

FWD

FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



> INDIAN RAILWAYS MAKEOVER > INDIA - GERMANY RELATIONS > QUICK COMMERCE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

As UPSC aspirants, it is essential to stay updated on current affairs to excel in the examination. This **Fortune Weekly Digest (ForWard)** brings you the latest news and developments from around the world, carefully curated and analyzed to help you prepare for the Civil Services (Main) Examination.

We understand that time is precious, and we have made sure to present the information in a concise and easy-to-understand manner.

The magazine is divided into different sections. Mains relevant topics have been covered in detail with a UPSC previous year question perspective. The jot downs are examples and interesting facts to enrich your answer writing. Cherrypicks has some key words from the week, helpful again in answer writing and essay. We have also included essay topics and sample questions to help you gauge your preparation.

We have designed this magazine to best supplement the daily current affairs notes we have launched by the name of **FIND (Fortune IAS News Daily)** and **FINDER (Fortune IAS News Daily Explainer)** and the **Fortune Prelims Precise** monthly compilation. This magazine will be explained in detail and your queries addressed in a live class we conduct.

At a time when there is no dearth of current affairs materials, our hope is help you get a one-stop solution for all your current affairs needs.

This magazine is a work in progress and your feedback will be appreciated.

We hope that this magazine will serve as a valuable resource for your exam preparation and contribute to your success in the UPSC examination.

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FIRST ATTEMPT TOPPERS FROM
OUR PRELIMS CUM MAINS BATCH

KASTURI SHA
AIR 68

MANJIMA P
AIR 235

FABI RASHEED
AIR 71

SWATHI S BABU
AIR 522

OORMILA J S
AIR 561

W O M E N I N P O W E R

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QUICK COMMERCE: AN ANALYSIS

Syllabus: GS III - Indian Economy

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Discuss the merits and demerits of the four 'Labour Codes' in the context of labour market reforms in India. What has been the progress so far in this regard? (2024)

Q) What is the status of digitalization in the Indian economy? Examine the problems faced in this regard and suggest improvements. (2023)

WHY IN NEWS

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has directed delivery platforms like Blinkit and Swiggy to **drop the "10-minute delivery"** promise amid concerns over gig workers' safety and working conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Quick commerce marks a significant transformation in India's urban retail landscape by enabling ultra-fast, hyperlocal delivery of essential goods through technology-driven logistics networks. Its rapid growth reflects the convergence of digital infrastructure, changing consumption behaviour, and platform-based business models reshaping contemporary urban economies.

SHORT TAKES

- **Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG):** Products that are sold quickly at relatively low cost and have a high turnover rate, often because they are consumed regularly or are perishable. They include everyday essentials such as food, beverages, toiletries, and household items that consumers purchase frequently and in large quantities.

WHAT IS QUICK COMMERCE (Q-COMMERCE)?

- ➔ Q-commerce is a **hyper-local, ultra-fast delivery** model that brings daily essentials (groceries, medicines, snacks, etc.) to consumers **within minutes** of ordering via an app.
- ➔ It uses a network of **dark stores/micro-warehouses** located close to concentrated urban demand, enabling fulfilment much faster than traditional e-commerce.
- ➔ Contrary to standard e-commerce, q-commerce focuses on **speed over breadth**, trading vast product ranges for immediacy and convenience.
- ➔ Major Indian players include **Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart** and others, each experimenting with different fulfilment models and service promises.
- ➔ The sector's growth reflects changing **consumer expectations** for fast, contactless, and on-demand retail in urban lifestyles
- ➔ The sector employs millions (estimated **7.7 million in 2020–21**, projected to **23.5 million by 2029–30**).

	E-COMMERCE	vs.	Q-COMMERCE (Quick Commerce)
Meaning	Online buying & selling goods/services via websites/apps.		Ultra-fast online delivery, immediate fulfillment of urgent needs.
Delivery Time	Typically 1–7 days (location/product dependent).		Extremely fast, usually within 10–30 minutes.
Main Focus	Wide variety, competitive pricing, discounts, convenience.		Speed, instant satisfaction, immediate accessibility of essentials.
Typical Products	Electronics, fashion, home appliances, books, general merchandise.		Daily essentials: groceries, medicines, snacks, beverages.
Logistics Model	Centralized warehouses, distribution hubs, courier networks.		Local "dark stores" or micro-warehouses close to customers.
Examples			

FEATURES

- ☀️ **Ultra-Short Delivery Timelines:** Delivery commitments range from **10 to 30 minutes**, creating a competitive differentiation based primarily on speed rather than cost or variety.
- ☀️ **Dense Network of Dark Stores:** Platforms operate hundreds of **small, strategically located fulfilment centres** with limited inventories, ensuring proximity to consumers and reduced travel distance.
- ☀️ **Limited but High-Velocity Inventory:** Product assortment is restricted to **fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG)**, perishables, medicines, and daily essentials with high turnover and predictable demand patterns.
 - o **Data:** Deloitte reports that quick commerce contributes **35% of online FMCG sales**, with a two-fold increase in platform share for major brands.
- ☀️ **Algorithmic Logistics Management:** Advanced algorithms handle **order batching, route optimisation,**

rider allocation, and demand forecasting, enabling real-time operational efficiency.

- ☀️ **App-Centric Experience:** Highly interactive mobile interfaces with tracking, custom recommendations, and easy payments improve user experience.
- ☀️ **Personalized Services:** Through push notifications, loyalty programs, and personalised discounts, platforms aim to increase order frequency and retention.
- ☀️ **Gig-Based Delivery Workforce:** The delivery ecosystem is largely staffed by **platform-dependent gig workers**, incentivised through performance-linked pay and time-based targets.
- ☀️ **Urban-Centric Operations:** The model is heavily concentrated in **metropolitan and tier-1 cities** due to population density, purchasing power, digital penetration, and logistics feasibility.

REASONS FOR ITS EXPANSION

- 👁️ **Urban Time Poverty:** Rising working hours, nuclear families, and dual-income households have created **acute time scarcity**, increasing demand for instant retail services.
 - o **Data:** NielsenIQ shows that while modern trade dominates at 41%, **quick commerce already accounts for 12% of urban preference**, indicating growing acceptance.
- 👁️ **Digital Infrastructure Maturity:** The expansion of smartphones, cheap mobile data, UPI-based payments, and location tracking has enabled **frictionless digital ordering and settlement systems**.
- 👁️ **Pandemic-Induced Behavioural Shift:** COVID-19 normalised home delivery of essentials and reduced reliance on physical retail, creating a **permanent structural shift in consumption habits**.
- 👁️ **Platform Competition:** Heavy capital inflows and intense rivalry among platforms have encouraged

aggressive **dark store expansion, discounts, and customer acquisition strategies**.

- 👁️ **High Urban Population Density:** Indian metros provide **ideal demand clusters** where a single dark store can serve thousands of households within a short radius, ensuring operational viability.
- 👁️ **Late-Night and Emergency Fulfilment:** Quick commerce fills gaps left by traditional retail, especially after **8 p.m. closures**, addressing unserved late-night and urgent demand
- 👁️ **Integration with Food Delivery Ecosystems:** Existing food delivery networks of Swiggy and Zomato allowed rapid **leveraging of rider fleets, customer bases, and technology platforms**.
- 👁️ **Rising Aspirational Consumption:** Young urban consumers increasingly value **convenience, immediacy, and lifestyle efficiency**, aligning well with q-commerce offerings.

BENEFITS

- ♣️ **Consumer Convenience:** Instant access to essentials without physical store visits, beneficial in emergencies or late hours.
- ♣️ **Enhanced Brand Visibility:** IIM Ahmedabad research highlights that q-commerce increases **brand recall and consumer reach** through constant app exposure and impulse discovery.
- ♣️ **Digital Economy Boost:** Q-commerce strengthens the online retail ecosystem and contributes significantly to the **gig economy and e-retail revenues**.

♣️ **Employment Creation:** Generates jobs for delivery riders, warehouse staff, tech workers, and associated logistics services which is a notable factor in India's evolving job market.

♣️ **Support to small vendors:** Some platforms collaborate with local vendors, enabling small brands to reach wider audiences with digital storefronts and distribution support.

♣️ **Reduced Shopping Time:** Especially for routine and small purchases, the time saved is significant for consumers, contributing to productivity gains.

CHALLENGES

- ▼ **Profitability Concerns:** Many q-commerce firms struggle with negative margins as delivery costs, dark store rents, and incentives outweigh revenues.
- ▼ **Predatory Pricing:** Platforms are accused of selling below landing cost to **eliminate competition**, followed by price hikes after market capture.
- ▼ **Labour & Safety Issues:** The “10-minute delivery” model was found to induce **unsafe road behaviour, extreme stress, and hazardous working conditions**, prompting nationwide strikes and protests.
- ▼ **Market Concentration and Dominance Risks:** Blinkit commands **46% market share**, followed by Zepto (29%) and Swiggy Instamart (25%), raising concerns of oligopolistic control.
- ▼ **Impact on Traditional Retail:** Local kirana stores face declining footfall and revenue as price-subsidised app orders attract consumers away.
- ▼ **Environmental Footprint:** Rapid deliveries increase carbon emissions and packaging waste, especially with frequent small orders.
- ▼ **Hygiene & Quality Control:** Storage standards in micro-warehouses/dark stores have been flagged by FMCG companies over hygiene and product handling issues.

WAY FORWARD

- * **Sustainable Profit Models:** Platforms should focus on improving profitability through higher average order values, subscription models, and reduced dependency on discounts.
- * **Balanced Co-existence Model:** Hybrid partnerships between platforms and kirana stores can enable **digital integration without displacement** of traditional retail.
- * **Strengthening Competition Oversight:** Active monitoring by the **Competition Commission of India** is necessary to address data misuse, market dominance, and discriminatory pricing.
- * **Worker Welfare Framework:** Strengthening social security, minimum wage standards, insurance, and safety protocols for gig workers can make the sector more equitable.
 - o **Example:** The **Code on Social Security** mandates formal registration, social security benefits, and creation of a **Social Security Fund**, funded partly by platform contributions (1–2% of turnover, capped at 5% of total worker payout).
- * **Balanced Regulation:** Government can introduce guidelines for delivery times, labour protections and dark store hygiene standards to protect stakeholders.
- * **Green Logistics Initiatives:** Adoption of electric delivery vehicles, bulk packaging innovations, and consolidation centers can reduce carbon footprints.
- * **Tier-2/3 Micro-Strategies:** Tailored logistics and demand models for smaller cities can enhance viability outside big metros.
- * **Digital Literacy & Consumer Awareness:** Educating consumers about fair pricing, sustainable consumption, and responsible ordering can mature demand patterns.

CONCLUSION

While quick commerce enhances convenience and modernises urban retail, its long-term sustainability depends on resolving challenges related to profitability, labour welfare, environmental impact, and regulatory oversight. A balanced policy framework integrating technology, traditional retail, and social protection is essential to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth of this emerging sector.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) “Quick commerce represents a new stage in India’s retail digitisation.” Examine its economic significance, operational challenges, and long-term sustainability.
(10 marks) (150 words)

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

Syllabus: GS III - Indian Economy

PYQ MAPPING

Q) How can the 'Digital India' programme help farmers to improve farm productivity and income? What steps has the Government taken in this regard? (2015)

Q) In what way could replacement of price subsidy with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) change the scenario of subsidies in India? Discuss. (2015)

WHY IN NEWS

An article in The Indian Express by Professor Mihir Mishra, Ashoka University, highlights the role of creative destruction in India's economic growth and its associated challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Creative destruction is the **continuous cycle where new innovations replace old technologies**, reshaping industries and driving economic progress. Introduced by Joseph Schumpeter, it underscores how growth and disruption coexist in a dynamic economy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- ➔ **Origin of the Concept:** The term **Creative Destruction** is associated with the Austrian economist **Joseph Schumpeter**, who popularised it to explain how capitalist economies evolve through cycles of innovation that replace old industries and practices.
- ➔ **Theoretical Roots:** Though Schumpeter popularised it, the phrase has antecedents in earlier economic thought like Marx's ideas about capitalism disrupting existing structures.

The 2025 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel



The 2025 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel was awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt for their research on innovation-driven economic growth. Mokyr received half of the prize "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress," while Aghion and Howitt shared the other half "for the theory of sustained growth through creative destruction." Their work explains how new technologies and methods replace older ones in a continuous cycle, underpinning sustained growth over the past two centuries and highlighting the role of innovation, competition, and institutions.

DEFINITION

- ☞ Creative destruction is a **process where new technologies, products, or business models displace outdated ones** in the economy, thereby reshaping economic structures from within.
- ☞ **Example:**
 - The **Industrial Revolution** exemplifies creative destruction, where mechanised production displaced traditional handcraft industries but laid the foundation for higher productivity and urbanisation.
 - Historical economic growth has often followed cycles of **innovation-induced disruption**, such as the transition from steam engines to electricity, or typewriters to computers, demonstrating the inevitability of change.

MECHANISM

- ♣ **Innovation as the Driving Force:** New technologies and business models create value while making older ones obsolete; for example, AI and digital services are transforming multiple sectors.
- ♣ **Entrepreneurship and Competition:** Entrepreneurs exploit opportunities left by declining sectors, creating competitive pressure for older firms to innovate or exit.
- ♣ **Resource Reallocation:** Capital, labour, and skills migrate from declining industries to emerging ones,

POSITIVE IMPACT

- ✓ **Economic Growth:** Creative destruction enables **higher productivity and growth** by moving resources from less efficient to more efficient uses and spawning new industries.
- ✓ **Technological Advancement:** Encourages industrial upgrading and continuous **innovation in sectors like electronics, AI, and fintech.**
- ✓ **Innovation and Quality:** It fosters continuous innovation, leading to **better quality products and services**
 - o **Example:** Internet services replacing traditional

NEGATIVE IMPACT

- ✗ **Job Displacement:** One of the most immediate downsides is **technological unemployment** where workers lose jobs when old industries contract before new ones absorb labour.
- ✗ **Skill Rigidity:** Displaced workers may face difficulty in relocating or upskilling quickly, leading to **prolonged unemployment or wage stagnation.**
- ✗ **Inequality:** Benefits of creative destruction may accrue unevenly, concentrating wealth with those who can innovate or invest, while leaving others behind.
- ✗ **Loss of Traditional Skills & Firms:** Cultural or local

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION IN INDIAN CONTEXT

- 🇮🇳 **Telecommunication Revolution:** The entry of **Reliance Jio** with low-cost data disrupted earlier telecom models, significantly **increasing internet penetration** and rendering older business strategies obsolete.
- 🇮🇳 **E-commerce vs Traditional Retail:** Platforms such as **Flipkart and Amazon** have transformed retail, challenging traditional shops but also creating digitally linked marketplaces.

enhancing **overall productivity.**

- ♣ **Market and Technology Interaction:** The adoption of innovations is influenced by **market readiness, regulatory environment, and cost-benefit considerations.**
 - ♣ **Structural Frictions:** Barriers such as **skill gaps, capacity constraints, or regulatory hurdles** can slow the pace of creative destruction, affecting its overall effectiveness.
- retail and media.
- ✓ **Consumer Benefits:** Consumers gain from **lower prices, more choices, and convenience** as new business models emerge.
 - ✓ **New Employment Opportunities:** While some jobs are displaced, new industries and sectors can create **fresh employment avenues**, often in higher-skilled domains.
 - ✓ **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem:** Fosters a dynamic start-up culture, attracting **investments like Google's AI Centre**, and supporting long-term competitiveness.

economic knowledge embedded in traditional industries may be lost when firms shut down.

- ✗ **Social Safety:** Displaced workers often lack adequate **social security nets** or unemployment protection.
- ✗ **Regional Disparities:** Regions lagging in industrial diversification may **struggle to attract new industries** after older ones decline.
- ✗ **Regulatory Hurdles:** In some sectors, rigid regulation can delay entry of new firms or technologies, **stifling the creative destruction cycle.**

- 🇮🇳 **Digital Economy & Fintech:** Initiatives like **Digital India, UPI, and Start-up India** demonstrate how creative destruction transforms banking, retail, and services.

- 🇮🇳 **AI and Technology Adoption:** AI is deployed in **agriculture, logistics, health, and public services**, offering productivity gains even with modest R&D (0.65% of GDP).

WAY FORWARD

- * **Reskilling and Education:** Invest in continuous **skills training and lifelong learning** to prepare the workforce for future jobs.
- * **Social Protection:** Strengthen **social safety nets and unemployment support** to ease transitions for displaced workers.
- * **Investment and Financing:** Promote **long-term capital investment** in infrastructure, start-ups, and emerging industries to sustain growth cycles.
- * **Innovation Ecosystems:** Support **R&D, start-ups, and incubation centres** to accelerate new industries and absorb displaced labour.
- * **Policy and Regulatory Framework:** Ensure **predictable policies, governance reforms, and regulatory stability** to encourage private investment and innovation.
- * **Regional Development:** Promote **decentralised innovation hubs** to prevent regional economic stagnation.

CONCLUSION

While creative destruction fuels innovation, competitiveness, and long-term growth, it also brings social and economic challenges that require thoughtful policies. Effective policies that promote reskilling, social protection, and inclusive growth are essential to ensure that the benefits of innovation reach society as a whole.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) “Creative destruction is the driving force of economic growth, but it also creates social and employment challenges.” Discuss with examples from India.
(10 marks) (150 words)

INDIAN RAILWAYS: A DUE MAKEOVER?

GS III: Infrastructure: Railways

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Why is Public Private Partnership (PPP) required in infrastructural projects? Examine the role of PPP model in the redevelopment of Railway Stations in India. (2022)

WHY IN NEWS

The Ministry of Railways is in the news for announcing an **ambitious target to renew 7,900 track kilometres in FY 2026–27**, highlighting sustained progress in track upgradation to improve railway safety and infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Railways, one of the world’s largest rail networks, has historically **served as the backbone of India’s economic integration, social mobility and strategic connectivity**. In an era of rising logistics demands, urbanisation and sustainability imperatives, the question is no longer about incremental reform but whether Indian Railways is undergoing a truly transformative makeover.

SHORT TAKES

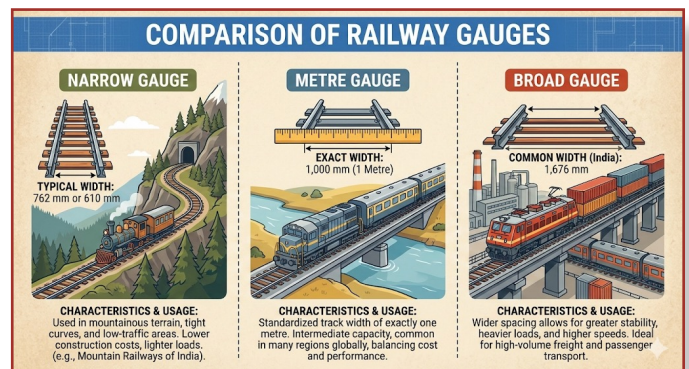
- **Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC):**
 - An Indian public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Railways that provides online ticketing, catering, and tourism services for the state-owned Indian Railways.
 - It was established in 1999 to professionalize and manage catering and hospitality services on trains and at stations and to promote rail-bound domestic and inbound tourism.

EVOLUTION OF INDIAN RAILWAYS

- ➔ **Historical Beginning:** The first passenger train in India ran between **Bombay and Thane in 1853**, laying the foundation for what would become one of the world’s largest rail networks, spanning over 68,000 route kilometres.
- ➔ **Post-Independence Expansion:** After 1947, Indian Railways expanded rapidly to integrate remote regions, build broad-gauge lines, and extend connectivity to border and tribal areas.
- ➔ **Network Modernisation:** In recent years, there has been a significant surge in infrastructure: track renewals, new lines, gauge conversions, and speed upgrades to 130 kmph on key corridors.
- ➔ **Gauge Standardisation:** The **Unigauge** policy gradually converted metre and narrow gauge lines into broad gauge, improving interoperability, speeds and safety across the national network.
- ➔ **Electrification Drive:** By March–July 2025, about

98–99% of the broad-gauge network was electrified, marking near-completion of a massive green transition.

- ➔ **Rolling Stock and Make-in-India:** Domestic manufacturing scaled significantly with production of **high-horsepower electric locomotives**, improving reliability and indigenous capacity.



SIGNIFICANCE

- ➔ **Economic Integrator:** Indian Railways connects markets, industries, and rural areas, facilitating the movement of goods and people across India’s vast geography.
- ➔ **Mass Mobility:** With **nearly seven billion passengers annually**, the Railways remains India’s most affordable and inclusive mode of long-distance transport, crucial for migrant workers, pilgrims and inter-regional mobility.
- ➔ **Economic Backbone and Freight Dominance:** Freight

contributes nearly **65% of railway earnings**, making Railways the backbone of India's logistics system, with a total loading of **1,617 million tonnes in FY25** supporting core industries such as coal, steel, cement and containers.

- 🔗 **Employment Generator:** It remains one of the largest employers in the country, providing direct and indirect livelihoods across regions.
- 🔗 **Strategic and National Security Role:** Railways

enable rapid troop mobilisation, border connectivity and disaster relief, making them a strategic asset in national security planning.

- 🔗 **Green Mobility and Climate Advantage:** Railways account for only **about 1% of transport emissions**, with near-100% electrification, **2,626 solar-powered stations**, use of **898 MW solar power** and plans for hydrogen trains positioning it as a key instrument for India's low-carbon transition.

RECENT REFORMS AND UPDATES

🔗 Private Participation in Passenger Train Operations:

- o In **2020**, Indian Railways invited private players to operate **151 modern passenger trains on 109 route pairs** under a long-term concession model, aimed at improving service quality and introducing modern rolling stock while Indian Railways retains track and signalling control.
- o **Example:**
 - **Tejas Express** series — **Lucknow–Delhi (October 2019)** and **Ahmedabad–Mumbai (January 2020)** — operated by **IRCTC** with private contractors providing onboard services and dynamic pricing.
 - **South Star Rail (from 2022)** has been promoted as one of India's first privately marketed trains operating under the **Bharat Gaurav tourism scheme**, offering customised luxury/pilgrimage journeys where the private operator manages onboard services while Indian Railways provides tracks and coaches.

🔗 Emphasis on Budgetary Allocation for Modern Trains and Services:

- o The Union Budget 2025–26 allocated a total **Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) of ₹2,52,200 crore**, with significant emphasis on capacity expansion, safety works and passenger services.
- o As of December 2025, Indian Railways utilized over 80% of its capital budget for FY 2025–26.

🔗 Safety Technology Roll-Out:

- o The indigenous **Kavach automatic train protection system** is being extended on key routes (e.g., Eastern Railway in West Bengal and Udhna–Jalgaon section) to prevent collisions and improve operational safety.

🔗 Vande Bharat Programme:

- o Indigenous **semi-high-speed trains** symbolise technological upgradation, improved passenger comfort and the success of Make-in-India

initiatives.

🔗 Amrit Bharat Trains:

- o **Fully non-AC trains** aimed at offering improved regional connectivity and passenger comfort at affordable fares, with about 30 such services already operational across the network.
- o **Example:**
 - In January 2026, Prime Minister flagged off four new Amrit Bharat Express trains connecting long-distance routes such as New Jalpaiguri–Nagercoil and SMVT Bengaluru–Alipurduar.

🔗 Namoo Bharat Train:

- o An electric regional rapid train on the **Delhi–Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor**, inaugurated in **October 2023**, designed for high-frequency, high-speed urban travel with modern amenities and safety features to reduce travel time and ease congestion.

🔗 Station Redevelopment:

- o The **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme** aims to modernise over **1,300 stations** with better concourses, lifts, escalators, and passenger amenities.
- o As of 2025, **15 stations** have been selected for development through **PPP models**, combining private investment with public infrastructure.
- o **Rani Kamlapati Railway Station** in Madhya Pradesh is the first station redeveloped under this model, offering modern facilities and commercial spaces for passengers.

🔗 Digital and Passenger Services:

- o Initiatives like the **RailOne App**, Aadhaar-authenticated reservation reforms, and anti-bot measures on IRCTC aim to improve digital ease and booking transparency.

🔗 Freight Corridor Expansion:

- o The extension of the **Western Dedicated Freight**

Corridor to JNPT strengthens port connectivity and offers scope to increase rail's freight modal share beyond the present **27%**.

🕒 **Logistics Integration:**

- o PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan integrates rail projects with ports, highways and industrial corridors to improve logistics efficiency.

🕒 **Reform Agenda for 2026:**

- o Railways plans to implement **"52 reforms in 52 weeks"**, focusing on safety, advanced tech, AI adoption, and customer service upgrades.

🕒 **Completion of Long-Pending Frontier Projects:**

- o The inauguration of the **Udhampur–Srinagar–**

Baramulla Rail Link in June 2025 and the **Bairabi–Sairang line in September 2025** marked the historic integration of **Kashmir Valley and Aizawl** into the national rail network

🕒 **Iconic Engineering and New Infrastructure:**

- o Projects such as the **Chenab Bridge (world's highest railway arch bridge)**, **Anji cable-stayed bridge**, and the new **Pamban vertical-lift sea bridge** reflect advanced engineering capability.

🕒 **High-Speed Rail Development:**

- o The **Mumbai–Ahmedabad bullet train project**, with over **55% physical progress**, marks India's entry into high-speed rail technology with phased completion targeted between **2027 and 2029**.

CHALLENGES

▼ **Safety Gaps:**

- o The **2025 New Delhi stampede** exposed vulnerabilities in station infrastructure, emergency response and peak-season crowd control mechanisms.
- o Although Kavach is expanding, **full network coverage remains a long-term objective**, and legacy issues like signal failures and maintenance lapses continue to pose safety risks.

▼ **Maintenance Backlog:** Focus on capital expenditure has sometimes outpaced track, bridge, and signal renewal, risking deterioration of older assets.

▼ **Financial Performance:** Operating costs often exceed revenue, with cross-subsidisation of passenger fares by freight earnings and heavy dependence on government budgetary support.

▼ **Over-Dependence on Bulk Commodities:** Nearly **50%**

of freight loading is coal-based, making revenues vulnerable to energy transition, while the top seven commodities account for **87.3% of total freight**, indicating poor diversification.

▼ **Urban-Rural Service Imbalance:** Premium services and station upgrades concentrate in major corridors, while rural and branch lines continue to suffer from poor facilities.

▼ **Human Resource & Cultural Barriers:** Legacy culture and workforce adaptability challenges slow tech adoption and performance optimization in operations.

▼ **Limited Private Bidding Response:** The initial privatisation attempt attracted limited private interest, with **few bidders participating**, reflecting difficulties in designing commercially viable contracts in a sector marked by high capital risk, regulatory complexity and social service obligations.

WAY FORWARD

✦ **Full Kavach Roll-Out:** Achieving 100% coverage of Kavach and modern signalling systems is key to eliminating collisions and enhancing safety across the network.

✦ **Passenger Safety and Station Modernisation:** Investment in **holding areas, surveillance, platform redesign and digital crowd monitoring** is essential to prevent stampedes and improve passenger experience.

✦ **Freight Diversification Strategy:** Railways must expand into **automobiles, FMCG, e-commerce and parcel logistics** to reduce dependence on coal and stabilise long-term revenues, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Railways.

✦ **Strengthening Multimodal Logistics:** Integrating Dedicated Freight Corridors with ports, industrial corridors and logistics parks can enhance last-mile efficiency and raise rail's modal share.

✦ **Sustained Green Transition:** Accelerating **renewable energy use, hydrogen trains and energy-efficient rolling stock** can position Indian Railways as the backbone of India's climate-friendly transport strategy.

✦ **Financial Reforms:** Dynamic pricing, freight tariff rationalisation, and asset monetisation can improve revenue streams and reduce dependency on budgetary support.

✦ **Technology-Driven Operations:** AI-based predictive

maintenance, digital traffic management and data-driven decision-making can improve asset life and operational reliability.

- * **Passenger-Centric Service Delivery:** Improving punctuality, cleanliness, information systems, accessibility for elderly and disabled, and grievance

redressal will enhance public trust.

- * **Timely Completion of Strategic Projects:** Fast-tracking border lines, Himalayan projects and high-speed rail will strengthen national security, tourism and regional development.

CONCLUSION

While recent investments, technological upgrades and institutional reforms signal a decisive shift towards modernisation, persistent challenges of capacity, safety, finances and governance continue to constrain performance. A holistic makeover, combining **infrastructure expansion, financial sustainability, institutional reform and passenger-centric service delivery**, is essential for Indian Railways to emerge as a modern, safe and globally competitive transport system.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) “Indian Railways is both a public utility and a commercial enterprise.” Discuss the implications of this dual character for its financial and operational performance.

(10 marks) (150 words)

INDIA - GERMANY RELATION

GS-II: International Relations

PYQ MAPPING

Q) 'Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European Countries'. Comment with examples. (2020)

Q) "What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy, which would satisfy India's National self-esteem and ambitions" Explain with suitable examples. (2019)

WHY IN NEWS

Recently, German Chancellor **Friedrich Merz's maiden visit to India and Asia** has drawn attention as it **marks 25 years of the India–Germany Strategic Partnership and 75 years of diplomatic relations** between the two countries.

INTRODUCTION

- **German Chancellor Friedrich Merz paid his maiden visit to India and the wider Asian region**, lending renewed momentum to bilateral ties at a landmark moment, **75 years of diplomatic relations and 25 years of the India–Germany Strategic Partnership**. Coming just ahead of the **EU leaders' visit for India's Republic Day and the India–EU Summit**, the visit reflects Europe's intensifying engagement with India.
- The discussions were distinctly **outcome-oriented**, culminating in the signing of **19 agreements and MoUs**, and underscoring a deepening **strategic, economic, and geopolitical convergence** between the two countries.

SHORT TAKES

➤ Track 1.5 forums

- They are specialized, closed-door, and often invite-only dialogues that bridge official government negotiations (Track 1) and non-governmental, expert-led discussions (Track 2). These meetings involve officials acting unofficially, academics, and experts to discuss sensitive geopolitical issues such as security in the Indo-Pacific, technology, and, for example, the BIMSTEC Security Dialogue

KEY OUTCOMES OF THE GERMAN CHANCELLOR'S VISIT TO INDIA

- **Deepening Defence and Strategic Alignment:** India and Germany agreed on a **joint defence industrial roadmap** to advance co-development, co-production, and technology partnerships, with Germany committing to **expedited export clearances**. Germany also conveyed its intent to participate in major Indian naval and air exercises such as **MILAN, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, and Tarang Shakti**. To institutionalise strategic engagement, both sides launched a **Track-1.5 Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue** involving officials and strategic experts.
- **Mobility and People-to-People Linkages:** Germany announced **visa-free airport transit** for Indian passport holders, facilitating smoother travel and business mobility.
- **Strengthening Education, Research, and Skill Development:** A **higher-education roadmap** was adopted, German universities were encouraged to establish campuses in India, and a **Centre of Excellence for skilling in Renewable Energy** was announced to support India's green transition.
- **Building Resilient Supply Chains in Critical Minerals and Semiconductors:** Both countries agreed to cooperate on **critical minerals and semiconductor ecosystems**, aiming to enhance **supply-chain resilience and strategic autonomy**.
- **Expanding Cooperation in Digital and Emerging Technologies:** The **Indo-German Digital Dialogue Work Plan (2026–27)** was finalised, covering cooperation in **artificial intelligence, data governance, telecommunications, and Industry 4.0**.
- **Converging Indo-Pacific and Connectivity Vision:** A **bilateral Indo-Pacific dialogue mechanism** was launched to promote a **rules-based regional order**, with both sides reaffirming commitment to a **free and open Indo-Pacific** and support for the **India–**

Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

- **Shared Push for Reform of Global Governance Institutions:** India and Germany reaffirmed their shared commitment to **reforming global institutions**, particularly the **UN Security Council**, through the **G4 framework**.
- **Reinforced Counter-Terrorism and Security**

Cooperation: Both sides strongly condemned all forms of terrorism, including **cross-border terrorism**, reaffirmed cooperation against **UN-designated terrorist groups under the 1267 regime**, welcomed the ratification of the **Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty**, and agreed to deepen **intelligence sharing, legal cooperation, and action against terror financing and safe havens**.

CURRENT STATE OF INDIA–GERMANY RELATIONS:

Institutionalised Engagements:

- o The **Inter-Governmental Consultations (IGC)** mechanism reserved by Germany for a limited set of strategic partners forms the backbone of bilateral coordination, making India–Germany ties among the **most structured and institutionalised** in Europe–India relations.

Robust Economic Interdependence:

Germany is India’s largest trading partner in Europe.

- o Bilateral ties are underpinned by deep trade and investment linkages, with **over 2,000 German companies operating in India**, generating nearly **4 lakh jobs**, while **Indian investments in Germany exceed €6.5 billion**, highlighting strong two-way economic integration.

Strategic Defence Collaboration:

- o Germany’s involvement in **Project 75(I)**, focused on **AIP-enabled submarines, over 60% indigenisation, and substantial technology transfer**, has major implications for India’s **maritime deterrence in the Indian Ocean**, especially amid China’s expanding naval footprint.

Advanced Science and Technology Partnership:

- o Building on **50 years of formal S&T cooperation**

(completed in 2024), bilateral collaboration is now expanding into **strategic and emerging domains** such as **quantum technologies, cybersecurity, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence**.

Climate and Green Finance Cooperation:

- o Through the **Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (2022)**, Germany has committed up to **€10 billion by 2030** to support India’s **energy transition and climate goals**.

Dynamic Mobility and Talent Flows:

- o The **Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership (2022)**, complemented by Germany’s **Skilled Immigration Act**, has positioned Germany as a key destination for Indian professionals and students, with **around 2.8 lakh Indians residing in Germany (2025)** and **over 42,000 Indian students**, particularly in **healthcare, STEM, and technical fields**.

Overall Assessment:

- o Today, India–Germany relations reflect a **deeply institutionalised, multi-dimensional partnership**, firmly establishing Germany as **India’s most consequential partner within the European Union**.

CHALLENGES IN INDIA–GERMANY RELATIONS

Divergent Strategic Outlook on Russia:

- o Germany seeks stronger political alignment on the Russia–Ukraine conflict, whereas India continues to uphold **strategic autonomy**, including energy and defence engagements with Russia, limiting full diplomatic convergence.

Constraints in Defence Cooperation:

- o Despite recent momentum, defence ties face structural hurdles due to India’s **legacy dependence on Russian platforms**, comparatively **higher costs and conditionalities** associated with German defence exports, and delays in finalising major projects such as submarines.

Limited Economic Scale Relative to Potential:

- o While trade and investment are expanding, **India–Germany economic engagement remains modest** when compared to Germany–China trade, creating a gap between Germany’s diversification objectives and the present depth of bilateral economic integration with India.

Differing Threat Perceptions on China:

- o Germany increasingly frames China as a **systemic economic rival**, whereas India views China primarily as a **direct security and territorial challenge**, resulting in mismatched strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

● **Slow Progress on India–EU Trade Architecture:**

- Protracted negotiations on India–EU **Free Trade Agreement** generates uncertainty for investors and supply-chain planners, constraining long-term economic momentum.

● **Migration and Integration Bottlenecks:**

- Although skilled migration and student flows are rising, persistent issues such as **language barriers, recognition of professional qualifications, and social integration challenges** continue to affect mobility outcomes.

WAY FORWARD FOR STRENGTHENING INDIA–GERMANY RELATIONS

✦ **Operationalise Defence Industrial Cooperation:**

- Move beyond intent by implementing the defence industrial roadmap through **flagship co-production projects**, especially fast-tracking a concrete breakthrough on the **submarine (Project 75-I)** deal.

✦ **Deepen Indo-Pacific Strategic Coordination:**

- Address persisting geopolitical divergences by enhancing **joint maritime cooperation, exercises, and dialogue mechanisms** to manage rising great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

✦ **Convert MoUs into Time-Bound Outcomes:**

- Shift from declaratory agreements to **clear timelines and accountability**, particularly in **semiconductors and critical minerals**, to build resilient and trusted supply chains.

✦ **Fast-Track India–EU Trade Architecture:**

- Bridge regulatory asymmetries by aligning **EU**

standards with Indian market realities and prioritising early conclusion of the **India–EU Free Trade Agreement**.

✦ **Scale Up Education and Skilling Partnership:**

- Encourage greater **German university presence in India under NEP 2020**, coupled with joint curriculum design and research collaboration.

✦ **Ensure Ethical and Mutual Skill Mobility:**

- Strengthen **skill mobility and qualification recognition agreements** to ensure migration is **ethical, demand-driven, and beneficial** to both economies, especially in healthcare and STEM sectors.

✦ **Anchor Cooperation in Strategic Implementation Platforms:**

- Use institutional mechanisms like the **IGC, Digital Dialogue, and Track-1.5 forums** to monitor progress, resolve bottlenecks, and sustain long-term strategic alignment.

CONCLUSION

India–Germany relations are entering a **phase of strategic consolidation**, supported by strong institutions and expanding cooperation across defence, technology, climate, and mobility. However, translating intent into outcomes, managing geopolitical divergences, and navigating external pressures particularly the **American challenge of protectionism, technology controls, and strategic expectations**, remain critical. By fast-tracking implementation, aligning trade frameworks, and deepening Indo-Pacific and green cooperation, India and Germany can anchor a **resilient partnership** that strengthens India–EU ties and contributes to stability in a more contested global order.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) “India–Germany relations are marked by strong institutional foundations but constrained by geopolitical divergences and implementation gaps.” Discuss the current state, key challenges, and future roadmap of India–Germany relations in the context of evolving India–EU and Indo-Pacific dynamics.

(15 marks) (250 words)

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

INDIA-EU TRADE DEAL: “MOTHER OF ALL DEALS”

The India-European Union (EU) trade agreement is a comprehensive free trade pact aimed at enhancing economic engagement between India and the 27-member EU bloc. The agreement seeks to reduce tariffs, improve market access, harmonise standards, and strengthen trade in goods and services. It is expected to cover key sectors including industrial goods, labour-intensive sectors, services, and regulatory cooperation.

- ◆ The EU President, **Ursula von der Leyen**, described the trade agreement as the “mother of all deals,” highlighting its scale and strategic importance. Commerce Minister **Piyush Goyal** also referred to it as such, reflecting the historic and transformative potential of the agreement for India-EU economic relations.

Benefits for India:

- ◆ **Market Access for Labour-Intensive Sectors:** India will gain easier access for textiles, footwear, gems, and jewellery, boosting exports and employment.
- ◆ **Diversification of Trade Partners:** The deal reduces India’s dependence on the U.S. and China, especially amid protectionist policies and supply chain disruptions.
- ◆ **Strengthening India’s Position in Global Value Chains:** Improved trade relations with the EU can help India integrate into higher-value segments of global manufacturing and services.

Benefits for Europe:

- ◆ **Market Access for Industrial Goods:** European automobiles, beverages, and other industrial goods will get preferential access to India’s rapidly growing market.
- ◆ **First-Mover Advantage:** By signing before India’s trade deal with the U.S., the EU positions itself as a primary partner for India in the Indo-Pacific region.
- ◆ **Countering China’s Dominance:** The agreement offers Europe an alternative to Chinese supply chains

and strengthens cooperation in critical technologies.

Challenges:

- ◆ **Regulatory and Compliance Burden:** Indian firms may face higher compliance costs to meet EU standards for sustainability, quality, and data protection.
- ◆ **CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism)** can be considered a **challenge** for India in the context of the India-EU trade deal.
- ◆ **Geopolitical Pressures:** U.S. trade policies and tariffs may influence the dynamics of India-EU trade cooperation.
- ◆ **Domestic Sensitivities:** Balancing liberalisation with protection of local industries and employment remains a critical challenge for India.

Way Forward:

- ◆ **Timely Implementation:** Ensure smooth finalisation of pending chapters and operationalise the agreement before major EU visits or summits.
- ◆ **Support Indian Industries:** Provide capacity-building and financial support to MSMEs to comply with EU standards.
- ◆ **Strategic Engagement:** Use the deal as a platform to strengthen India’s role in global value chains, enhance technology transfer, and reduce dependence on China.

Conclusion

- ◆ The India–EU trade agreement, described as the “Mother of All Deals,” has the potential to significantly deepen economic integration, strengthen supply-chain resilience, and reposition India and Europe in global value chains. Its success will depend on timely implementation, managing regulatory challenges such as CBAM, and balancing liberalisation with domestic economic interests in an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment.

INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD: SMALL TABLES, BIG DIVIDENDS

- ◆ In 2026, India faces **complex bilateral and multilateral challenges**, including tensions in the neighbourhood, and strategic competition with the U.S. and China.
- ◆ Traditional large forums like the **UN and G-20** often fail to deliver due to conflicting interests, domestic politics, or agenda disputes.

Advantages for India

- ◆ **Strategic Leverage in White Spaces**, India can lead where no major power dominates, shaping rules and delivering global public goods.
- ◆ **Economic Gains**: Engagement with the **EU** through standards, trade, and market access strengthens value chains and hedges against trade pressures from the U.S.
- ◆ **Global Leadership Role**: As **BRICS Chair**, India can steer development finance and ensure the Global South's concerns are addressed.
- ◆ **Regional Security and Influence**: In the **Quad**, India can provide maritime security and resilient port capacities, boosting its Indo-Pacific role without escalating rivalries.
- ◆ **Tangible Diplomatic Outcomes**: Smaller, focused forums like **AI and tech coalitions** allow India to translate diplomacy into actionable results.

Challenges

- ◆ **Geopolitical Risks**: Balancing ties with **Washington and Beijing** amid trade disputes and strategic competition.
- ◆ **Internal Divergence in Coalitions**: BRICS members

have different priorities, making consensus difficult.

- ◆ **Limited Leverage in Large Forums**: UN and G-20 often fail to deliver due to domestic politics or conflicting agendas.
- ◆ **Compliance and Regulatory Burden**: Aligning with EU standards may strain Indian industries.
- ◆ **External Pressure**: U.S. tariff threats and political signaling can constrain India's freedom in global coalitions.

Way Forward

- ◆ **Prioritise Selective Engagement**: Focus on smaller, actionable tables where India has comparative advantage.
- ◆ **Balance Diplomacy and Strategic Autonomy**: Avoid entanglement in great power rivalries while advancing national interests.
- ◆ **Turn Policies into Action**: Ensure forums like BRICS, Quad, and AI coalitions deliver tangible results through tools like development bank guarantees and service-oriented initiatives.
- **Pax Silica of US**: Pax Silica is a strategic initiative launched by the U.S. on December 12, 2025, aimed at securing global supply chains of critical minerals, semiconductors, and AI technologies.

Conclusion

- ◆ India's diplomacy in a multipolar world must shift from **maximum participation to maximum outcomes**, leveraging small, focused coalitions to secure strategic autonomy, economic resilience, and global leadership.

LINKING BRICS CBDCS FOR CROSS-BORDER PAYMENTS

The **RBI has proposed linking the Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) of BRICS nations**, to be discussed at the **2026 BRICS Summit in India**. This initiative aligns with India's ongoing push for **digital finance standardisation and international cooperation**, building on its **G-20 presidency in 2023**.

Advantages

- ◆ **Enhanced Transparency**: Blockchain ensures immutable transaction records, reducing fraud and

black money.

- ◆ **Faster Settlements**: Instant cross-border payments compared to traditional banking channels.
- ◆ **Reduced Dollar Dependence**: Minimises reliance on the U.S.-dominated SWIFT system.
- ◆ **Regulatory Integration**: Potential integration with national ID and tax systems strengthens compliance.
- ◆ **Strategic Autonomy**: Enhances India's economic and geopolitical resilience in international trade.

Challenges

- ◆ **Geopolitical Risks:** Could trigger retaliatory measures such as U.S. tariffs.
- ◆ **Technical Complexity:** Requires interoperable and secure blockchain infrastructure across nations.
- ◆ **Legal & Regulatory Alignment:** Different regulatory frameworks across BRICS countries.
- ◆ **Cybersecurity Threats:** Risk of hacking, fraud, or manipulation in cross-border transactions.
- ◆ **Adoption Barriers:** Resistance from private sector, banks, and public in using CBDCs for international trade.

Way Forward

- ◆ **Standardised Framework:** Harmonise protocols, security standards, and compliance across BRICS nations.
- ◆ **Pilot Transactions:** Begin with low-value, low-risk payments before full-scale deployment.
- ◆ **Strengthen Legal & Cybersecurity Measures:** Establish robust safeguards to mitigate fraud, technical failures, and disputes.

Conclusion:

Linking BRICS CBDCs can **revolutionise cross-border payments** by boosting transparency, efficiency, and strategic autonomy, but success depends on robust technical, legal, and cybersecurity frameworks alongside careful geopolitical navigation.

BEYOND VERDICTS: KEY JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS

Supreme Court Empowers States to Investigate Corruption under PCA, 1988

- ◆ The **Supreme Court of India** has clarified that **State investigative agencies**, including **State Anti-Corruption Bureaus and police**, are empowered to register and investigate cases under the **Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988**, even when the accused is a **Central Government employee**, without requiring prior permission from the **CBI**.
- ◆ The **PCA, 1988** criminalises acts of **bribery, misappropriation, possession of disproportionate assets**, and other forms of corruption, aiming to **combat corruption across government bodies and public sector organisations**.

Supreme Court on Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls

- ◆ In the case of **Association for Democratic Reforms vs. Election Commission of India**, the **Supreme Court** observed that the **Election Commission (ECI) cannot exercise unregulated powers** under Section 21(3) of the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**, which allows it to conduct a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls “in such manner as it may think fit.”
- ◆ The Court noted that while S.21(3) grants the ECI discretion distinct from the general revision rules under S.21(2), **the process must adhere to constitutional principles of natural justice, transparency, fairness, and equality**.
- ◆ The bench highlighted that any deviation from prescribed procedures cannot compromise **voters’ rights under Articles 14 and 326**, and the ECI must ensure that the **SIR process remains just, fair, and transparent**, even when exercising its discretionary powers.

Supreme Court Directs High Courts to Report on Women’s Representation in Bar Associations

- ◆ In the case of **Deeksha N Amruthesh vs. State of Karnataka & Ors**, the **Supreme Court** has directed the **Registrars General of all High Courts** to verify and report compliance with its **March 24, 2025 order** mandating **30% representation of women lawyers** as office bearers or executive members in Bar Associations.
- ◆ The Court noted that several associations in Karnataka had either **failed or partially failed** to comply, holding elections without adequate female representation.

Supreme Court Reviews CAQM Report on Delhi-NCR Air Pollution

- ◆ The **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** submitted a comprehensive **status report** to the **Supreme Court** in the long-running **MC Mehta case** on Delhi-NCR air pollution, recommending both **short-term and long-term measures**. The report, based on studies from 2015–2025, identifies **vehicular emissions, industry, road and soil dust, biomass burning, and secondary particulates** as key contributors to PM2.5 pollution, with **seasonal variations**.
- ◆ Key recommendations include: continuation and **rationalisation of the Environment Compensation Charge**, deployment of **barrier-free multi-lane toll systems** at Delhi's borders, **phasing out polluting vehicles**, expansion of **public and electric transport**, strengthening **EV and CNG/LNG infrastructure**, and adoption of **AI- and sensor-based enforcement**. Industrial measures involve **C&D waste management, cleaner furnaces, zero burning of industrial waste, and restrictions on coal-based power plants within 300 km of Delhi**. For agricultural pollution, CAQM recommends **crop residue management and biomass utilization**, while waste management measures include **segregation, processing, and integration of informal waste pickers**.

Supreme Court to Frame SOP for Timely Recovery of Missing Children

- ◆ In **G. Ganesh v. State of Tamil Nadu**, the **Supreme Court** expressed its intent to formulate a **common Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** for the **timely investigation and recovery of missing children**, highlighting that delays often reduce the chances of tracing children.
- ◆ The Court noted that despite missing children cases being widespread, **States frequently fail to prioritise them**, citing a case from Tamil Nadu where police inaction led to prolonged litigation.
- ◆ The Court directed the **Union of India and all State/UT governments** to provide details of **dedicated Nodal Officers** for such cases and to upload the information on the **Mission Vatsalya portal**.
- ◆ It emphasised **time-bound investigations**, recommended **expedited trials within six months**, and highlighted coordination challenges posed by **inter-State trafficking networks**. The Court also referenced ongoing PILs and cases on **child trafficking**, urging **States to be vigilant in cancelling bail for accused traffickers** and ensuring adherence to robust procedures for protecting children.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) An NGO working for child welfare discovers that a popular social media platform is being used to circulate content that exploits minors, including images and videos of child labor and abuse. The NGO writes to the platform requesting removal of such content, but the platform responds that it cannot proactively monitor all posts due to privacy concerns and the sheer volume of content. Meanwhile, public outrage is growing, and local communities are demanding immediate action.

As a government official in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, you are asked to recommend a strategy to address the issue.

Questions:

- Identify the ethical issues involved in regulating social media content related to child welfare.
- Discuss the conflict between privacy, freedom of expression, and protection of vulnerable groups.
- Suggest practical and ethical measures that the government, NGOs, and platforms can take to ensure children's safety while respecting rights.

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

- Dedication:** For nearly 29 years, Vijayalakshmi has been the lone teacher at a Multi-Grade Learning Centre in Edamalakkudy, Kerala, educating 21 tribal children of Classes I–IV despite earning only ₹7,000 a month, with no service benefits and her contract terminated and renewed every year.
- Governance Ethics:** Sreenarayanaguru Open University has partnered with the Kerala State Literacy Mission to launch the “From literacy to higher education” initiative, enabling Class 12 equivalency graduates, especially women, to enter university, with fees covered by district panchayat funds. The programme aims to admit over 10,000 new students this year, advancing Kerala’s goal of becoming a complete graduate State.
- Environmental Ethics:** G. Rajkumar spearheaded the Save Kurinji Campaign, raising awareness of the Neelakurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthiana*) and leading to the 2006 establishment of the 32-sq.km Neelakurinji Sanctuary in Munnar. He organised flowering-season campaigns (1994–2006) and inspired works like Sugathakumari’s *Kurinji Pookkal*, making its conservation a landmark environmental movement.
- Public Service Ethics:** An IAS officer, Chandan Sanjay Tripathi, significantly improved maternal and child health in Chhattisgarh's Korea district by introducing the "Korea Modak Ladoo," a nutritious snack made from ragi (finger millet), jaggery, and peanuts, transforming complex nutrition issues into a culturally accepted, effective food intervention that reduced underweight cases by 57%.
- Resilience:** Pani Devi Godara, a 94-year-old from rural Rajasthan, has won gold medals in the 100-metre sprint, shot put, discus throw, and javelin at the Asian Masters Athletics Championship. Despite early marriage, raising eight children, and limited sponsorship, she continues daily farm work, trains rigorously, and follows a simple diet of bajra roti, vegetables, ghee, and milk, showing that age need not limit physical achievement.
- Social Responsibility:** In Chandaki, Gujarat, a village of around 500 mostly elderly residents, a community kitchen started about 15 years ago by sarpanch Poonambhai Patel, provides two nutritious Gujarati meals daily for Rs 2,000–2,500 per month. The initiative has improved health, reduced stress and strengthened social bonds ensuring no resident eats alone despite younger family members migrating to cities or abroad.
- Environmental Ethics:** In Haryana’s Faridabad, the Green Pencil Foundation has transformed government school libraries into eco-friendly learning spaces, where over 2,250 students engage in hands-on sustainability activities like building vertical gardens, waste segregation, and climate workshops, fostering awareness and practical habits for a greener future.

MODEL ESSAY

"Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies"

Introduction

- Quote by Friedrich Nietzsche
- Truth is often considered the foundation of knowledge, society, and moral progress, while lies are deliberate distortions of facts.
- At first glance, lies seem more dangerous because they spread falsehoods and mislead people.
- However, **Convictions are deeply internalized beliefs**; they resist contradiction and are often impervious to evidence.
- Example: Climate change denial is largely rooted in ideological conviction rather than ignorance; despite overwhelming scientific evidence, some groups reject it.

Societal Implications of Convictions

- **Slows Scientific Progress:** Religious convictions against heliocentrism delayed acceptance of Galileo's findings in 17th-century Europe.
- **Political and Social Polarization:** Ideological convictions on climate change have divided US policymakers, delaying environmental reforms.
- **Public Health Risks:** Anti-vaccine convictions in 21st-century India and Europe contributed to **measles outbreaks** despite vaccine availability.
- **Persecution and Violence:** Witch-hunting convictions in 16th–17th century Germany and Scotland led to the execution of thousands.
- **Resistance to Social Reforms:** Caste-based convictions in India delayed implementation of **Dalit rights and affirmative action policies** for decades.

Why are lies less dangerous?

- **Temporary and Detectable:** Lies can be exposed over time. **Eg:** COVID-19 misinformation on social media was debunked by WHO and health authorities.

- **Do Not Shape Belief:** Lies are not always internalized. **Eg:** False political statements may mislead voters briefly but are corrected in later elections.
- **Less Deeply Internalized:** Lies do not form core convictions.

Way Forward

- **Promote Critical Thinking:** Encourage analytical reasoning in education to question beliefs rather than accept them blindly.
- **Scientific and Evidence-Based Literacy:** Strengthen awareness of facts and methods to evaluate claims objectively.
- **Open Dialogue and Debate:** Foster environments where diverse viewpoints are discussed respectfully to challenge entrenched convictions.
- **Media and Information Literacy:** Train individuals to identify misinformation and avoid ideological echo chambers.
- **Encourage Cognitive Flexibility:** Cultivate adaptability and willingness to revise beliefs in light of new evidence, reducing dogmatism.

Conclusion

- While lies deceive temporarily, **convictions can permanently blind individuals and societies to truth.**
- Therefore, cultivating a mindset of open inquiry, skepticism, and willingness to revise beliefs is crucial to safeguard truth.

Sample Quotes

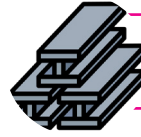
- *Victory belongs to the most persevering - Napoleon Bonaparte*
- *There is an immeasurable distance between late and too late - Og Mandino*
- *Personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures - F. Scott Fitzgerald*

MAINS JOT DOWN



GS II: ELECTION

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** unveiled the **ECINET platform** at the **IICDEM 2026**, following its successful **beta pilot during the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections**.
- ECINET is a **unified digital ecosystem** for managing end-to-end electoral processes, offering services like **voter registration, electoral roll search, e-EPIC download, candidate information, grievance redressal, and real-time tracking**. As the **world's largest electoral service platform**, it enhances **transparency, efficiency, and real-time election monitoring**.



GS- III - INFRASTRUCTURE

- The **One Station One Product (OSOP)** scheme, led by the **Ministry of Railways**, has reached over **2,000 stations**, benefiting **1.32 lakh artisans** as of January 2026.
- Launched in 2022, it promotes **local crafts, handlooms, and processed foods** through dedicated **sales outlets at railway stations**, supporting the **“Vocal for Local”** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** initiatives by linking artisans to a **national market**.



GS- III - ENERGY

- The **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** is prioritising the **fabrication of Indian Light Water Reactors (LWRs)** to accelerate nuclear power capacity expansion.
- LWRs use **ordinary water as both coolant and neutron moderator**, with **low-enriched uranium (3–5% U-235)** as fuel. Fission generates heat, which is carried by water to produce steam that drives turbines for electricity.
- Globally, LWRs make up over **85% of civil nuclear capacity**, and while India has traditionally focused on **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)**, LWRs are now seen as a key avenue for **rapid nuclear capacity addition**.



GS- III - SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- A **Pixxel-led consortium**, including **Piersight Space, Satsure Analytics India, and Dhruva Space**, has partnered with **IN-SPACE** to design, build, and operate India's **first national Earth Observation (EO) constellation** under a **PPP model**.
- The project, with an investment of **₹1,200 crore over five years**, will deploy **12 satellites** offering **high-resolution optical, multispectral, SAR, and hyperspectral imaging**, creating a complete **end-to-end EO ecosystem** from satellite deployment to geospatial analytics. This marks a **strategic shift** from government-built to **industry-operated national EO infrastructure**.



GS- III - GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

- The **Chips to Start-up (C2S) Programme**, launched by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** in 2022, is a nationwide **capacity-building initiative** aimed at developing **85,000 industry-ready professionals** across undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels.
- The programme provides participants with access to **SMART lab facilities**, and has already recorded **over 1 lakh enrolments**, reflecting its growing impact on building talent for India's semiconductor and electronics ecosystem.

- The **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)**, launched on **22nd January 2015** under the **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** initiative, encourages long-term savings for the **education and future needs of girl children**.
- Designed for **girls below 10 years**, a family can open accounts for a maximum of **two daughters**, with annual contributions ranging from **₹250 to ₹1.5 lakh** for 15 years. Managed by a **guardian until the girl turns 18**, the account **matures at 21 years**, allowing up to **50% withdrawal for educational purposes** after 18, ensuring both financial security and empowerment for girls.

- The government has approved the construction of **over 10,000 km of rural roads across six states** under **PMGSY-IV**.
- Launched in **December 2000** by the **Ministry of Rural Development**, the **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)** is a **centrally sponsored scheme** aimed at providing **all-weather road connectivity** to eligible unconnected rural habitations, including the **construction and modernisation of bridges**, as part of a broader **poverty alleviation strategy**.



GS- III - ENVIRONMENT

- The Union Minister of State for Earth Sciences launched India's **first open-sea Marine Fish Farming project** in the Andaman Sea, implemented jointly by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences, NIOT, and the Andaman & Nicobar administration**.
- The project aims to cultivate **marine finfish and seaweed in natural ocean conditions**, promoting sustainable livelihoods. It includes two livelihood-focused components: **seaweed farming** and **cage-based finfish cultivation**, marking a significant step towards harnessing the **economic potential of India's Blue Economy**.
- The **High Seas Treaty**, the World's first legally binding treaty to protect marine life in international waters (beyond national jurisdiction), covers nearly 50% of Earth's surface and about two-thirds of the world's oceans.
- It came into force after 60 countries ratified it; 83 countries have ratified so far (including China and Japan).
- The **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** has notified the **Environmental (Protection) Fund Rules, 2026** to streamline the use of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).
- Constituted under **Section 16 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, the Fund accumulates fines levied under the **Air, Water, and Environment Acts**. **75% of the corpus is transferred to States/UTs**, while 25% remains with the Centre, and it is utilised for **monitoring networks, remediation of contaminated sites, R&D in clean technologies, and strengthening regulatory bodies like CPCB and SPCBs**.

- ➔ The **CAG has released the second edition of the 'State Finances 2023–24' report**, providing an overview of the fiscal position of all **28 States** for FY 2023–24, following the first edition released in **September 2025**.
- ➔ The report highlights rising fiscal stress, with **State public debt reaching ₹67.87 lakh crore**, about **23 percent of GSDP**, as of March 31, 2024.
- ➔ **Eighteen States breached the 3 percent fiscal deficit limit** recommended by the **15th Finance Commission**, indicating weakened fiscal discipline.
- ➔ A key concern is **extreme fiscal rigidity**, as committed expenditures such as salaries, pensions, and interest payments consume **around 60 percent of revenue expenditure**, leaving little fiscal space for development.
- ➔ States are also increasingly dependent on **Union tax devolution**, which has risen from **about 21 percent in 2014–15 to nearly 30 percent in 2023–24**, making State finances vulnerable to national economic fluctuations. Additionally, **capital expenditure remains low at around 16 percent**, while **revenue expenditure dominates at about 83 percent**, with states like **Punjab and Andhra Pradesh using debt to meet routine expenses rather than asset creation**.

- ➔ The **Centre has sanctioned 24 chip design projects** under the **Design Linked Incentive DLI Scheme**, marking significant progress in India's semiconductor design ecosystem.
- ➔ The supported projects have achieved **16 tape outs**, developed **6 ASIC chips**, filed **10 patents**, and leveraged **over three times private investment**, showing strong industry confidence.
- ➔ The **DLI Scheme was launched in 2021** by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology MeitY** under the **Semicon India Programme**, with **C DAC as the nodal implementing agency**.
- ➔ The scheme aims to build a **self-reliant and globally competitive chip design ecosystem** by supporting **domestic startups and MSMEs**. Key support includes **financial incentives under Product Design Linked Incentive and Deployment Linked Incentive**, and access to **advanced design infrastructure through the ChipIN Centre**, such as a **National EDA Tool Grid, IP core repository**, and **support for prototyping MPW and post silicon validation**.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

STEEL SLAG

- It is a solid by-product of the steel-making process, primarily composed of **oxides of calcium, iron, silicon, magnesium**, and other elements.
- It is valued for its **strength, durability, and corrosion resistance**, making it suitable for **construction materials, concrete and cement production, and road building applications**.

BOARD OF PEACE

- It is a proposed international organisation intended to act as a **transitional governing body** in post-conflict scenarios, with a current focus on **Gaza**.
- Its mandate is to **coordinate governance, security, and reconstruction efforts**, mobilising international resources while ensuring accountability.
- The body would be **chaired by the U.S. President** and include an **executive board of select global leaders**, with membership on an **invitation basis**, comprising both **fixed-term and paid permanent members**.

TERAWAVE COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

- It is a **hybrid satellite constellation** of **5,408 satellites** operating in both **Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and Medium Earth Orbit (MEO)**.
- It delivers **symmetrical high-speed bandwidth** using a combination of **radio frequency and optical connectivity**, where optical links transmit data via **modulated light pulses** through fiber optics or free space, enabling **high-bandwidth, low-latency communication**.

SOCIAL COMMERCE

- It refers to the **buying and selling of goods or services directly through social media platforms**.
- It primarily takes three forms: **livestream selling, influencer-led product discovery, and group buying**, where consumers purchase collectively to avail better deals.

BAGURUMBA DANCE

- It is a traditional folk dance of the **Bodo community in Assam**, inspired by **nature and the blooming of flowers**, symbolising the **harmony between humans and the natural world**.
- Performed mainly by **young Bodo women**, with men providing musical accompaniment on **traditional instruments**, it is usually showcased in **groups forming circles or lines**, enhancing its **visual grace and rhythmic appeal**.