Sri Lanka (130), but ahead of Pakistan (148).**
- Globally, the gap is **68.8% closed**, with **Iceland ranked 1st for 16 years**, followed by **Finland and Norway**, and **full parity over 120 years away.**

Paraquat

- **Paraquat is in the news because Telangana has recently banned its sale, distribution, manufacture, and use to safeguard farmers, making it the third State in India after Kerala and Odisha to do so.**
- It is a **very strong weed-killing chemical that destroys almost all plants it touches**, meaning it **does not distinguish between weeds and useful crops.**
- The substance is **banned or severely restricted in over 70 countries globally due to its extreme toxicity**, but its **imports to India rose sharply from 8,598 tonnes in 2019-20 to 20,786 tonnes in 2022-23.**
- The chemical is **highly lethal to humans and animals, with no known medical antidote**, and causes **catastrophic cell destruction, irreversible lung fibrosis, and multiple organ failure.**
- In India, such chemicals are regulated under the **Insecticides Act, 1968**, which is often criticised as **outdated in addressing modern pesticide risks.**

Species In News

Arctic Tern

- The **Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)** is a **small, agile seabird** known for undertaking **one of the longest migrations in the animal kingdom.**
 - The longest trips of which may exceed **80,000 km**
- Its distinctive features include **short red legs**, a **blood-red bill** during the breeding season, and a **long tail** that extends beyond its folded wings.
- It can be distinguished from the similar **Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)** by its **shorter red legs and bill, longer tail, and greyer underparts.**
- According to the **IUCN Red List**, the **Arctic Tern** is classified as **Least Concern (LC).**



Places in News

Estonia

- Estonia is **seeking stronger cooperation with India in defence, trade, and technology** amid the ongoing Russia–Ukraine War
- Estonia is a Northern European country known for its democratic governance and digital innovation
- It is **officially classified as one of the three Baltic countries**, alongside Latvia and Lithuania,

due to its location on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and its shared modern history.

- **Known as the “Digital Republic,” Estonia is a global leader in e-governance** and the birthplace of companies such as Skype and Wise.
- After regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, **it joined the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization.**
- **Estonia shares land borders with Russia and Latvia**, and maritime borders with Finland and Sweden.

