



FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



> WEAPONISATION OF SPACE

> GENDER PARITY INDEX

> UPI ISSUE

14th SEPTEMBER, 2026 - 20th SEPTEMBER, 2026

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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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WEAPONISATION OF SPACE

Syllabus: GS III - Science & Technology

PYQ MAPPING

Q) "Write about the 'Kessler syndrome' with reference to space debris." (2011)

Q) "Discuss India's achievements in the field of space science and technology. How has the application of this technology helped India in its socio-economic development?" (2016)

SHORT TAKES

➤ ASAT (Anti-Satellite) weapons:

- Weapons designed to **destroy, damage, disable or disrupt artificial satellites**, particularly for military purposes.
- They may use **kinetic methods such as direct collision** or **non-kinetic methods such as lasers, jamming and cyberattacks** to interfere with satellite functions.

WHY IN NEWS

On 14 September 2026, **U.S. Air Force Secretary Troy Meink** publicly acknowledged that the United States has deployed "on-orbit space control weapons", marking its first official public confirmation of weapons in orbit.

INTRODUCTION

Space weaponisation refers to the development and deployment of capabilities to attack, disrupt or defend space-based and ground-based assets. The **2026 Global Counterspace Capabilities Report** identifies **13 countries** developing counterspace capabilities, highlighting the growing strategic importance of outer space.

ABOUT SPACE WEAPONISATION

• STAR WARS

Use of weapons in space can take different forms. They can be used to either **destroy**, or to **jam**, equipment.

EARTH-TO-SPACE	SPACE-TO-SPACE	SPACE-TO-EARTH
Anti-satellite tests	Co-orbital satellites	Weapons deployed in space
● Involves launching missiles from earth to destroy space-based assets	One satellite can be programmed to crash into an enemy satellite	Satellite-based weapons can deorbit, enter atmosphere, and strike Earth-based targets
● Four countries demonstrated this	Soviet Union reported to have tested this during the Cold War	Not demonstrated
◆ Earth-based systems can jam or 'blind' signals of enemy satellites	Using space-based assets to jam or block the signals or comms of enemy satellites	Use of space-based systems to interfere or disrupt functioning of radars, missiles or aircraft
◆ Many have this capability	No known capability	Not known

➔ **Space weaponisation** refers to the development, deployment or use of military capabilities in or through space to **attack, disrupt, degrade or defend space and ground-based assets**.

➔ It includes **Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons, co-orbital systems, directed-energy weapons, electronic warfare, cyberattacks and satellite jamming/spoofing**.

DRIVERS OF SPACE WEAPONISATION

🔍 **Growing Military Dependence:** Modern militaries increasingly **rely on satellites** for intelligence, navigation, communication and precision targeting, making them critical strategic assets.

🔍 **Great-Power Competition:** Strategic rivalry among major powers, particularly the **US, China and Russia**, is driving the development of counterspace capabilities.

🔍 **Technological Advances:** Advances in **artificial intelligence (AI), autonomous satellites, lasers, cyber capabilities and electronic warfare** are expanding the means to disrupt or attack space systems.

🔍 **Protection of Critical Space Assets:** Since disabling an adversary's satellite can significantly disrupt military operations, countries are developing capabilities to protect their own space assets.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF SPACE CAPABILITIES

NATIONAL SECURITY

Protects satellites essential for military communication, surveillance and navigation.

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Indigenous space-security capabilities reduce dependence on foreign systems.

MODERN WARFARE

Space-based intelligence and navigation support precision-guided weapons, drones and network-centric warfare.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Satellites support banking, telecommunications, weather forecasting, agriculture and disaster management.

GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCE

Space capabilities enhance a country's technological and strategic standing.

DUAL-USE ADVANTAGE

Civilian space infrastructure can provide valuable resilience and redundancy during conflicts.

- 🔍 **Rise of Private Space Companies:** The growing number of commercial satellites and private space operators increases the number of potential targets and creates new security vulnerabilities.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

✍️ **Outer Space Treaty, 1967:**

- o Serves as the **foundational legal framework** for international space activities.
- o **Article IV** prohibits placing **nuclear weapons or other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)** in orbit or stationing them in outer space.
- o The treaty does **not comprehensively prohibit conventional weapons or all Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons**, leaving a major gap in regulating space weaponisation.

- ✍️ **Moon Agreement, 1979:** Regulates activities on the **Moon and other celestial bodies**, but has relatively limited participation.

✍️ **UN Efforts:**

- o The **Open-ended Working Group on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (OEWG-PAROS), 2025–2028**, is working towards recommendations to prevent an arms race in outer space
- o India supports **legally binding international rules on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)** and maintains its opposition to the **weaponisation of outer space**.

CHALLENGES

- ▼ **Dual-use ambiguity:** The same satellite or technology can have both civilian and military applications.
- ▼ **Weak international regulation:** Existing treaties do not comprehensively regulate conventional space weapons.
- ▼ **Arms race:** Competition among major powers could encourage development of increasingly sophisticated counterspace systems.
- ▼ **Commercial vulnerability:** Growing dependence on private satellite constellations creates additional targets and complicates conflict management.
- ▼ **Space congestion:** Increasing numbers of satellites and debris make safe space operations more difficult.
- ▼ **High technological costs:** Developing resilient satellites and counterspace capabilities requires substantial investment.

INDIA'S PERSPECTIVE

- 🇮🇳 **Mission Shakti (2019):** India demonstrated an

indigenous **ASAT capability** by destroying a satellite in LEO.

- 🇮🇳 **Defence Space Agency (DSA):** India has institutionalised defence-related space capabilities and coordination.

- 🇮🇳 **ISRO System for Safe and Sustainable Space Operations Management (IS4OM):** Strengthens India's **Space Situational Awareness and space-traffic monitoring**.

- 🇮🇳 **Space sustainability:** India's **Debris Free Space Mission (DFSMD)** aims for zero debris creation by Indian space actors by **2030**.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳️ **Strengthen international law:** Develop a legally binding framework covering conventional space weapons, ASATs and harmful interference.
- ✳️ **Improve Space Situational Awareness:** Build international mechanisms for **real-time tracking and information sharing**.
- ✳️ **Prioritise non-destructive capabilities:** Emphasise resilience, cyber defence, electronic protection and redundancy over debris-generating weapons.
- ✳️ **Public-private cooperation:** Integrate commercial space capabilities into national space-security planning while maintaining appropriate safeguards.
- ✳️ **International cooperation:** Expand cooperation through mechanisms such as **PAROS and bilateral/multilateral space-security dialogues**.

CONCLUSION

The growing use of **counterspace capabilities** highlights the need to prevent an arms race while protecting legitimate national security interests. Strengthening **international rules, transparency, confidence-building measures and responsible space operations** is essential for maintaining outer space as a safe, secure and sustainable domain.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Space weaponisation poses risks not only to national security but also to the long-term sustainability of outer space. Discuss with suitable examples. **(15 marks, 250 words)**

UPI ISSUE

Syllabus: GS III - Indian Economy

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Is inclusive growth possible under market economy? State the significance of financial inclusion in achieving economic growth in India. (2022)

SHORT TAKES

- **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR):** A fee charged to a merchant on a digital payment transaction, usually paid by the merchant to the payment ecosystem (banks, payment service providers, etc.) for processing the transaction.
- **P2PM (Person-to-Person Merchant):** A UPI category for small merchants, such as street vendors and neighbourhood shops, receiving payments through UPI QR codes directly into their bank accounts.

WHY IN NEWS

The **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** has announced a revised **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** framework for selected **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** merchant transactions, effective from **15 October 2026**.

INTRODUCTION

UPI has emerged as the backbone of India's digital payments ecosystem by enabling instant, interoperable and low-cost bank-to-bank transactions. In **August 2026**, **UPI processed 24.51 billion transactions worth ₹29.82 lakh crore**, highlighting its enormous scale and systemic importance.

ABOUT UPI

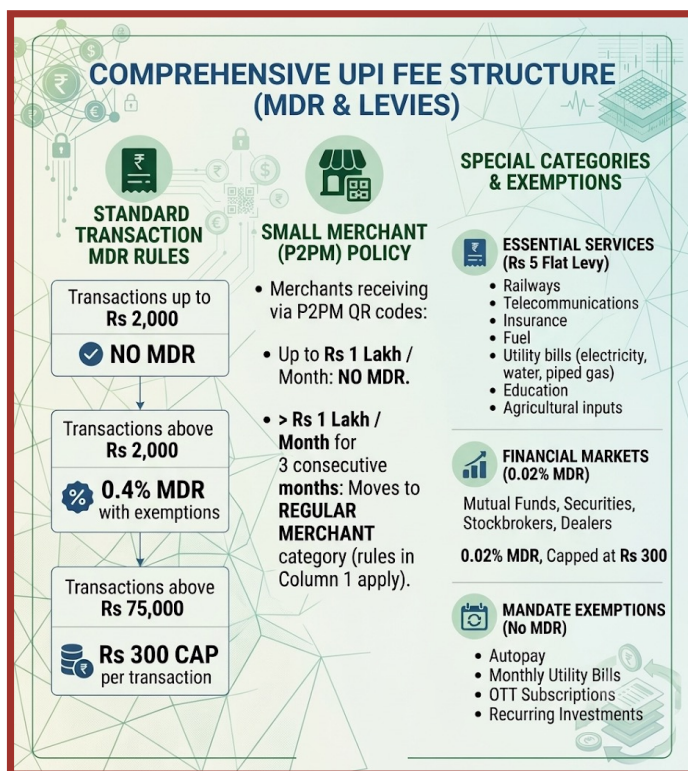
- ➔ **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** is an instant payment system developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** under the regulatory oversight of the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**.
- ➔ Launched in **2016**, UPI enables instant bank-to-bank payments through mobile applications using **Virtual Payment Addresses (VPAs)**, **QR codes**, **mobile numbers** and **bank details**.
- ➔ It supports both **Person-to-Person (P2P)** and **Person-to-Merchant (P2M)** transactions.

UPI has become a major component of India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and is operational in **11 countries** as of August 2026.

RECENT ISSUE

Revised MDR Framework:

- o **NPCI has introduced a revised Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) framework** for selected UPI merchant transactions, effective from **15 October 2026**.
- o An **MDR of up to 0.4%** will apply to specified **Person-to-Merchant transactions above ₹2,000**.
- o **Person-to-Person transactions will remain completely free**, irrespective of the transaction value.
- o Around **96% of P2M transactions** will remain unaffected, as payments to merchants up to ₹2,000 and transactions covered under the zero-MDR framework will remain free.

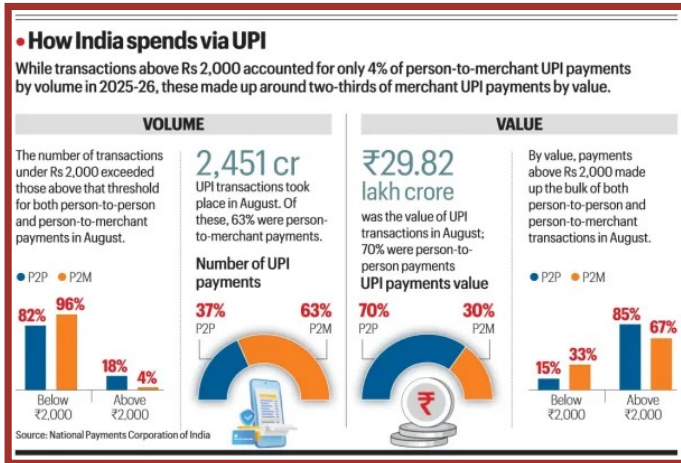


Distribution of MDR:

- o The MDR is **not a charge collected by the Government or NPCI**; it is distributed among participants such as banks and payment application providers.
- o The move aims to support investment in **payment infrastructure, cybersecurity, fraud prevention, reliability and customer service**.

Concerns:

- o The development has also triggered debate over the **sustainability of the zero-cost UPI model** and concerns about whether merchants might indirectly pass costs to consumers.
- o A petition challenging the new MDR framework was filed in the **Supreme Court** in September 2026



IMPORTANCE OF UPI

- ☀ **Financial inclusion:** Enables low-cost digital payments without requiring traditional card infrastructure.
- ☀ **Ease of transactions:** Provides **instant, 24×7 interoperable payments** across banks and applications.
- ☀ **Merchant inclusion:** QR-based payments allow even **small and informal merchants** to accept digital payments with minimal infrastructure.
- ☀ **Digital economy:** UPI has become a major foundation of India's rapidly expanding **cashless economy**.
- ☀ **Mass adoption:** Nearly **55.49 crore users** were onboarded on UPI by June 2026.
- ☀ **Global reach:** UPI is increasingly being adopted for **cross-border payments**, strengthening India's digital-payment footprint.
- ☀ **Innovation:** Its interoperable architecture supports innovations such as **UPI Lite, UPI credit card payments and biometric authentication**.

CHALLENGES

- ⚠ **Cybersecurity risks:** The enormous scale of UPI makes it an attractive target for **phishing, social engineering, identity theft and payment fraud**.
- ⚠ **Systemic dependence:** Heavy dependence on digital payments means outages can disrupt everyday economic activity.
- ⚠ **Infrastructure resilience:** Banks, payment service providers and other participants need continuous investment to maintain **high uptime and reliability**.
- ⚠ **Market concentration:** A large share of UPI

transactions is concentrated among a few major third-party applications, creating concerns about **competition**.

- ⚠ **Digital divide:** Limited access to smartphones, internet connectivity and digital literacy can exclude sections of the population.
- ⚠ **Consumer protection:** Failed transactions, fraud and unauthorised payments require quick **grievance redressal and refund mechanisms**.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳ **Ensure Affordable Payments:** Ensure the revised **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** framework does not undermine affordability for consumers and small merchants.
- ✳ **Strengthen Cybersecurity:** Invest in **fraud detection, encryption, real-time risk monitoring and consumer awareness** against phishing, fake QR codes and unauthorised payment requests.
- ✳ **Promote Financial Inclusion:** Expand **UPI Lite, offline payment solutions and rural UPI adoption**, particularly among small merchants and users in areas with weak connectivity.
- ✳ **Ensure Competition and Consumer Protection:** Promote greater **competition among UPI applications** and strengthen **grievance-redressal and dispute-resolution mechanisms**.

CONCLUSION

The recent debate over **UPI transaction charges** highlights the need to balance affordable digital payments with the financial sustainability of the payment ecosystem. Strengthening **cybersecurity, infrastructure resilience, consumer protection and inclusive access** can ensure that UPI remains a reliable pillar of India's Digital Public Infrastructure.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has transformed India's digital payments ecosystem, but its rapid expansion has created new challenges. Discuss. **(15 marks, 250 words)**

GENDER PARITY INDEX: ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Syllabus: GS II - Health, Education, Human Resources

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Distinguish between gender equality, gender equity and women's empowerment. Why is it important to take gender concerns into account in programme design and implementation? **(2024)**

Q) What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space? **(2019)**

WHY IN NEWS

India retained the 131st rank in the Global Gender Gap Index 2026 released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), with a gender parity score of 64.5%.

INTRODUCTION

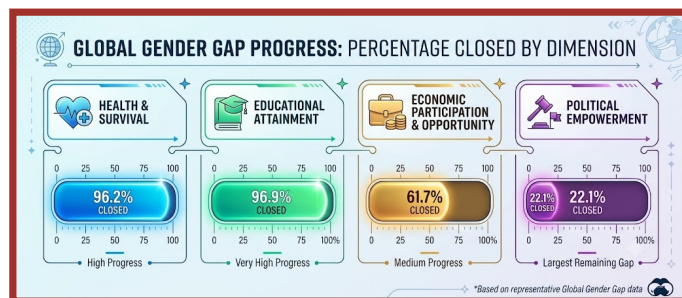
Gender parity refers to the equal participation and opportunities of women and men across social, economic and political spheres. The **2026 Global Gender Gap Index** shows that the global gender gap has closed by only **69.4%**, highlighting the persistence of gender inequalities despite progress.

ABOUT GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX

- ➔ The **Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)** was introduced by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)** in **2006** to measure the relative gaps between women and men.
- ➔ The 2026 edition covers **145 economies** and marks the **20th edition** of the index.
- ➔ It measures gender gaps across **four dimensions**
 - o **Economic Participation and Opportunity**
 - o **Educational Attainment**
 - o **Health and Survival**
 - o **Political Empowerment**
- ➔ The index uses a **0–1 scale**, where a higher score indicates greater progress towards gender parity.

KEY FINDINGS

- ♣ **Global Gender Gap:**
 - o **69.4%** of the global gender gap has been closed in 2026 across the **97 economies** continuously covered since 2006.
 - o No economy has yet achieved **100% gender parity**.



♣ **Time to Parity:** At the current historical rate of progress, **global gender parity is estimated to take 120 years**.

♣ **Top Performers:** **Iceland, Finland and Norway** occupy the top three positions in the **2026 Global Gender Gap Index**.



INDIA'S POSITION

- 🇮🇳 **Overall Ranking:**
 - o India ranks **131st out of 145 economies** in the **2026 Global Gender Gap Index**, with **64.5%** of its overall gender gap closed.
 - o This represents a **4.3 percentage-point**

improvement since 2006.

- o The **14 countries ranked below India** on the index include Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Mali, Algeria, and Congo.

Educational Attainment:

- o India has achieved **96.6% parity**.
- o **Full parity** in **secondary and tertiary enrolment**.
- o **Adult literacy** remains a gap, with **82.5% parity**.

Health and Survival:

- o India has achieved **95.6% parity**, indicating a relatively narrow gender gap in this dimension.

Economic Participation and Opportunity:

- o India has achieved only **41.2% parity**.
- o **Labour-force participation: 44.1% parity**.
- o **Legislators, senior officials and managers: only 13.1% parity**.
- o **Professional and technical workers: improved to 49.9% parity**.

Political Empowerment:

- o At **24.5% parity**, this is India's **highest-ranked sub-index**, placing India **67th globally** in this dimension.
- o **Parliamentary representation: 16.1% parity**.
- o **Ministerial representation: 5.9% parity**.

CHALLENGES

- **Low Female Labour-Force Participation:** Limited participation in the workforce and inadequate access to **quality and formal employment**.
 - o **Example:** Global female labor force participation is approximately 47% compared to 72% for men (*ILO Data*)
- **Gender Wage and Income Gaps:** Women continue to face **lower wages and earnings**, particularly in formal and higher-paying occupations.
 - o **Example:** Urban self-employed men in India earn nearly **2.5 times** more than women (*Oxfam 'India Discrimination Report 2022'*)
- **Unequal Unpaid Care Burden:** **Unpaid domestic and care work** disproportionately falls on women, restricting their time for education and paid employment.
 - o **Example:** Women spent an average of **140 minutes per day** on unpaid caregiving activities, while men spent **74 minutes per day** (*Time Use Survey 2024*)
- **Under-representation in Leadership:** Women remain

under-represented in **management, politics, senior positions and decision-making**.

- o **Example:** Women constituted only **74 of 543 MPs (13.6%)** in the 18th Lok Sabha.
- **Social Norms and Patriarchy:** Patriarchal attitudes continue to influence women's education, employment, mobility, marriage and inheritance.
 - o **Example:** Around **87% of women and 90% of men** globally hold at least one bias against women (*UNDP Data*)
- **Digital and STEM Gender Divide:** Unequal access to **digital technology and skills**, along with under-representation in **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)** fields.

IMPLICATIONS

- 🔍 **Lower Economic Productivity:** Gender inequality leads to **under-utilisation of human capital**, reducing overall productivity and economic output.
- 🔍 **Intergenerational Poverty:** Limited access to **education, employment and income** can reinforce poverty across generations.
- 🔍 **Weakens Policy Diversity:** Lower representation of women in **politics and decision-making** can limit the diversity of perspectives in public policymaking.
- 🔍 **Restricts Women's Agency:** A disproportionate **unpaid-care burden** can reduce women's economic independence, mobility and decision-making power.
- 🔍 **Future Skills Gap:** Gender disparities in **digital technology and STEM** may widen inequalities in the emerging **AI-driven economy and labour market**.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳ **Increase Female Employment:** Improve **safe transport, accommodation, flexible work, childcare and equal employment opportunities** to raise female labour-force participation.
 - o **Example:** Working Women Hostel (Sakhi Niwas) scheme.
- ✳ **Strengthen Care Infrastructure:** Expand affordable **childcare and eldercare** to reduce women's disproportionate unpaid-care burden.
- ✳ **Ensure Economic and Digital Equality:** Promote **equal pay, financial inclusion, digital literacy and women's participation in STEM and emerging technologies**.
- ✳ **Strengthen Political Representation:** Increase women's participation in **political institutions, leadership and decision-making positions**.
 - o **Example:** 106th Constitutional Amendment Act

(Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023)

* **Promote Social and Behavioural Change:** Address **patriarchal norms** through education and community programmes

- o **Example:** Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mission Shakti.

CONCLUSION

Achieving gender parity requires moving beyond improvements in education towards **equal economic participation, political representation, leadership and decision-making**. India must strengthen **institutional support, care infrastructure, safety, digital inclusion and implementation of gender-responsive policies** to convert formal equality into substantive equality.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) “Gender equality is not merely a matter of social justice but also an essential condition for inclusive economic growth.” Discuss in the context of India. **(15 marks, 250 words)**

DATA CENTRES

Syllabus: GS III - Science & Technology

PYQ Mapping

Q) “India’s data storage center industry had leap-frogged at least a decade in the past couple of years. Discuss.” (2022)

Why in the news?

India’s data centre boom is drawing major investment, but its rising power and water needs are straining resources, highlighting the need for enforceable national standards.

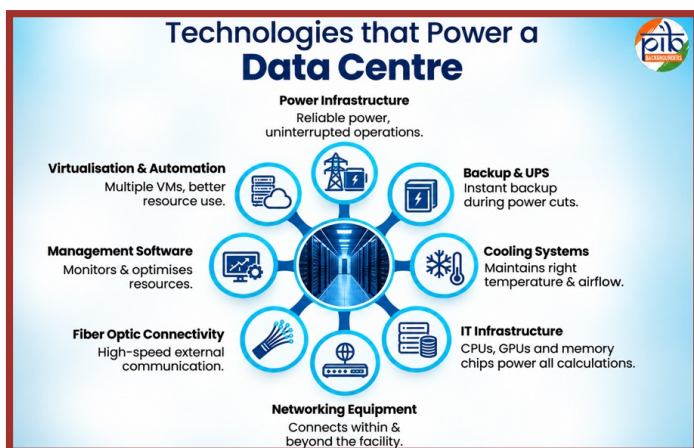
Introduction

India’s rapidly expanding digital economy is creating unprecedented demand for computing power, data storage and high-speed connectivity. In this transformation, data centres have emerged as critical digital infrastructure, supporting online services, businesses, cloud computing and e-governance while strengthening India’s overall digital ecosystem.

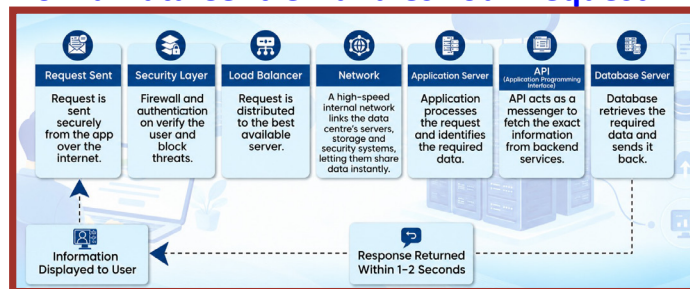
What are Data centres?

A data centre is a secure facility that houses computing, storage and networking equipment. It stores, processes, manages and distributes large volumes of digital information. These capabilities support online banking, e-Governance, digital payments, cloud computing and other emerging technologies.

The Technologies Powering Digital Services

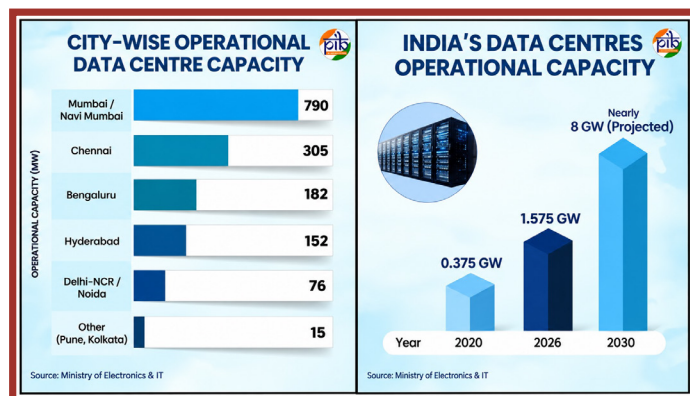


How a Data Centre Handles Your Request



India’s Data centre capacity

The **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** has established state-of-the-art National Data Centres across the country. These include facilities at NIC Headquarters in **Delhi, Pune, Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar**. NIC has also established 37 smaller Data Centres at various State Capitals.



Challenges

Power challenge:

- India’s data centre capacity has **nearly tripled** from **520 MW in 2020 to about 1.5 GW today** and may reach **6.5 GW by 2030**. At the same time, electricity demand could rise more than **fourfold** from **13 TWh in 2024 to nearly 57 TWh by 2030**.

Transmission challenge:

- According to an analysis of **Central Electricity Authority data by Ember Energy, India** curtailed 300 GW-hours of renewable energy in the first quarter of 2026 alone, simply because the grid could not carry it.
- Solar capacity is expanding **faster** than

transmission infrastructure, limiting delivery of renewable power. For data centres, this could mean greater reliance on **coal-based electricity**, increasing **carbon emissions** despite India's clean-energy goals.

▼ Water stress:

- According to a UN report, the electricity consumption of data centres had a water footprint of **4.5 trillion litres of water in 2025**, enough to meet the water needs of Chennai for approximately **8.8 years**.
- **Ground water extraction**
 - The CGWB's 2024 Dynamic Ground Water Resources assessment puts India's overall stage of groundwater extraction at **60.47%**, with **11.1% of assessment units** already classified as **"over-exploited."**
 - According to Data Centre Map, **Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh**, has at least **17 operational or upcoming data centres** and a groundwater extraction rate of **104.79%**, meaning the district withdraws more groundwater annually than nature replenishes.

▼ Heat generated and global warming:

- A study from the **University of Cambridge**, analysing 20 years of NASA satellite data, found that data centres raise land surface temperatures by an average of 2°C within a 10 km radius, with extreme cases reaching 9.1°C.
- Data centres create a **heat-energy-emissions loop** more server heat increases cooling and electricity demand, which can raise emissions and further worsen climate warming.

▼ Governance gap:

- No Central or State policy has fully assessed the **power, water and heat impacts** of data centres on already stressed grids and high-temperature regions.

▼ Burden to tax paying citizen:

- Grid expansion costs for data centres can raise **household electricity tariffs** if utilities pass those costs on to consumers.

Way Forward

* National sustainability framework:

- Set enforceable standards for renewable sourcing, water use, grid impact and thermal load.

* Strengthen transmission:

- The **Union Ministry of Power** notes that generation capacity is not the key constraint; transmission and market design need improvement.

* Expand battery storage:

- **Ember Energy** estimates that about **3–4 GW (gigawatts) of two-hour storage** could have absorbed most renewable curtailment seen in early 2026.

* Reform electricity markets:

- Create climate-intelligent markets that separately reward **ramping, storage and demand response**.

* Promote suitable locations:

- **Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA)** highlights coastal locations for access to renewable power and seawater-based cooling.
 - **Example: Google** has used Baltic seawater to cool its data centre in Finland for more than 10 years.

* Protect consumers:

- Ensure data-centre-related grid expansion costs are not passed on through higher household electricity tariffs.

Conclusion

Data centres are essential to India's digital future. The real challenge is to expand them in a way that safeguards **water resources, grid stability and climate goals**, rather than shifting environmental and economic costs to future generations.

Sample Question

Q) "Data centres are becoming critical infrastructure for India's digital economy, but their rapid expansion poses significant challenges for energy, water and climate sustainability." Discuss. Suggest measures for sustainable development of India's data-centre ecosystem. **(250 words)**

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

WHAT IS THE U.S. SANCTIONING RUSSIA AND IRAN ACT, 2026?

Introduction

- ◆ The **Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026**, enacted by the United States on **September 18, 2026**, seeks to intensify economic pressure on Russia by targeting its energy revenues and countries that continue substantial trade with it.

Key Provisions

- ◆ The Act strengthens sanctions against individuals and entities supporting the **Russian government and its energy sector**.

It empowers the U.S. administration to impose tariffs of up to **100% on goods from major purchasers of Russian oil and gas**.

The law can therefore affect not only Russia but also major trading partners such as **India and China**.

- ◆ It also contains waiver provisions, giving the U.S. President significant discretion in enforcement.

Why is it significant?

- ◆ The Act represents a shift from traditional sanctions against a target country towards **secondary economic pressure on third countries**. It shows how tariffs, sanctions and market access are increasingly being used as instruments of foreign policy.

Concerns

- ◆ It may disrupt global oil trade and energy supply chains.
- ◆ Secondary tariffs may create tensions between the U.S. and its strategic partners.
- ◆ Broad presidential tariff powers may increase uncertainty in international trade.

Conclusion

- ◆ The law demonstrates the growing use of **geo-economic tools to achieve geopolitical objectives**, while also raising questions about global trade stability and the sovereignty of third countries in determining their economic relations.

IMPACT OF THE U.S. RUSSIA SANCTIONS ACT ON INDIA

India is among the world's major crude oil importers and has significantly increased purchases of Russian oil in recent years. Therefore, U.S. measures targeting major buyers of Russian energy directly intersect with India's **energy security, trade interests and strategic autonomy**.

Impact

- ◆ **Exports may become uncompetitive:** A potential **100% U.S. tariff**, on top of existing duties, could severely hurt Indian exports to the American market.
- ◆ **MSMEs could be hit hardest:** Export-oriented **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** may lose orders, margins and jobs.
- ◆ **Major trade exposure:** The **U.S. accounts for about 20% of India's total goods exports**, making tariff escalation economically significant.
- ◆ **Energy security challenge:** Russia supplied **over 51% of India's oil imports as of July 2026**, so cutting Russian crude would require costly diversification.
- ◆ **Higher import bill and inflation risk:** With oil prices

above **\$100 per barrel**, switching suppliers could raise India's crude import bill and fuel inflation.

- ◆ **Limited alternatives:** Constraints through the **Strait of Hormuz** could make replacement supplies harder and more expensive.
- ◆ **Pressure on strategic autonomy:** India may be forced to choose between **continuing Russian oil imports and facing tariffs**, or reducing them to protect exports.

Challenge to Strategic Autonomy

- ◆ India has traditionally sought to maintain relations with both the U.S. and Russia. External pressure on its energy choices therefore creates a challenge for India's policy of **strategic autonomy**.

Emerging Response

Indian refiners have already begun diversifying supplies. Russian crude imports fell by **16.5% in August 2026**, while sourcing from some West Asian suppliers increased.

Way Forward

- ◆ India should diversify crude imports across **West Asia, Africa, the Americas and Russia**.
- ◆ It should strengthen its **Strategic Petroleum Reserves**.
- ◆ Diplomatic engagement with Washington should seek exemptions or flexible implementation.
- ◆ India should accelerate renewable energy, electric mobility and domestic exploration to reduce long-term oil dependence.

- ◆ Export-market diversification through new trade agreements can reduce vulnerability to unilateral tariff actions.

Conclusion

- ◆ India must balance its **energy security, economic interests and strategic autonomy** while maintaining strong relations with both the U.S. and Russia. Diversification rather than dependence on any single supplier or market offers the most resilient path.

IMPACT ON WORLD ORDER AND GLOBAL ECONOMY

The U.S. sanctions law reflects a broader transformation in international relations, where **trade, finance, energy and technology are increasingly becoming instruments of strategic competition**.

Rise of Geo-economics

- ◆ Major powers are increasingly using **tariffs, sanctions and market access** as tools of foreign policy.
- ◆ Economic interdependence, once viewed mainly as a source of cooperation, is increasingly being used as geopolitical leverage.

Fragmentation of Global Trade

- ◆ Secondary sanctions can push countries towards alternative trading arrangements and economic blocs. Countries affected by unilateral sanctions may seek to reduce dependence on Western financial and commercial networks.

Reorganisation of Energy Markets

- ◆ Restrictions on Russian energy can redirect oil flows towards new buyers and suppliers, creating longer trade routes, higher transport costs and greater volatility in global energy markets.

Challenge to Multilateralism

- ◆ Unilateral secondary sanctions can create tensions with the principles of a **rules-based multilateral trading system**, particularly when third countries are economically penalised for commercial relations with another state.

Push for Alternative Financial Systems

Affected countries may increasingly explore:

- ◆ Local-currency trade,
- ◆ Non-dollar payment mechanisms,
- ◆ Alternative financial messaging systems,
- ◆ Greater cooperation through groupings such as **BRICS**.

Impact on Developing Countries

- ◆ Higher energy prices and trade fragmentation can disproportionately affect developing economies through Imported inflation, Currency pressure, Higher transport and production costs, Slower global growth.

Way Forward

- ◆ Greater reliance on multilateral institutions and negotiated sanctions frameworks is needed.
- ◆ Major powers should preserve predictable global energy markets.
- ◆ International institutions should strengthen rules governing unilateral economic coercion.
- ◆ Developing countries should diversify energy, trade and financial partnerships.

Conclusion

- ◆ The sanctions episode highlights an emerging world order defined increasingly by **geo-economic competition and fragmented interdependence**. The challenge is to ensure that strategic rivalry does not undermine global economic stability, energy security and multilateral cooperation.

BEYOND VERDICTS: KEY JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS

FSSAI's Proposed Front-of-Pack Warning Labels

- ◆ The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** has proposed a **Canadian-style red hexagonal front-of-pack warning label** for foods high in **sugar, fat or salt**. The warning would apply even when **any one nutrient of concern** crosses the prescribed threshold. These limits will be based on the **ICMR–National Institute of Nutrition's Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**. The move can strengthen **consumer awareness and nutritional literacy** and support efforts to reduce **obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases**.

Supreme Court on Powers Within the Election Commission

- ◆ The Supreme Court has long held that the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is not superior to the other Election Commissioners (ECs) in decision-making**. In **T.N. Seshan v. Union of India (1995)**, the Court observed that treating the CEC's word as final would make the other Commissioners "non-functional or ornamental"; the Election Commission under **Article 324** is a multi-member constitutional body in which all Commissioners have a meaningful role.

Supreme Court on Hindi as Official Language

- ◆ The **Supreme Court dismissed a plea seeking Hindi as its official language**, holding that such a change cannot be brought through a judicial order and would require legislative or constitutional action. The Court noted that language reforms are already being introduced gradually, including summaries in **Hindi and other regional languages**. Under **Article 348(1)(a) of the Constitution**, proceedings in the Supreme Court and High Courts are conducted in **English unless Parliament provides otherwise by law**. The issue highlights the need to balance **access to justice, linguistic diversity and constitutional procedure**.

Supreme Court on Online Child Sexual Exploitation Material

- ◆ The **Supreme Court has sought a detailed response from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Ministry of Law and Justice** on steps taken to curb **Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Material (CSEAM)** on social-media platforms.
- ◆ The Court stressed that intermediaries must take preventive action and comply with mandatory reporting obligations; its **2024 judgment had held that storing such material without deleting or reporting it can attract liability under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act**.

Supreme Court on OBC Creamy Layer Policy

- ◆ The **Supreme Court has reserved its order on the Centre's plea seeking a two-year window** to implement its March 11, 2026 judgment on determining **OBC creamy-layer status**. The judgment held that an OBC candidate **cannot be excluded from reservation solely on the basis of parental salary income**; the nature/status of the parent's post must also be considered, including for those employed in **Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and the private sector**.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) You are the **District Health Officer** of a district where government hospitals face severe shortages of doctors, ICU beds and diagnostic facilities. To improve access and reduce waiting time, the State government introduces an **AI-based clinical decision-support system** in public hospitals. The system analyses symptoms, laboratory results and medical images and recommends probable diagnoses and treatment priorities. Within a few months, the system improves patient flow and helps doctors identify several critical cases early. However, concerns begin to emerge. Some doctors report that the AI gives inaccurate recommendations for patients from rural and tribal communities because their health data are poorly represented in the training dataset. In one case, delayed intervention following an incorrect AI recommendation allegedly contributed to a patient's death.

At the same time, the private technology company supplying the system refuses to disclose details of its algorithm, citing **commercial confidentiality**. Patient groups raise concerns about **data privacy, informed consent and accountability**. The State government, however, pressures you to continue expanding the programme because it has reduced costs and gained positive publicity.

Questions

- Identify the **ethical issues and stakeholders** involved in the case.
- What ethical principles should guide the use of **Artificial Intelligence in public healthcare**?
- As District Health Officer, what course of action would you take to balance **innovation, efficiency and patient safety**?
- Suggest measures to ensure **ethical and accountable AI-based health governance** in India.

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

- Social Responsibility:** Harekala Hajabba, an uneducated orange seller from Newpadapu village near Mangaluru, earned about ₹150 a day and was inspired to build a school after he could not understand a foreigner's question about the price of oranges in English. He saved his earnings and helped establish a school for village children; he received the Padma Shri in 2020 and is popularly known as "Akshara Santa" (Saint of Letters).
- Dedication:** Seema Dhaka, a Delhi Police Head Constable, traced 76 missing children in about 2.5 months, across Delhi and states such as West Bengal, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. She became the first Delhi Police personnel to receive an out-of-turn promotion under the 2020 incentive scheme, which made her an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI).
- Perseverance:** Fariba Hashimi, an Afghan cyclist from Faryab, began cycling at 14 with her sister Yulduz despite social restrictions, with people throwing stones at them while they trained on the roads. She later represented Afghanistan at the Paris Olympics 2024 and won silver in the women's road race at the 2026 Asian Games.
- Constitutional Morality:** M. A. Sneha, a lawyer from Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu, was raised without a caste or religious identity, with these fields left blank in her birth and school records. After a nine-year struggle, she received a "No Caste, No Religion" certificate in 2019, reportedly becoming the first Indian woman to receive such official recognition.
- Compassion:** Sulagitti Narasamma, a traditional midwife from Pavagada, Tumakuru, Karnataka, learnt childbirth practices from her grandmother and spent nearly seven decades helping women deliver babies, often travelling to remote villages and providing her services free of charge. She assisted in more than 15,000 deliveries, trained around 180 midwives, and received the Padma Shri in 2018.
- Fairness:** The Maharashtra FDA found major price gaps, with an IV set costing ₹11.05 but carrying an MRP of ₹325 (2,841% markup). It proposed bringing essential medical consumables under the price control of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to protect patients from excessive charges.
- Human Rights:** The Kerala High Court granted relief to a 43-year-old widow, allowing her to use embryos cryopreserved with her deceased husband after an IVF hospital denied access due to the absence of prescribed consent. The Court held that a procedural lapse in Form 9 could not override the couple's apparent intention and the woman's reproductive autonomy and right to parenthood.

MODEL ESSAY

"The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend"

Introduction

- Quote by Canadian author Robertson Davies
- In **1857**, as peasants, zamindars and soldiers rose across northern India, British officials dismissed the uprising as a mere **"Sepoy Mutiny"**, failing to recognise the deeper resistance to colonial rule unfolding before them.
- Human perception is not purely objective; it is shaped by our **cultural conditioning and personal biases**, influencing how we interpret reality.

The Cognitive Filters of Perception

- **Sociological Paradigms:** A person may see rising crime as individual immorality, while **Durkheim or Merton** reveals structural causes like **anomie and strain**. *Eg: Crime as a social, not merely individual, problem.*
- **Bureaucratic Rigidity:** A rule-bound official see only a missing document, while an empathetic administrator sees the citizen's **need**. *Eg: Applying rules with compassion.*
- **Historical Symbolism:** A charkha may appear as a simple tool, but historians see it as a symbol of **Swadeshi and anti-colonial mobilisation**. *Eg: Charkha as nationalist symbolism.*
- **Ecological Lens:** An industrialist may see a forest as timber, while an ecologist sees an **interconnected ecosystem**.
- **Gendered Labour:** Traditional economics viewed domestic work as a natural duty, while feminist theory recognised its **unpaid economic value**. *Eg: Second shift of women.*
- **Trauma:** Earlier doctors often interpreted veterans' psychological symptoms as cowardice rather than **trauma**. *Eg: Later recognition of PTSD.*
- **Political Echo Chambers:** The same political event may be interpreted differently through contrasting **media and ideological frameworks**. *Eg: Algorithm-driven political polarisation.*

When Reality Overwhelms the Cognitive Filter

- **Radical Empathy:** Direct exposure to human

suffering can override ideological conditioning. *Eg: Witnessing the suffering of civilians during war.*

- **Scientific Anomalies:** Strong empirical evidence can force established theories to change. *Eg: Galileo's observation of Jupiter's moons challenging geocentrism.*
- **Childlike Perception:** An unconditioned perspective may recognise truths that socially conditioned adults overlook. *Eg: The child in The Emperor's New Clothes.*
- **Institutional Collapse:** Sudden crises can expose the fragility of institutions previously considered permanent. *Eg: The fall of Kabul in 2021.*

Synthesis

- Knowledge and theoretical frameworks help us interpret the complexities of reality, but they should not become rigid barriers.
- A mature mind acknowledges its own biases and remains open to **new and contradictory evidence**.
- True wisdom requires constantly expanding our understanding through **education, diverse disciplines and challenging perspectives**.

Conclusion

- Had British administrators questioned their imperial assumptions in **1857**, they might have recognised the rebellion as a deeper challenge to colonial rule rather than merely a sepoy mutiny.
- Truth is often not hidden but **overlooked by minds unwilling to see beyond their familiar assumptions**.

Sample Quote

- *You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water. — Rabindranath Tagore*
- *The axe forgets; the tree remembers. — African Proverb*
- *The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators. — Edward Gibbon*

MAINS JOT DOWN



GS II: INDIAN POLITY

- ➔ **Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls**
 - » According to **Election Commission of India (ECI)** data analysed by *The Hindu*, **Phase 3 of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** saw **6.15 crore names deleted from draft rolls across 17 States/UTs, about 17.1% of voters**, compared with roughly **12.3% in the earlier phases**.
 - » A notable change is the growing share of deletions classified as **"Permanently Shifted" or "Untraceable/Absent"**, while deletions for **"Deceased" or "Duplicate"** have declined. This raises questions about the **uniformity, transparency and verification standards** used in electoral-roll revision.



GS II: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

- ➔ **Rising Intra-BRICS Trade**
 - » According to **United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**, intra-BRICS merchandise trade expanded **more than 13-fold**, from about **\$84 billion in 2003 to \$1.17 trillion in 2024**, showing the growing economic integration of the Global South.



GS II: HEALTH

- ➔ **Crackdown on Nicotine Pouches**
 - » The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** has issued an **Advisory on Oral Nicotine Pouches** under the **National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP)**, reflecting growing concern over new nicotine-delivery products that may evade traditional tobacco controls.
 - » The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has warned that nicotine pouches are being aggressively marketed to adolescents and young people; global retail sales exceeded **23 billion units in 2024**, rising by more than **50% in one year**



GS II: HEALTH

➔ Why Male Contraception Still Lags

- » According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, men still have very limited contraceptive options under their control, mainly **condoms, withdrawal and vasectomy**, which keeps most of the contraceptive burden on women.
- » The **WHO Global Study on Male Contraception** found **strong potential demand for new methods: over 75% of couples surveyed were willing to use a new male contraceptive**, while **more than 85% of women said they would trust male partners to take responsibility for contraception**.



GS II: HEALTH

➔ Haryana's Tele-ECG Model

- » Haryana's **Tele-ECG network** enables patients at rural health facilities to get ECGs interpreted remotely by specialists, helping detect serious cardiac conditions quickly without first travelling to tertiary hospitals.
- » By July 2026, the network had conducted **6,082 ECG tests**, with specialist interpretation averaging about **2 minutes 37 seconds**.



GS II: HEALTH

➔ AI in Healthcare

- » Artificial Intelligence can improve **diagnosis, clinical decision-making, medical imaging, drug discovery and hospital efficiency**, especially where specialist availability is limited.
- » **Patient-safety concern:** AI systems can generate **errors, biased outputs or misleading recommendations**, making human oversight essential in high-stakes medical decisions.
- » **Governance need:** India needs stronger standards for **validation, accountability, privacy, transparency and post-deployment monitoring** before AI tools are widely integrated into healthcare.
- » **Institutional value:** The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has repeatedly stressed that AI in health should be governed by principles of **safety, transparency, accountability and protection of patient rights**



GS III: INDIAN ECONOMY

- ➔ **India–China Trade & the “Assembly Trap”**
 - » According to the World **Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) of the World Bank**, India–China bilateral trade reached **\$167.6 billion in 2025**. However, India’s imports from China rose about **71% between 2021 and 2025 to \$149.5 billion**, while exports remained broadly stagnant, exposing a widening structural trade imbalance.
 - » Nearly **70% of India’s imports from China are intermediate goods and another 22% are capital goods**, showing that dependence is embedded in India’s manufacturing supply chains rather than being driven mainly by finished consumer goods. This creates an **“assembly trap”**, where domestic production expands but remains dependent on Chinese components.
 - » Despite initiatives such as **Make in India, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme and Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP)**, imported mobile-phone parts and components increased from **3.3% of the import basket in 2022 to 10.1% in 2025**. This highlights the need to move from **downstream assembly to domestic component manufacturing, innovation and technological capability**.



GS III: ENERGY

- ➔ **India’s Shift to Alternative Fuels**
 - » According to the **Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA)**, **August 2026 marked a “historic fuel crossover”**: alternative-fuel passenger vehicles (CNG, hybrids and EVs together) reached **41.95% of registrations**, overtaking petrol vehicles at **40.85%** for the first time.
 - » The transition is **uneven across vehicle segments**. EVs account for about **60.5% of three-wheeler registrations**, while their share in two-wheelers rose to around **9.1% in 2026**, showing much faster electrification in smaller vehicle categories.
 - » In passenger cars, the shift away from petrol and diesel is being driven more by **CNG/LPG and hybrids than by pure EVs**; EV adoption remains slower, highlighting the need to expand **charging infrastructure and affordability**

support.



GS III: ENVIRONMENT

- ➔ **Citizen Science & Urban Biodiversity**
 - » **Guwahati Bioblitz 2025**, conducted by **Help Earth** in association with the **Assam Climate Change Management Society**, involved school students in a 30-day biodiversity survey across Kamrup Metropolitan district.
 - » **48 students recorded 5,932 observations and documented 1,517 species**, including **993 plants, 221 insects, 117 birds, 25 mammals and 10 reptiles**, showing the significant biodiversity present even in an urban landscape.
 - » The initiative used the **iNaturalist app** for species identification and demonstrated how **citizen science, digital tools and school participation** can create continuous biodiversity databases while improving ecological literacy among young people.



GS III: AGRICULTURE

- ➔ **Licensed Opium Cultivation in India**
 - » **Opium cultivation in India is strictly licensed and regulated by the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN)** under the Department of Revenue. Licensed farmers must sell their entire produce to the government at officially determined prices.
 - » For the **2025–26 crop year**, the Union government estimated that about **1.21 lakh farmers in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh** would be eligible for licences, a **23.5% increase** over the previous year, with about **15,000 additional farmers** brought under the licensing system.
 - » Ahead of the 2026–27 policy, farmer groups demanded **more cultivation licences and a procurement price of ₹1 lakh per kg**, arguing that morphine content is influenced by natural factors and that current pricing does not reflect international market conditions.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

OPTICAL ATOMIC CLOCK:

- An optical atomic clock measures time using extremely high-frequency transitions of atoms excited by visible or near-visible light, making it far more precise than conventional microwave atomic clocks. A **lutetium-ion optical clock** was recently reported as the world's most accurate timekeeper.

POSITIVE INDIAN OCEAN DIPOLE (IOD):

- It occurs when the western Indian Ocean becomes warmer than the eastern part, altering atmospheric circulation and often influencing the Indian monsoon.

GEO-ECONOMIC FRAGMENTATION:

- It refers to the splitting of the global economy into competing geopolitical blocs through tariffs, sanctions, technology restrictions and supply-chain realignment, reducing economic integration.

LITTLE RED DOTS:

- These are compact, very red objects seen in the early universe by the **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)**. Scientists are studying whether they are rapidly growing black holes, compact star-forming galaxies, or a mixture of both.

SUPERBUBBLES:

- These are enormous cavities in interstellar gas created by multiple **supernova explosions and stellar winds**. Recent research links them to the turbulence that shapes gas movement across galaxies.