

A missed opportunity to guarantee minimum wages

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. Importance of Wage Rates in Employment Schemes

- **Wage rate** is a **critical parameter** for success of employment programmes.
- **Higher wages** increase **worker participation and enthusiasm**.
- **Lower/suppressed wages** leads to **reduced participation** and gradual weakening of schemes.
- Wage rates also significantly affect **programme costs**.

2. Evolution of MGNREGA Wage Policy

- The wage rates of MGNREGA workers are **determined under Section 6 of the Act**.
- Under **Section 6(1) of the act**, the **Central Government** can notify wage rates.
- Under **Section 6(2)**, workers are entitled to **State minimum wages** (especially for agricultural labourers).
- MGNREGA **came into force on February 2, 2006**, and **until 2009**, the **Central Government did not notify wages under Section 6(1)**.
- From 2006 to 2009, **State minimum wages were used**, and since they were often **higher than market wages**, the scheme became **popular**.
- After 2009, the Centre fixed wages, leading to **slow increases** and eventually a **freeze in real wages** (only adjusted for inflation).

3. Consequences of Real Wage Freeze

- **MGNREGA wages lag behind minimum wages** in most States and **undermines legal and policy objectives**.
- Also lag behind **market wages**, reducing the attractiveness of the scheme.
- **Delayed payments** and **technical issues** (Aadhaar-based systems) worsen the situation.
- This leads to a **“discouragement effect”** and declining worker interest.
- Associated with **increase in corruption** and **leakages** due to reduced worker vigilance.

4. Issues with VB-G RAM G Act & Way Forward

- The new Act continues **central control over wage rates** despite **shared funding (60:40)**.
- Drops provision ensuring **minimum wages**, raising **legal concerns**.
- Lacks mechanisms for **timely payment** and **corruption control**.
- **Way forward:**
 - ➔ Ensure wages are **equal to or above minimum wages**.
 - ➔ This would improve **legal validity, real incomes, and programme effectiveness**.
- Continued **wage suppression** may reduce employment and could be **challenged legally**.

A Bill that secures IPS officers' role in deputation

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

1. Context

- The Central Government introduced the **Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026** in the Rajya Sabha on March 25, 2026 to regulate recruitment and service conditions of officers in CAPFs.
- It governs **Group A General Duty Officers (GAGDO)** and other officers to bring uniformity in service rules.
- The Bill is seen as a response to the **Sanjay Prakash and Others vs Union of India**, which directed cadre review and reduction of deputation posts.

2. Key Provisions of the Bill

- 50% of **Inspector General (IG)** posts to be filled by IPS officers on deputation.
- Minimum 67% of **Additional Director General (ADG)** posts reserved for IPS officers.
- All **Special Director General (SDG)** and **Director General (DG)** posts to be filled by IPS officers.
- Deputation for **Deputy Inspector General (DIG) and below** will continue as per existing rules.
- Financial benefits already granted to **GAGDO officers** (Assistant Commandant and above) are protected.
- Applies to five CAPFs: CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP and SSB.

3. Rationale for IPS Deputation

- IPS officers ensure **coordination** between **CAPFs** and **State police forces**.
- They bring **training, field experience and broader administrative exposure** needed for leadership roles.
- Their presence helps maintain the **operational and institutional character of CAPFs**.
- Reflects the vision of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel of IPS as a **unifying link between Union and States**.
- The **Ministry of Home Affairs (2026)** made a **minimum two-year central deputation mandatory** for empanelment as Inspector General.

4. Judicial Intervention and Policy Debate

- The **Supreme Court** directed **cadre review, service rule review, and reduction of deputation posts up to IG level within two years**.

- CAPFs were recognised as **Organised Group 'A' Services (OGAS)**, subject to continued IPS deputation.
- Debate exists that **deputation policy falls within executive/legislative domain**, not judiciary.
- Courts have held that **policy decisions are not subject to judicial review** unless **arbitrary, irrational, or unconstitutional**.
- In *Gazula Dasaratha Rama Rao vs State of Andhra Pradesh*, **service conditions were held not to be fundamental rights**.
- In *Indian Ex-Servicemen Movement vs Union of India*, the Court upheld the **One Rank One Pension (OROP) principle**.
- The Bill aims to **codify deputation policy and remove ambiguity**, reinforcing it as a **policy matter beyond adjudication**.

On Maharashtra's anti-conversion Bill

Prelims: General Studies 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.

1. What is the Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026?

- The recently passed Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026 **aims to protect the right to freedom of religion while prohibiting unlawful religious conversions**.
- Bans conversions done through force, coercion, fraud, misrepresentation, allurement, or undue influence**.
- Individuals intending to convert must give a 60-day advance declaration** to authorities.
- After conversion, a **mandatory declaration must be submitted** confirming the change.
- Critics argue it **may infringe personal liberty and fundamental rights, fearing excessive state control** over individual religious choices

2. Key Provisions of the Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026

- **Police must register a complaint if approached by the converted person or their relatives** (parents, siblings, or close relations).
- **Marriage done only for illegal conversion can be cancelled** by a court.
- **Children born from such marriages follow the mother's pre-marriage religion** and get property rights from both parents.
- Maintenance must be provided, and child custody remains with the mother unless a court decides otherwise.

3. Punishments under Bill

- Violations can **lead to up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of ₹7 lakh**; offences are cognisable and non-bailable.
- **Unlawful conversion is punishable with up to 7 years' imprisonment** and a fine of ₹1 lakh.
- If the **victim is a minor, woman, SC/ST, or mentally unsound, punishment increases to up to 7 years and a fine of ₹5 lakh.**
- **Repeat offenders can attract up to 10 years' imprisonment** and a fine of ₹7 lakh.
- Institutions may lose registration and aid, and victims are entitled to rehabilitation, maintenance, and custody rights.

4. Concerns

- There is no **strong evidence to justify the law.**
- It **may limit personal freedom and privacy.**
- It **could be misused against minorities** and interfaith couples.
- It **creates administrative difficulties.**

5. Government's Response

- The **government says the right to freedom of religion is not absolute.**
- It **claims forcible conversions are increasing** and existing laws are not enough.

- The government argues that such cases disturb public order and social harmony.

Pak. as U.S. mediator with Iran recalls Nixon's China outreach

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
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Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Context

- Donald Trump **developed strong ties with Pakistan after Operation Sindoor (2025), engaging closely with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.**
- Pakistan **strengthened relations by praising Trump as a "peacemaker" and deepening diplomatic engagement.**
- The U.S. involved Pakistan in mediation to ensure it would not support Iran militarily.
- **For Iran, Pakistan is seen as the best mediator due to its proximity to Iran, neutral stance, and non-recognition of Israel.**

2. Cold War Precedent

- During the Cold War, **Richard Nixon (President of the USA during that time) sought to open relations with China but failed through direct talks.**
- **China, led by Mao Zedong, rejected Western intermediaries** and distrusted other communist channels.
- **Pakistan emerged as a trusted mediator** because it had good relations with both the U.S. and China.
- **Henry Kissinger (U.S. National Security Advisor) secretly travelled via Pakistan in 1971** to meet Chinese leaders, **facilitated by Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan** (President of Pakistan).
- This **led to Nixon's 1972 China visit, a major global diplomatic shift.**

3. Cost of Back-Channel Diplomacy

- **Richard Nixon ignored Pakistan's actions in East Pakistan** due to China talks, leading to mass killings.

- Henry Kissinger advised options, but **the U.S. chose not to pressure Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan.**
- The **crisis caused a refugee influx into India**, leading to India's support for Bangladesh's independence movement.
- The **Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 resulted in the creation of Bangladesh** despite U.S. pressure on India.
- **India's stance was strengthened by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation**, shaping regional geopolitics.
- Hence, **Pakistan's continued role as a mediator** shows both its strategic relevance and risks of such back-channel diplomacy.

KEYWORDS

Strategic Petroleum Reserves

- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR)** are emergency stockpiles of crude oil maintained by a country to ensure **energy security during supply disruptions, geopolitical crises, or price shocks.**
- In India, SPRs are maintained by **Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited**, a Government of India Special Purpose Vehicle, with a total capacity of **5.33 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT)** at **Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur.**
- This existing SPR capacity is estimated to meet about **9.5 days of India's crude oil requirement** based on 2019–20 consumption patterns.
- In addition, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) maintain storage for **64.5 days**, taking the **total national storage capacity to around 74 days** of crude oil and petroleum products.
- Under Phase II of the SPR programme, the government approved two new facilities at **Chandikhol (Odisha, 4 MMT)** and **Padur (Karnataka, 2.5 MMT)** with a combined capacity of **6.5 MMT**, adding about **12 more days** to India's crude oil requirement buffer.

Gyan Bharatam National Manuscript Survey

- The **Ministry of Culture** launched the **Gyan Bharatam National Manuscript Survey** on **16 March 2026** to **identify and document manuscripts** across India.
- It aims to create a **geo-tagged national inventory** and a **"Manuscript Presence Map"** for better **cataloguing, preservation, research, and digitisation.**
- The initiative will help build **digital resources** accessible to **scholars and future generations.**
- The **Gyan Bharatam National Manuscript Survey** promotes **wide public participation** through its **mobile application and website.**
- **Authorised surveyors**, along with **manuscript custodians** including **families, scholars, temples, and institutions** and even **individuals aware of local collections**, can **submit details of manuscripts.**

Species In News

Jungle Cat



- The Jungle Cat is a **medium-sized wild cat** found across the **Middle East, South Asia, and parts of China.**
- It is **widely distributed in India**, from the **Thar Desert to the Northeast.**

- It **prefers habitats like wetlands, grasslands, and agricultural fields**, where it mainly hunts rodents.
- It has a **sandy or grey coat without spots, long legs**, and small black ear tufts.
- It is **solitary in nature, mostly active during early morning and night**, and is an efficient hunter of small animals.
- It **faces threats from habitat loss, deforestation, and road accidents**, though it is listed as **“Least Concern”** and **protected under Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.

