

FWD

FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



> AI IMPACT SUMMIT 2026 > INDIA-FRANCE RELATIONS > STATUS OF DEATH SENTENCE IN INDIA

16th FEBRUARY, 2025 - 22nd FEBRUARY, 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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INDIA FRANCE RELATIONS

Syllabus: GS II - Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries

PYQ MAPPING

Q) How will the I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and USA) grouping transform India's position in global politics? (2022)

WHY IN NEWS

India and France elevated their bilateral ties to a Special Global Strategic Partnership after talks in Mumbai between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron.

INTRODUCTION

The partnership between India and France has steadily deepened since the launch of their Strategic Partnership in 1998, India's first with a Western nation. Its recent elevation to a Special Global Strategic Partnership in 2026 reflects expanding cooperation in defence co-production, nuclear energy, and Indo-Pacific security.

SHORT TAKES

> Airbus H125:

- o A **high-performance, single-engine light utility helicopter** known for its versatility and rugged reliability, widely used for transport, aerial work, law enforcement, rescue, and medical evacuation missions around the world.
- o It is one of the **world's best-selling single-engine helicopters**, capable of operating in "high and hot" conditions, including landing on **Mount Everest**.

ABOUT FRANCE



- ➔ **Geography:** France spans northwestern Europe and is bordered by the **Atlantic Ocean**, the **English Channel**, and the **Mediterranean Sea**, with mountain ranges such as the **Alps and Pyrenees**.
- ➔ **Language & Culture:** **French** is the official language. French culture has played a major role in arts, philosophy, literature, and science, and French ideas were central to *Enlightenment* thought.
- ➔ **French Revolution:** The *French Revolution (1789–1799)* abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the republic; its ideals of **liberty, equality, fraternity** influenced democratic movements worldwide.
- ➔ **Economy:** France is one of the world's major economic powers, historically driven by manufacturing, agriculture, and now **services**; it was known for a long period of growth called the *trente glorieuses* ("thirty glorious years" after WWII).
- ➔ **Role in Europe & World Affairs:** France was a **founding member of the European Union** and is a **permanent member of the United Nations Security Council** with veto power.
- ➔ **Natural Resources & Agriculture:** Much of France's land is suitable for agriculture, making it **Europe's most important agricultural producer**, with forests covering about a quarter of the country.

- ➔ **Official Name & Government:** France is officially the **French Republic (République Française)**, a **republic with two legislative houses** with a **President as head of state** and a **Prime Minister as head of government**.
- ➔ **Capital & Major Cities:** The capital city is **Paris**, a global centre of culture, commerce, fashion and diplomacy; other major cities include **Lyon, Marseille, Nantes and Bordeaux**.
- ➔ **Population:** As of 2026, France's estimated population is approximately **66.6 million people**.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF RELATIONS

Post-Independence diplomatic ties:

- o India and France established relations soon after 1947, rooted in mutual respect, strategic autonomy, and non-alignment.

Strategic Partnership since 1998:

- o A formal Strategic Partnership was initiated in 1998, making France one of India's earliest Western strategic partners.
- o This expanded cooperation in defence, civil nuclear energy, space, and science & technology.

Multi-sectoral deepening (2000s–2020s):

- o The partnership broadened to include climate action, education, innovation, Indo-Pacific security, and people-to-people exchanges.

- o Both countries co-launched the **International Solar Alliance** in 2015, demonstrating leadership on renewable energy and climate action.

25th Anniversary & Roadmap (2023):

- o In 2023, India and France celebrated 25 years of strategic partnership and adopted the **India-France Horizon 2047 Roadmap** to guide cooperation until 2047, expanding collaboration in defence, technology, space, energy, and people-to-people ties.

2026 Qualitative Upgrade:

- o In **February 2026**, India and France elevated their bilateral ties to a **“Special Global Strategic Partnership,”** signifying a broader and deeper cooperation agenda spanning defence, technology, innovation, critical minerals, and global governance.

ABOUT RECENT MEETINGS

Bilateral Talks

♣ Strategic upgrade:

- o During the official visit of **Emmanuel Macron** (17–19 Feb 2026), talks in **Mumbai** with **Narendra Modi** led **India** and **France** to elevate their ties to a Special Global Strategic Partnership, reflecting a deepening and broadening long-standing relationship.
- o Both countries agreed to establish an **annual Foreign Ministers Dialogue** to review implementation of the elevated partnership and the Horizon 2047 Roadmap.

- ♣ **Comprehensive expansion of partnership agenda:** The talks produced **21 major outcomes** spanning defence, critical minerals, technology and innovation,

startups, advanced materials, health, and skilling, indicating multi-sectoral institutionalisation of cooperation.

India-France Annual Defence Dialogue

- ♣ **Institutionalised defence dialogue mechanism:** The India-France Annual Defence Dialogue is a **structured ministerial-level bilateral mechanism** to review and guide defence and security cooperation, with the previous edition held in France from October 11–13, 2023.

- ♣ **High-level defence summit convened:** The sixth India-France Annual Defence Dialogue was held parallelly in Bengaluru, chaired by Rajnath Singh and Catherine Vautrin, to review the full spectrum of bilateral defence cooperation with emphasis on industrial collaboration.

KEY OUTCOMES OF THE RECENT BILATERAL TALKS

Strategic & Defence Cooperation

- 🌀 Decision to constitute a **Joint Advanced Technology Development Group** on critical and emerging technologies including defence.
- 🌀 Procurement of **26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets**.
- 🌀 **Reciprocal deployment of officers** between Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments
- 🌀 A joint venture between **Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL)** and French firm Safran to produce **HAMMER missiles** for Rafales in India boosts indigenous capability.
- 🌀 **Development of Indian Multi Role Helicopter (IMRH)** by Hindustan Aeronauticals Limited (HAL) and Safran collaboration.

- 🌀 Inauguration of the **H125 light utility helicopter final assembly line in Karnataka under the Tata–Airbus partnership**, with the first “Made in India” H125 expected in early 2027 and planned for export to the South Asian region.

🌀 Counter-terrorism collaboration:

- o Support for elimination of terrorist safe havens and financing networks consistent with FATF norms.
- o Letter of Intent (LoI) for cooperation between **NSG (India) and GIGN (France)**.
- o Support for **No Money For Terror (NMFT) Conference 2026 in Paris**.
- o Cooperation in organization of **MILIPOL exhibitions**

in India and France.

Economic & Investment Outcomes

- 🌀 **Revision of tax treaty:** India and France updated their **Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC)**, removing the **Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause**, clarifying **capital gains tax**, changing **dividend tax rates**, and updating rules for **services and business presence**, to **boost investment and trade**.
- 🌀 **Critical minerals cooperation:** A **Joint Declaration of Intent** was adopted for cooperation in critical minerals and metals supply chains.

Innovation & Technology

- 🌀 **Innovation ecosystem partnership:** Launch of the **India-France Year of Innovation (2026)** and creation of the **India-France Innovation Network** to deepen technological collaboration.
- 🌀 **Nuclear Energy Cooperation**
 - o India and France strengthened cooperation on **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)** and **Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs)**.
 - o Cooperation extends across the nuclear value chain including progress on the **Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant Project**, supporting India's target of **100 GW nuclear power capacity by 2047**.
- 🌀 **Start-up and technology collaboration:**
 - o A Letter of Intent was signed between T-Hub and Nord France for cooperation in innovation and startup ecosystems.
 - o Launch of a binational **center on digital sciences and technology** between INRIA (France) and DST

(India).

- 🌀 **Renewable energy cooperation:** Renewal of cooperation agreement between Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and the French Ministry responsible for economy, finance, energy, and digital sovereignty.

Education & Health

- 🌀 **Scientific and health research cooperation:**
 - o Agreements signed for collaboration in infectious diseases and global health research between the Department of Biotechnology and ANRS.
 - o Launch of **AI-based healthcare research center** in collaboration with:
 - » Sorbonne University
 - » AIIMS New Delhi
 - » Paris Brain Institute
- 🌀 **Establishment of specialised research and training institutions:**
 - o Indo-French Centre for AI in Health at AIIMS New Delhi
 - o Indo-French Centre for Digital Sciences and Technology
 - o Indo-French Centre for Metabolic Health Sciences
 - o National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics
- 🌀 **Student mobility expansion:** France aims to host up to **30,000 Indian students by 2030** with streamlined visa policies and expanded English-taught programmes.

AREAS OF COOPERATION

- ☀️ **Global governance and multipolar order vision:** Both countries support a differentiated global order with wider networks of partnerships beyond traditional geopolitical blocs.
- ☀️ **Joint manufacturing & co-design:** Moves from mere procurement to **co-production of major platforms** (Rafale jets, helicopters) and joint missile production strengthen India's defence industrial base with growing participation of India's private sector.
- ☀️ **Maritime and Indo-Pacific cooperation:** Shared commitment to a **rules-based Indo-Pacific order**, including joint exercises and maritime security coordination.
 - o **Example:** India and France conduct three major bilateral exercises namely **Exercise Shakti (Army)**, **Exercise Varuna (Navy)**, and **Exercise Garuda (Air Force)**.
- ☀️ **Year of Innovation & research centres:** Drive collaboration in digital sciences, healthcare, and sustainable technologies through joint centres and industry-academia linkages.
- ☀️ **Leadership-level AI cooperation:** Co-chairing the AI Action Summit in Paris (2025) and continued cooperation on responsible and advanced use of artificial intelligence, including engagement at the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi.
- ☀️ **Space and climate science collaboration:** The joint development of the **TRISHNA satellite** by Indian Space Research Organisation and Centre National d'Études Spatiales (2024) aims to enhance monitoring and understanding of climate change through combined scientific and industrial expertise.
- ☀️ **Agricultural value-chain cooperation:** A farm-to-plate project led by a French institute in Puducherry tracks

agricultural products, reflecting applied research cooperation.

- ☀️ **Talent and academic cooperation:** Enhanced mobility and education linkages with a target to host more Indian students and research exchanges.
- ☀️ **Tax treaty modernisation:** The updated DTAC aims

to attract investment by clarifying capital gains rights and adjusting withholding tax structures, aligning with global standards.

- ☀️ **Trade and investment expansion:** Enhanced cooperation across aerospace, digital payments (e.g., expansion of UPI), rail technologies, and secure value chains.

AREAS OF CHALLENGES

- ▼ **Technology transfer limitations:** France has reportedly **refused to hand over the Rafale source code**, limiting India's ability to fully customise or modify the aircraft's systems which is a strategic and technological challenge for self-reliance.
- ▼ **Uncertain impact of alternative governance models:** The India-France "third way" approach to AI governance faces uncertainty in influencing global standards due to technological dominance of major powers.
- ▼ **Complexity of defence deals:** Major defence contracts (e.g., Rafale co-production) require long negotiations over industrial terms, costing and licensing provisions.
- ▼ **Tax treaty negotiations:** While revised, aligning bilateral tax treaties with India's evolving global obligations and domestic legal frameworks involves complex negotiations.
- ▼ **Balancing strategic autonomy:** Managing relations with other major powers (US, China) while deepening France ties requires careful diplomatic calibration.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳️ **Deepening Europe-centric strategic engagement:** Strengthening cooperation with France and broader European partners is a means to diversify India's external partnerships and reduce dependence on any single major power.
- ✳️ **Consolidate defence industrial co-development:** Push beyond procurement to joint R&D, design, and production across air, land, naval, and missile systems.
- ✳️ **Implement tax reforms and economic facilitation:** Ratify and operationalise DTAC amendments to increase investor confidence and facilitate technology and capital flows.
- ✳️ **Scale innovation partnerships:** Operationalise research hubs in AI, digital tech, health and sustainability; expand student and talent exchanges.
- ✳️ **Strengthen global collaboration:** Align cooperation on climate action, Indo-Pacific security, UN reforms, and multilateral diplomacy.
- ✳️ **Support resilient supply chains:** Deepen cooperation in critical minerals and technology supply chains to reduce dependencies.

CONCLUSION

The durability of the India–France partnership will depend on deeper co-development in defence and emerging technologies, alongside progress in trade, nuclear cooperation, and industrial collaboration; with **Emmanuel Macron's current visit, his fourth to India since 2017**, the relationship has the potential to become a model of balanced, future-oriented cooperation shaping a multipolar global order.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) How does cooperation between India and France contribute to the emergence of a multipolar global order? Discuss. **(10 marks) (150 words)**

STATUS OF DEATH SENTENCES IN INDIA

Syllabus: GS II - Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Instances of the President's delay in commuting death sentences has come under public debate as denial of justice. Should there be a time limit specified for the President to accept/reject such petitions? Analyse. (2014)

WHY IN NEWS

The **2016–2025 Annual Death Penalty Statistics Report** was released by The Square Circle Clinic at NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, marking a decade of nationwide data collection and analysis on capital punishment in India.

INTRODUCTION

The death penalty in India represents the ultimate form of criminal punishment, reserved for the “rarest of rare” cases, and is governed by constitutional, statutory, and judicial safeguards. Recent Supreme Court rulings, including *Vasanta Sampat Dupare (2025)*, have emphasised that proper sentencing procedures are essential to uphold fairness, equality, and the right to life under Articles 14 and 21.

SHORT TAKES

- **Aggravating circumstances:** Factors that **increase the severity or culpability** of a crime, making a death sentence more justifiable, such as brutality, premeditation, or multiple victims.
- **Mitigating circumstances:** Factors that **reduce the moral culpability or blameworthiness** of the offender, such as youth, mental illness, lack of prior criminal record, or evidence of remorse.
- **Moratorium:** A temporary, **authorized suspension or delay of an activity or legal obligation**, such as pausing enforcement of a law or stopping a practice for a set period of time.

CONCEPT

- ➔ **Capital punishment or death penalty** is the legally sanctioned execution of a convicted person by the state as the most severe form of criminal sanction. It is imposed only after a full judicial process.
- ➔ India treats it as *the highest legal penalty*, given only in exceptional circumstances when life imprisonment is considered inadequate to meet justice demands.
- ➔ Currently, **hanging by the neck until death** is considered the “safest and quickest” **method of execution** by the government, but the Centre has indicated openness to exploring alternatives that could reduce cruelty.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL BASIS

🔍 Constitutional Foundation

- **Article 21 (Right to Life)** guarantees life and personal liberty but allows for deprivation of life “*according to procedure established by law*”.
- This is interpreted to permit the death penalty if justified within legal procedure.

🔍 Statutory and Criminal Law

- The **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023** retains capital punishment for specific offences such as *murder, murder with sexual offences,*

terrorism-related killings, waging war against the state, and other heinous crimes leading to death.

- Courts must explicitly record “special reasons” for awarding death sentence; this procedural safeguard reflects the seriousness of the penalty.

🔍 Clemency Powers:

President (Article 72) and Governors (Article 161) can grant pardons, reprieves, respites, remissions, or commute sentences, serving as the final check before execution.

JUDICIAL PRECEDENTS

- ✍ **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980):**
 - The judgment mandated that death penalty should be imposed only when life imprisonment is unquestionably inadequate, establishing the **“rarest of rare” doctrine**.
 - Courts have elaborated that *brutality of crime, lack of mitigating factors, pre-meditation, societal impact, and vulnerability of victims* matter in classifying a case as “rarest of rare”.
- ✍ **Santosh Kumar Satishbhushan Bariyar v. State of Maharashtra (2009)**
 - The **Supreme Court of India** upheld that the death penalty should be imposed only in **“rarest of rare”** cases after a principled balancing of **aggravating and mitigating circumstances**, emphasising that life imprisonment is the rule and capital punishment the exception.
- ✍ **Manoj vs State of Madhya Pradesh (2022)**
 - Trial courts must gather mitigating material like psychological evaluations, prison conduct reports, socio-economic and family background for fair and individualized death sentencing.
 - Ensures that the death penalty is imposed only after careful consideration, upholding **Articles 14 and 21** (equality and right to life).
- ✍ **Vasanta Sampat Dupare vs Union of India (2025)**
 - The Supreme Court allowed Dupare’s writ petition under **Article 32**, holding that where the mandatory procedural safeguards from *Manoj judgement* were not followed, the **sentencing stage in a death penalty case can be reopened even after finality**, to protect fundamental rights.
 - The Supreme Court stressed this power is **used sparingly**, only where there is clear breach of procedural safeguards, to prevent routine disruption of final judgments.

ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING DEATH PENALTY

- 🌀 **Retributive justice:** Reserved for the most heinous crimes where life imprisonment is deemed inadequate.
- 🌀 **Public confidence:** Reinforces societal faith in the criminal justice system when crimes shock public conscience.
- 🌀 **Deterrence:** Acts as a potential deterrent for egregious crimes, including murder and terrorism.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST DEATH PENALTY

- ⚡ **Human Rights Concerns:** Analysts argue that the death penalty stands in tension with the *right to life and dignity*, especially given global human rights trends.
- ⚡ **Questionable deterrence:** Evidence shows the death penalty does not clearly prevent violent crime.
- ⚡ **Disproportionate impact on marginalized:** Poor and marginalized defendants are disproportionately sentenced to death, raising equality concerns.
- ⚡ **Procedural lapses:** Trial courts often fail to comply with procedural safeguards, violating Article 21.
- ⚡ **Risk of wrongful conviction:** Ignoring personal circumstances and mitigating factors increases the likelihood of unjust execution.
- ⚡ **Risk of miscarriage of Justice:** High reversal rates at appellate levels show that many trial court death sentences were flawed or unsafe, risking execution of innocent people.
- ⚡ **Moral and rehabilitative concerns:** Execution contradicts efforts to rehabilitate offenders and raises ethical questions about the state taking life.
- ⚡ **Global context:** Over 113 countries have moved toward abolition, highlighting India’s retentionist stance as increasingly out of step with international moral and human rights trends.

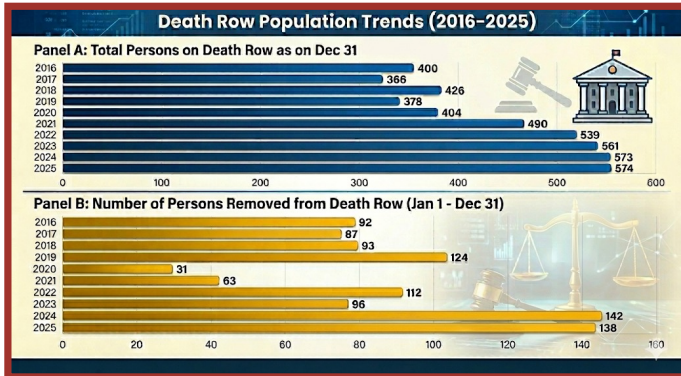
CURRENT STATUS

- ♣ **Death Row Population**
 - Total Death Row Inmates: 574 (550 men, 24 women).
 - Growth Since 2016: 43.5% increase in the death row population over 9 years.
 - Concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Karnataka.
- ♣ **Crimes Leading to Death Sentences**
 - **Murder:** About 45% of death row inmates.
 - **Murder with Sexual Offences:** Approximately 37% of death row inmates.
 - **Other Crimes:** Remaining 18% include terrorism, dacoity, kidnapping, and other rare cases punishable by death.
- ♣ **Magnitude and Trends**
 - Between **2016 and 2025**, Indian trial courts awarded **1,310 death sentences** (averaging

over 130 per year) reflecting active use of capital punishment at the first instance.

- o However, **only about 8–10%** of these sentences were upheld by High Courts, demonstrating rigorous appellate scrutiny.

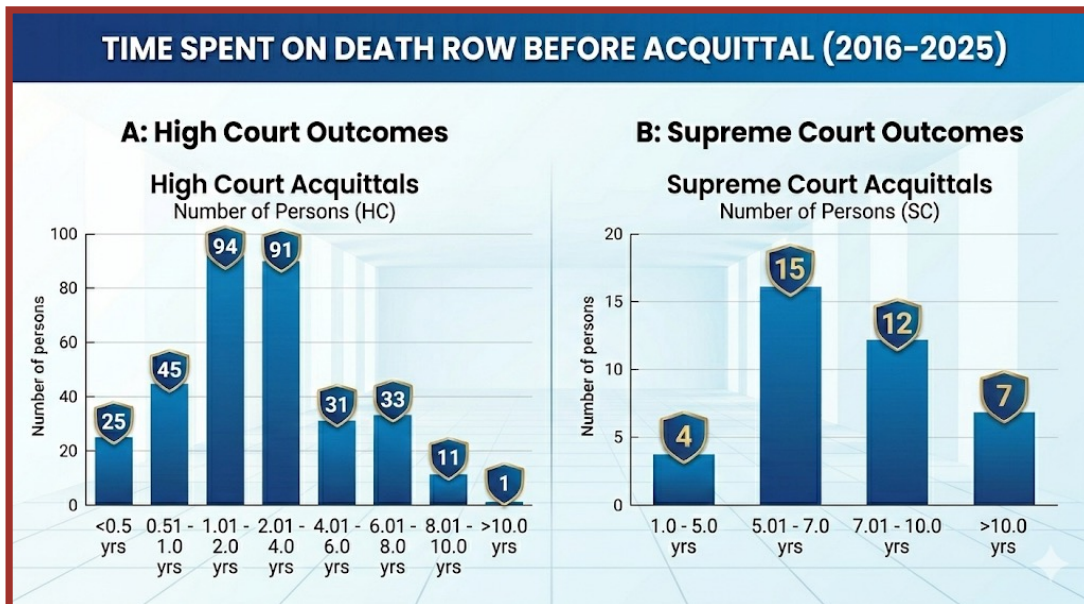
- o The **Supreme Court has not upheld any death sentence in recent years (2023–25)**, instead commuting, acquitting, or remanding cases for reconsideration.



What the report says

Death sentences imposed by Sessions Courts	1,310
Death row cases taken up by High Courts	842
Death row cases upheld by High Courts	70
Death row cases acquitted by High Courts	258
Death row cases decided by the Supreme Court	38
Death row cases upheld by the Supreme Court	0

DEATH PENALTY DATA: 10 YEAR OVERVIEW (2016–2025)



Source Credit: Data sourced from the ‘Death Penalty in India Annual Statistics report 2025 & 10 Years of Death Penalty Data (2016-2025)’ published by The Square Circle Clinic, NALSAR University of Law.

RECENT EXECUTION EVENTS IN INDIA

🕒 **March 20, 2020 (The Nirbhaya Case Convicts)**

- o **Individuals:** Akshay Thakur, Pawan Gupta, Vinay Sharma, and Mukesh Singh.
- o **The Crime:** The brutal gang-rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern (posthumously known as Nirbhaya) on a moving bus in Delhi in December 2012.

🕒 **July 30, 2015 (Yakub Memon)**

- o **The Crime:** Convicted for his financial and logistical involvement in the 1993 Mumbai serial bomb blasts, which killed 257 people.

🕒 **February 9, 2013 (Afzal Guru)**

- o **The Crime:** Convicted for his role in providing

logistical support and hideouts for the terrorists who carried out the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament.

🕒 **November 21, 2012 (Ajmal Kasab)**

- o **The Crime:** The sole surviving Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist from the devastating 2008 Mumbai attacks (26/11), during which 166 people were killed.

🕒 **August 14, 2004 (Dhananjay Chatterjee)**

- o **The Crime:** Convicted for the 1990 rape and murder of a 14-year-old schoolgirl, Hetal Parekh, in Kolkata, where he was working as a security guard.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Status of countries on death penalty based on the latest Amnesty International data (2024):

- ☀️ **Fully Abolished (~113 countries):** Eliminated for all crimes.
 - *Examples:* UK, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, South Africa.
- ☀️ **Abolished for Ordinary Crimes (~9 countries):** Retained only for exceptional circumstances like war crimes or treason.

- *Examples:* Brazil, Israel, Chile.
- ☀️ **Abolished in Practice (~23 countries):** The law exists, but no executions have occurred in 10+ years, or an official moratorium is in place.
 - *Examples:* Russia, South Korea, Kenya.
- ☀️ **Retentionist (~55 countries):** Actively retain and use the death penalty for crimes.
 - *Examples:* USA, China, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Singapore.



WAY FORWARD

- ✳️ **Reevaluation of execution methods:** Courts and the government should explore more humane alternatives to hanging to align with Article 21 protections.
- ✳️ **Greater judicial restraint:** Judges must focus on mitigating circumstances and human dignity rather than public outrage.
- ✳️ **Alternative sentencing:** Expansion of life imprisonment without remission for serious crimes could reduce dependence on the death penalty.
- ✳️ **Judicial Reforms:** Improve sentencing training for trial judges to reduce erroneous death sentences and ensure consistent application of the “rarest of rare” doctrine.
- ✳️ **Legal Safeguards:** Strengthen mandatory pre-sentencing reports (psycho-social evaluation, probation reports) to reduce arbitrariness and enhance procedural fairness.
- ✳️ **Systemic Improvements:** Address the backlog and pendency in appellate courts to ensure timely resolution of capital cases and reduce prolonged death row incarceration.
- ✳️ **Aligning with global standards:** India may benefit from integrating global best practices on **abolition or moratorium** while preserving justice and accountability.

CONCLUSION

While the death penalty continues to be retained in India, evolving judicial scrutiny, high appellate acquittal rates, and global trends toward abolition highlight the need for procedural rigor, humane execution methods, and consideration of alternatives. Ensuring that capital punishment is fair, consistent, and aligned with constitutional values remains critical to balancing justice with humanity.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Critically analyse the ethical, moral, and human rights issues associated with the death penalty in India. Should India retain capital punishment in the 21st century?

(10 marks) (150 words)

CITIES OF DEBT

Syllabus: GS I - Urbanization

PYQ MAPPING

Q) The frequency of urban floods due to high intensity rainfall is increasing over the years. Discussing the reasons for urban floods, highlight the mechanisms for preparedness to reduce the risk during such events. (2016)

Q) Do government schemes for up-lifting vulnerable and backward communities by protecting required social resources for them, lead to their exclusion in establishing businesses in urban economies? (2014)

WHY IN NEWS

The Union Cabinet on February 13, 2026 approved the launch of the 'Urban Challenge Fund' (UCF), a new Centrally sponsored scheme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, with a total Central assistance of ₹1 lakh crore.

INTRODUCTION

India's rapid urbanisation has placed immense pressure on cities to provide quality infrastructure and services, even as Urban Local Bodies struggle with weak finances and capacity constraints. The Urban Challenge Fund aims to leverage market-linked financing to address this gap, promoting reform-driven and outcome-oriented urban development.

URBANISATION PRESSURES OF INDIA

- ➔ **Rapid urban growth:** India's urban population is over 36%, **expected to reach 50% by 2045–50**, putting immense pressure on city infrastructure and services.
- ➔ **Infrastructure strain:** Existing water supply, sanitation, transport, and drainage systems are overstretched due to population growth and migration.
- ➔ **ULBs struggling with unfinished projects:** Urban Local Bodies are already grappling with incomplete work under schemes like AMRUT, Swachh Bharat Mission

Urban 2.0, Smart Cities, and PMAY, reflecting chronic underutilisation and administrative bottlenecks.

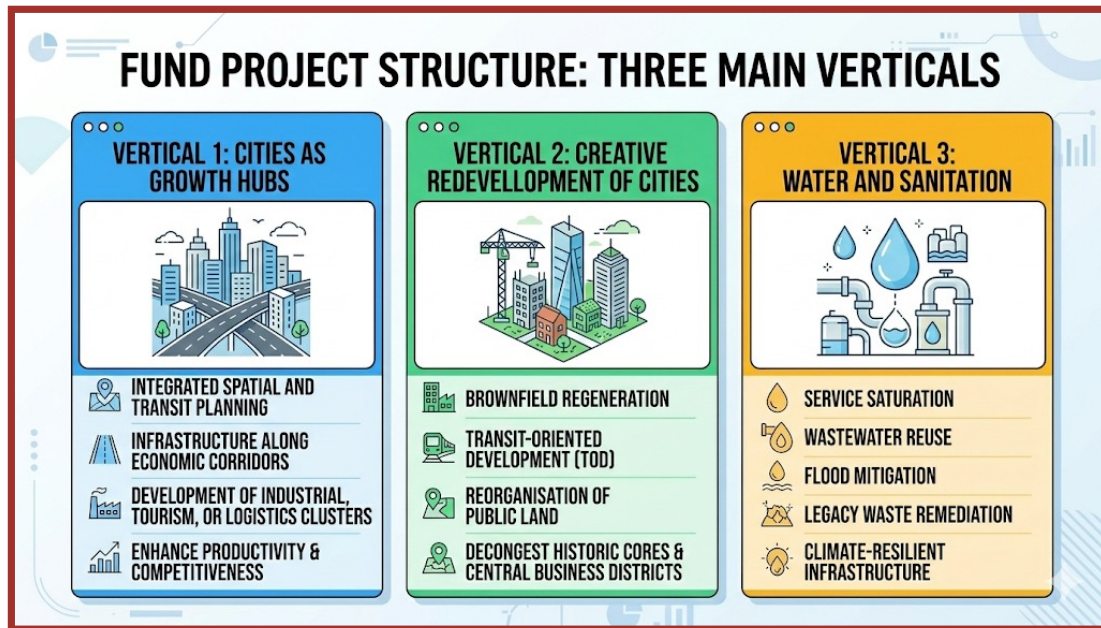
- ➔ **Weak municipal finances:** Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) largely depend on state and central transfers, limiting fiscal autonomy and capacity to invest in infrastructure.
- ➔ **Investment gap:** Current allocations for urban infrastructure are insufficient, creating an urgent need for alternative financing mechanisms.

ABOUT URBAN CHALLENGE FUND (UCF)

- ★ **Launch and scale:** The **Union Cabinet approved the UCF** with **₹1 lakh crore central assistance** for FY 2025–26 to FY 2030–31 (extendable to FY 2033–34), designed to catalyse **₹4 lakh crore total investment** in urban infrastructure.
- ★ **Funding mechanism:** Central assistance covers **25% of project cost**, while cities must mobilise **at least 50% from market sources**, including municipal bonds, bank loans, and PPPs. Remaining contributions can come from **states, ULBs, or other sources**.
- ★ **Selection process:** Projects will be chosen through a transparent, competitive "challenge-mode" system, focusing on high-impact, bankable, and reform-oriented proposals.
- ★ **Challenge-based selection:** Projects are selected competitively, focusing on reforms, sustainability, and transformational impact rather than just grant

allocation.

- ★ **Credit support:**
 - o A dedicated ₹5,000 crore corpus under the Credit Repayment Guarantee Scheme will enhance the creditworthiness of 4,223 cities, particularly enabling first-time market access.
 - o It enables states to access market finance with central guarantees of up to **70% of first loans** and 50% for subsequent loans.
- ★ **Eligibility:** All cities with populations over 10 lakh, state and UT capitals, major industrial cities with over 1 lakh population, and smaller ULBs in hilly and northeastern states will be eligible.
- ★ **Focus areas:** Priority includes redevelopment of urban cores, water and sanitation infrastructure, and creating bankable city assets.



IMPORTANCE

- ☀ **Market-linked approach:** Marks a shift from **grant-based funding to market-linked**, reform-driven, and outcome-oriented urban infrastructure financing.
 - **Example:** The **Water and Sanitation Pooled Fund (Tamil Nadu)** pooled 13 ULBs to issue a single pooled bond, helping them access long-term capital and refinance projects at lower cost.
- ☀ **Promoting private participation:** By involving private developers and citizen groups, the Fund encourages innovation and shared ownership in urban development.
- ☀ **Supporting smaller cities:** Credit guarantees and challenge-based selection provide access to finance for Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, reducing regional disparities.
- ☀ **Encouraging fiscal discipline:** Linking funding to reforms ensures cities strengthen financial management, revenue generation, and project execution capabilities.
- ☀ **Focus on national growth:** The Fund supports key Budget 2025–26 priorities such as **Cities as Growth Hubs, Creative Redevelopment of Cities, and Water & Sanitation**, reinforcing national development goals.

CHALLENGES

- **Risk of sidelining weaker cities:** Market-oriented requirements may disadvantage cities that lack strong revenue bases or administrative capacity, widening regional disparities.
- **Underutilisation of existing schemes:** Historical delays in programs like AMRUT and Smart Cities show systemic bottlenecks, risking poor Fund absorption.
- **Shift from services to monetisable assets:** Emphasis on “bankable” projects risks prioritising revenue-generating infrastructure over essential services such as formalising settlements or low-income housing.
- **Administrative and accounting gaps:** Without proper systems and trained personnel, ULBs may struggle to utilise funds efficiently, limiting the Fund’s effectiveness.
- **Governance and political interference :** Without clear eligibility criteria and transparency, project selection may be influenced by political considerations.

INTERNATIONAL URBAN FINANCE MODELS

- ♣ **Sweden**
 - *Sweden’s Kommuninvest* is a local government funding agency that aggregates municipal borrowing needs to issue bonds jointly, helping municipalities access capital at lower costs
- ♣ **Johannesberg**
 - In 2014, the City of Johannesburg pioneered the COJG01 Green Bond and successfully raised approximately \$140 million at the time.
- ♣ **Hong Kong**
 - Uses a highly integrated **"Rail plus Property" (R+P)** model where the government grants the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) Corporation exclusive development rights for the land directly above and adjacent to new railway stations.

- o MTR partners with private developers to build highly lucrative commercial spaces, luxury malls, and high-density residential towers integrated directly into the transit hubs.

- o *Financiera de Desarrollo Territorial S.A. (Findeter)* is a national development bank that finances sub-national infrastructure by providing long-term credit to local governments that otherwise lack access to such financing,

♣ **Colombia**

WAY FORWARD

- * **Strengthen municipal capacity:** Invest in accounting systems, trained personnel, and project management expertise to ensure proper utilisation of funds.
- * **Ensure inclusivity in project selection:** Prioritise essential services, low-income housing, and formalisation of settlements alongside monetisable assets to prevent exclusion of vulnerable populations.
- * **Maintain transparency:** Challenge-mode project selection and monitoring must remain robust to prevent political interference or resource misallocation.
- * **Leverage private finance responsibly :** Private sector involvement should be structured with risk-sharing and service standards to ensure high-quality infrastructure delivery.
- * **Develop capital markets:** Promote municipal bond markets, blended finance solutions, and credit ratings for ULBs to sustainably scale urban investments.

CONCLUSION

While the Fund has the potential to mobilise private capital and encourage fiscal discipline, its success depends on strong municipal capacity, transparent governance, and equitable project selection. Without balancing bankability with essential services, weaker cities and vulnerable populations risk being sidelined in India's urban growth story.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Critically evaluate the Urban Challenge Fund as a reform-driven initiative to strengthen municipal governance and fiscal discipline in Indian cities. **(10 marks) (150 words)**

AI IMPACT SUMMIT 2026

Syllabus: GS III - Science and Technology

PYQ MAPPING

Q) India aims to become a semiconductor manufacturing hub. What are the challenges faced by the semiconductor industry in India? Mention the salient features of the India Semiconductor Mission. [2025]

INTRODUCTION

The **India-AI Impact Summit 2026** concluded at **Bharat Mandapam**, marking the first major global Artificial Intelligence summit hosted in the Global South. Organised by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** under the **India AI Mission**, the summit brought together global stakeholders to shape a development-oriented AI agenda. It signalled a shift in international discourse from a narrow focus on AI safety toward leveraging AI for inclusive growth, governance transformation, and measurable socio-economic impact.

WHY IN NEWS

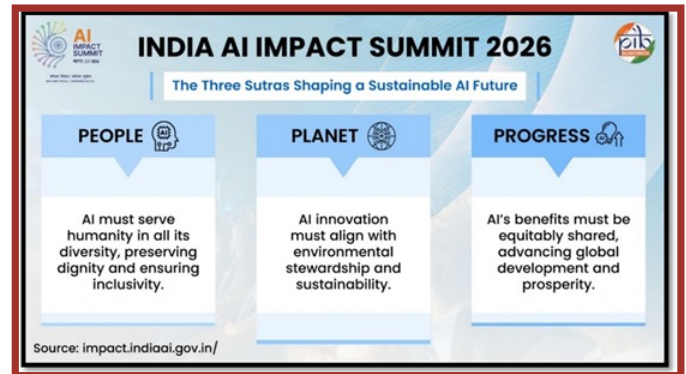
- The **India-AI Impact Summit 2026**, hosted in New Delhi, concluded with 89 countries and several international organizations, including major powers like the United States and China, endorsing the **New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact**.
- The declaration, though non-binding, represents the widest multilateral consensus on Artificial Intelligence so far and is structured around seven thematic “Chakras,” emphasizing equitable and democratic access to AI benefits.

EVOLUTION OF GLOBAL AI GOVERNANCE



FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK: THREE SUTRAS AND SEVEN CHAKRAS FOR GLOBAL AI COOPERATION

- ➔ The India–AI Impact Summit 2026 adopts a people-centric and outcome-driven vision for Artificial Intelligence. The goal is not technological spectacle, but measurable social and economic transformation. This vision is anchored in three foundational “Sutras”, guiding principles that shape collective global action and multilateral cooperation in AI development.
- ➔ Building upon these Sutras, the summit’s discussions are organized around seven “Chakras,” each representing a key domain of international collaboration aimed at inclusive, sustainable, and equitable AI-led progress.



SEVEN CHAKRAS OF AI IMPACT

- Human Capital:** This chakra emphasizes building a fair and large-scale AI skilling and reskilling ecosystem. It seeks to prepare the workforce for the emerging AI-driven economy. For India, it aligns skill development with national growth priorities and enhances long-term employability.
- Inclusion for Social Empowerment:** This focuses on ensuring broad-based participation through shared AI platforms and scalable digital solutions. It strengthens delivery of citizen-centric services and improves last-mile governance in India.
- Safe and Trusted AI:** This area aims to operationalize global principles of responsible AI into workable governance and safety frameworks. For India, it enhances regulatory preparedness, ensures secure AI deployment across public systems, and builds societal trust while sustaining innovation.
- Resilience, Innovation and Efficiency:** This chakra addresses environmental and infrastructure pressures created by large AI systems. It promotes sustainable and resource-efficient AI growth. For India, it ensures that AI expansion remains environmentally responsible and prevents widening of the global AI divide.
- Science:** This domain seeks to use AI to accelerate scientific discovery while correcting inequalities in access to data, computing power, and research ecosystems. For India, it strengthens domestic research capacity and supports breakthroughs in health, agriculture, and climate science.
- Democratizing AI Resources:** This envisions equitable and affordable access to foundational AI inputs such

as compute, datasets, and infrastructure. For India, it supports startups, public institutions, and researchers, ensuring fair participation in global AI value chains.

- AI for Economic Growth and Social Good:** This chakra focuses on leveraging AI to drive inclusive economic development. It encourages identification and scaling of high-impact use cases that combine economic growth with measurable social benefit.



NEW DELHI DECLARATION ON AI IMPACT

The **New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact (2026)** is a global framework aimed at ensuring that Artificial Intelligence serves inclusive development and shared prosperity. Rooted in Indian civilizational ideals such as **Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**, the declaration calls for trusted, ethical, and transparent AI systems, expanded global research collaboration, and democratized access to digital infrastructure.

Key Highlights of the Declaration

- On **economic growth and social good**, the Declaration promotes open and interoperable AI solutions that can be scaled across contexts. It references the **Global AI Impact Commons**, a voluntary platform intended to replicate and expand high-impact AI use cases across regions.
- In the domain of **secure and trusted AI**, it recognizes the **Trusted AI Commons**, which provides shared tools, benchmarks, and best practices to support responsible and adaptable AI deployment.
- Regarding **science**, the Declaration stresses that reducing barriers to AI research and expanding shared infrastructure can accelerate global scientific discovery. It highlights the **International Network of AI for Science Institutions** as a collaborative platform for pooling research capacity and AI capabilities.
- For **social empowerment**, it supports the creation of a voluntary knowledge-sharing platform to exchange best practices and scalable AI models that strengthen inclusive development.
- On **human capital**, it underlines the need for large-scale skilling, reskilling, and AI literacy initiatives, supported by guiding principles and practical playbooks to prepare societies for an AI-driven economy.
- Finally, under **resilience, innovation, and efficiency**, the Declaration emphasizes energy-efficient and robust AI systems to address rising resource demands. It notes the **Voluntary Guiding Principles on Resilient, Innovative, and Efficient AI and the Playbook on Advancing Resilient AI Infrastructure** as key reference frameworks for sustainable AI expansion.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC OUTCOMES FROM THE AI IMPACT SUMMIT 2026

Geopolitical and Supply Chain Positioning

- o India joined the US-led **Pax Silica Alliance**, aiming to secure semiconductor supply chains and critical minerals.
- o Signed the **India–US AI Opportunity Partnership**, strengthening bilateral AI cooperation and reducing overdependence on any single power bloc.

Massive Capital Commitments

- o Investment pledges exceeding USD 250 billion for AI infrastructure, including semiconductor fabs and hyperscale data centres.
- o Around USD 20 billion earmarked for deep-tech venture funding to accelerate domestic innovation.

Expansion of Compute Capacity

- o Addition of 20,000 GPUs to the existing 38,000, with a target of crossing 100,000 GPUs by 2026, a decisive push toward AI compute sovereignty.

IndiaAI Mission 2.0 Rollout

- o Focus on scaling national compute infrastructure,

curated datasets, and sectoral AI deployment in governance, agriculture, and healthcare.

Human-Centric AI Framework

- o Introduction of the **M.A.N.A.V. vision (Moral, Accountable, National Sovereignty, Accessible, Valid)** to anchor AI development in ethics, inclusivity, and strategic autonomy.

MSME-Centric AI Adoption Model

- o Proposal of a UPI-style standardized AI playbook to enable small enterprises to adopt affordable, plug-and-play AI tools.

Push for Sovereign Foundation Models

- o Emphasis on domestically trained and hosted AI systems.
- o **Sarvam AI** unveiled large language models Sarvam-30B and Sarvam-105B, marking India's entry into frontier AI model development.
- o BharatGen introduced **Param2** (multilingual model) and Sutra (AI news anchor), strengthening India's linguistic AI capacity.

CONCERNS

- ▼ **Voluntary Nature:** The framework is non-binding, lacking enforcement or monitoring mechanisms.
- ▼ **No Explicit Prohibitions:** Unlike the **EU AI Act**, it does not clearly ban high-risk applications such as predictive policing or biometric mass surveillance.
- ▼ **Workforce Vulnerability:** Limited structured discussion on immediate displacement risks to India's 5.8 million IT workforce, especially entry-level roles vulnerable to generative AI.
- ▼ **Infrastructure Gaps:** India still faces constraints in advanced chip fabrication, high-end compute, and sustainable data centre capacity.
- ▼ **Risk of Data Colonialism:** Potential scenario where India supplies data and talent while value capture remains concentrated in foreign AI platforms.
- ▼ **Environmental Stress:** Data centres' heavy water and energy use could intensify ecological pressures, particularly in already water-stressed urban regions.

WAY FORWARD ENSURE AI DRIVEN INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- * **Translate Principles into Metrics:** Operationalize **People, Planet, and Progress** through measurable AI projects in governance and public service delivery.
- * **Green AI Strategy:** Promote energy-efficient algorithms and renewable-powered data centres to reduce ecological costs.
- * **Strengthen Semiconductor Ecosystem:** To reduce long-term dependence on foreign semiconductor supply chains, the strategy focuses on aligning with **ISM 2.0 (India Semiconductor Mission)** to develop indigenous AI chips and strengthen domestic manufacturing capabilities..
- * **Move Toward Binding Standards:** Develop interoperable safety benchmarks under shared global platforms to strengthen accountability.
- * **Regulatory Sandboxes:** Establish cross-border pilot environments for AI testing in sectors like agriculture and healthcare.
- * **Large-Scale Reskilling:** Scale up the Reskilling Playbook through initiatives like **Bodhan AI** to make youth **"AI-ready"** instead of "AI-displaced." Introduce clear laws mandating a "Glass Box" approach to ensure transparent, accountable, and lawful AI use in governance.
- * **Transparency Mandates:** Introduce "glass box" governance norms ensuring explainable and legally verifiable AI decision-making in public administration.

CONCLUSION

The New Delhi Declaration signals a shift toward broad-based access and diffusion of AI capabilities, especially for the Global South. Its real test, however, lies not in aspirational language but in whether voluntary cooperation evolves into enforceable standards, resilient infrastructure, and genuinely inclusive technological transformation.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Discuss India's strategic outcomes from the AI Impact Summit 2026. Also examine the major concerns associated with the Declaration and suggest measures to ensure that Artificial Intelligence becomes a tool for inclusive and sustainable growth.

(15 marks) (250 words)

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

INDIA'S EXPANDING DIRECT TAX BASE: A STRUCTURAL SHIFT IN FISCAL CAPACITY

Over the last decade, India's direct tax system has witnessed a significant structural transformation. Between Assessment Year (AY) 2013–14 and AY 2024–25, the total taxpayer base more than doubled from 5.26 crore to 12.13 crore, reflecting sustained formalisation and improved compliance. Simultaneously, the cost of direct tax collection declined to historically low levels, indicating enhanced administrative efficiency.

The Structural Expansion of the Tax Base

1. Broad-Based Growth

- ◆ The expansion has not been episodic but sustained, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of nearly 8% over eleven years. This suggests deeper integration of individuals and businesses into the formal tax framework rather than a temporary compliance surge.

2. Rise in Individual Taxpayers

- ◆ Individual taxpayers have been the primary drivers of this growth, increasing from 4.96 crore to 11.61 crore during the period. Despite a temporary contraction during AY 2020–21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the post-pandemic recovery has been strong, with double-digit growth in recent years.

3. Steady Growth in Non-Individual Taxpayers

- ◆ The number of firms, companies, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), Associations of Persons (AOPs), and other entities rose from 0.29 crore to nearly 0.48 crore. Growth in this segment has been moderate but stable, indicating progressive formalisation of business entities.

Improved Administrative Efficiency

A key indicator of institutional strengthening is the sharp decline in the cost of collection of direct taxes, from 1.36% in FY 2000–01 to 0.41% in FY 2024–25 (provisional).

This improvement has occurred despite:

- ◆ A substantial increase in taxpayer headcount
- ◆ Higher aggregate tax collections

The temporary rise during FY 2020–21 was pandemic-related rather than structural.

Drivers of the Transformation

- ◆ Digital filing and e-assessment systems
- ◆ Pre-filled income tax returns
- ◆ Faceless assessments and appeals
- ◆ Enhanced third-party information reporting
- ◆ Integration of PAN-based tracking

Implications for Governance and Public Finance

- ◆ **Revenue Stability:** A broader tax base reduces vulnerability to cyclical shocks.
- ◆ **Equity in Taxation:** Wider participation improves fairness and burden-sharing.
- ◆ **Fiscal Sustainability:** Enhanced mobilisation supports infrastructure and welfare spending.
- ◆ **Formalisation of Economy:** Increased reporting embeds taxation within the formal sector.
- ◆ **Administrative Modernisation:** Lower collection costs reflect improved state capacity.

Emerging Concerns

- ◆ Ensuring that expansion reflects genuine income growth rather than excessive compliance burden.
- ◆ Protecting taxpayer rights amid expanded data surveillance.
- ◆ Maintaining progress in non-individual formalisation, especially MSMEs.
- ◆ Sustaining efficiency gains under the forthcoming New Income Tax Act (effective April 2026).

Conclusion

- ◆ The doubling of India's taxpayer base over the past decade represents more than a statistical milestone, it signals a structural strengthening of fiscal institutions. By combining technological modernisation with improved compliance frameworks, India has expanded revenue mobilisation while lowering administrative costs.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC TRUST IN ISRO

The recent public release of a technical committee report by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on the NVS-02 satellite mission marks a significant moment in India's space governance. The satellite, launched aboard a GSLV in January 2025, failed to reach its intended orbit due to a malfunction in the oxidiser valve activation system. While ISRO eventually disclosed the broad technical cause, the delayed and limited transparency has raised questions about institutional openness and public accountability.

The Incident and Institutional Response

- ◆ The technical findings indicate that an electrical signal meant to activate a critical engine valve did not reach its destination, likely due to a failed or loose connector in both primary and backup systems.
- ◆ ISRO stated that corrective measures were implemented successfully in the November 2025 LVM3-M5 mission that placed the GSAT-7R into orbit.
- ◆ However, the absence of detailed clarification, whether the issue arose from oversight, systemic quality-control gaps, or manufacturing anomalies, has sparked debate about the adequacy of disclosure.

Emerging Concerns

- ◆ Retreat from routine publication of detailed Failure Analysis Reports.

- ◆ Multiple committees investigating "systemic issues," indicating deeper structural challenges.
- ◆ Risk of eroding confidence if transparency appears reactive rather than proactive.

Way Forward

- ◆ Institutionalise mandatory publication of redacted Failure Analysis Reports after defined review periods.
- ◆ Clearly distinguish between national security-sensitive information and operational accountability.
- ◆ Strengthen independent technical audit mechanisms.
- ◆ Adopt global best practices in aerospace transparency to maintain credibility.
- ◆ Foster a culture where technical setbacks are treated as data for improvement rather than reputational threats.

Conclusion

ISRO's technological achievements have long inspired public confidence. However, institutional strength in a democracy rests not only on successful launches but also on how failures are handled. Transparent disclosure, without compromising strategic interests, can convert technical setbacks into demonstrations of maturity and accountability.

CARBON CAPTURE AND UTILISATION (CCU) TECHNOLOGIES



Carbon Capture and Utilisation (CCU) refers to technologies that capture carbon dioxide (CO₂) from industrial sources, such as power plants, cement kilns, steel plants, or even directly from the air — and convert it into useful products. Instead of storing the captured CO₂ underground permanently (which is called Carbon Capture and Storage, CCS), CCU reuses the carbon to make:

- ◆ Synthetic fuels
- ◆ Chemicals (like methanol or olefins)
- ◆ Building materials (carbon-cured concrete)
- ◆ Polymers and specialty materials

How can CCU reduce emissions?

- ◆ **Decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors:** Industries like cement and steel release CO₂ as part of chemical reactions, not just fuel burning. Renewable energy alone cannot eliminate these emissions. CCU captures and reuses that carbon.
- ◆ **Avoiding fresh fossil carbon extraction:** If CO₂ is used as a feedstock for chemicals or fuels, it reduces dependence on newly extracted fossil carbon.
- ◆ **Supporting a circular carbon economy:** Instead of a linear model: extract → burn → emit, CCU promotes

a loop where carbon is recycled within industrial systems.

Why does India need CCU?

India is the world's third-largest CO₂ emitter, with emissions driven mainly by:

- ◆ Coal-based power generation
- ◆ Cement production
- ◆ Steel manufacturing
- ◆ Chemical industries

Many of these sectors are structurally carbon-intensive. Since India has committed to net-zero emissions by 2070, CCU offers a transitional pathway for industries where electrification or renewables alone are insufficient. It also aligns with India's vision of building a circular and low-carbon economy.

Global examples

- ◆ The U.S. uses tax credits and subsidies to scale CCU projects.
- ◆ The UAE integrates CCU with green hydrogen in projects like Al Reyadah.
- ◆ European steel and chemical companies are piloting CO₂-to-carbon monoxide conversion for industrial reuse.

Challenges

- ◆ **High cost:** Capturing and converting CO₂ is energy-intensive and currently expensive.
- ◆ **Infrastructure gaps:** CCU requires industrial clustering, CO₂ transport systems, and integration with downstream industries.
- ◆ **Policy uncertainty:** Lack of standards, carbon pricing, and certification frameworks reduces investor confidence.
- ◆ **Energy paradox:** If fossil energy powers CCU, climate benefits shrink dramatically.

Way forward

- ◆ Introduce targeted incentives such as carbon pricing, tax credits, or green procurement mandates.
- ◆ Develop industrial CCU clusters in cement and steel hubs.
- ◆ Power CCU systems with renewable energy to ensure net emission reduction.
- ◆ Establish certification standards for CO₂-derived products.
- ◆ Promote public-private partnerships and global technology collaboration.

Conclusion

CCU is not a silver bullet. It cannot substitute for rapid renewable expansion or energy efficiency. But for heavy industry, it may be one of the few realistic bridges between today's carbon economy and tomorrow's low-carbon one.

BEYOND VERDICTS: KEY JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS

Supreme Court on Fraternity and Free Expression

- ◆ In *Atul Mishra v. Union of India (2026)*, the Supreme Court addressed a writ petition challenging the title of a proposed film for allegedly stereotyping a particular community.
- ◆ The Court reaffirmed that vilifying any community on the basis of caste, religion, language, or region is constitutionally impermissible, emphasizing that fraternity is vital to sustaining liberty and equality in a democracy.
- ◆ Recalling **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's** view in the Constituent Assembly that liberty, equality, and fraternity form an inseparable "trinity," the Court underscored that weakening one undermines the foundation of democratic values.

Principle of Just Deserts

- ◆ The Supreme Court stressed adherence to the **Principle of Just Deserts**, which requires that punishment be **proportionate to the gravity of the offence**.
- ◆ Based on the **retributive theory of justice**, it holds that offenders **morally deserve consequences** for their wrongful acts. The principle also promotes **consistency, accountability, and deterrence**, guarding against undue leniency in sentencing.

SC on Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholder seeking membership in a State Bar Council

- ◆ The Supreme Court recently dismissed a request by an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholder seeking membership in a State Bar Council.
- ◆ The **OCI scheme**, introduced in 2005 through an amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955, does not grant dual citizenship or political rights such as voting.
- ◆ OCI cardholders receive a **lifelong multiple-entry visa** and enjoy **parity with NRIs in select financial, economic, and educational matters**, except in areas like acquisition of agricultural or plantation land, and require prior permission for activities such as research.
- ◆ Eligibility extends to Persons of Indian Origin who were citizens of India on or after 26 January 1950, or who belonged to territories that became part of India after 15 August 1947. However, individuals with links to Pakistan, Bangladesh, or other specified countries are excluded.

SC Transfers River Pollution Oversight to NGT

- ◆ The Supreme Court has closed its 2021 suo motu proceedings on the remediation of polluted rivers, noting limited progress over the past five years, and transferred primary monitoring responsibility to the **National Green Tribunal**.
- ◆ The Court reiterated that the **right to live in hygienic conditions with human dignity and a clean environment** is intrinsic to the **Right to Life under Article 21** of the Constitution, reinforcing environmental protection as a fundamental constitutional guarantee.

Delhi HC on Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002

- ◆ The Delhi High Court has held that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) can attach even ancestral property of an accused under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act**.
- ◆ The **Directorate of Enforcement**, established in 1956, is the premier financial investigation agency responsible for enforcing laws related to foreign exchange management and anti-money laundering.
- ◆ The PMLA aims to prevent and control money laundering, confiscate and seize proceeds of crime, and address related offences. The Directors of the Financial Intelligence Unit–India (FIU-IND) and the ED are vested with exclusive and concurrent powers under the Act to ensure effective enforcement.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) You are the Municipal Commissioner of a rapidly growing metropolitan city. A large informal settlement (slum) located along a riverbank is slated for eviction as part of a Smart City riverfront beautification project. The project promises improved flood management, tourism revenue, and green public spaces. Nearly 8,000 families live in the settlement, many for over 20 years. Most residents work as domestic workers, street vendors, sanitation staff, and construction laborers. The High Court has ordered removal of “encroachments” within three months, citing environmental protection and public safety concerns. The State Government is pushing for swift action to meet project deadlines. However, civil society groups argue that eviction without proper rehabilitation violates the right to life and dignity under Article 21. Budget constraints mean that adequate in-situ rehabilitation housing may delay the project by at least a year.

As Municipal Commissioner, you must decide how to proceed.

Questions:

- a. Identify the key ethical and constitutional issues involved.
- b. Discuss the conflict between environmental sustainability, development goals, and social justice.
- c. What are the options available to you? Evaluate their ethical implications.
- d. What course of action would you adopt and why?
- e. How can urban governance integrate inclusivity while pursuing modernization?

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

- 1. Animal Ethics:** During Sivaratri in Vattavada near Munnar, villagers performed Mankooth, a ritual dance symbolically reenacting an ancient deer hunt tied to the Hill Pulaya community’s traditions. Now observed without actual hunting, the performance preserves tribal cultural memory in Idukki.
- 2. Human Rights:** In Samastipur district in Bihar, 22-year-old Nitish Kumar was allegedly drugged, abducted, and forced into marriage in a case of “pakadwa vivah,” a practice where men are kidnapped and compelled to wed, often to avoid dowry demands. He was later rescued, and authorities are investigating the incident amid claims from the bride’s family that the marriage was consensual.
- 3. Environmental Ethics:** In Bengaluru, the seasonal pink bloom of Tabebuia trees traces back to a 1980s greening drive led by Seturam Gopalrao Neginhal, an Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer who planned species selection, protection, and community participation. Over five years, the initiative planted more than 1.5 million trees, helping restore the city’s green cover amid rapid urban expansion.
- 4. Social Responsibility:** In Bengaluru, transgender activist Nakshatra founded Nammane Summane in 2020 to provide shelter, food, healthcare, and care for abandoned elderly people and orphaned children. The home, started with a few residents, now houses over 100 people rescued from the streets.
- 5. Gender Equality:** In Mumbai, 19-year-old Shrey Panchal self-trained through observation and daily practice, performs Lavni in traditional attire, and directs his own stage shows to expand the dance’s reach beyond gender stereotypes.
- 6. Social Justice:** In Soundala in Maharashtra, a special gram sabha unanimously passed a resolution declaring the village “caste-free,” prohibiting caste-based discrimination and guaranteeing equal access to public spaces and services. Led by sarpanch Sharad Argade, the initiative also promotes shared festivals, discourages abusive language, and supports social reforms such as widow remarriage and girls’ education.
- 7. Inclusivity:** The Board of Control for Cricket in India introduced a structured support framework for blind cricket through the Cricket Association for the Blind in India, giving visually impaired athletes access to BCCI-affiliated venues, international exposure, and broader professional opportunities.
- 8. Consumer Ethics:** A consumer court in Chennai fined Kolors Healthcare ₹2 lakh for falsely advertising a “100 % money-back guarantee” on a weight-loss program, ruling the contradictory terms on billing and ads amounted to an unfair trade practice under the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019**.

MODEL ESSAY

"If you shut the door to all errors, truth will be shut out"

Introduction

- Quote by Rabindranath Tagore
- Challenges the belief that perfection or fear of mistakes safeguards truth; instead, it suggests that **rejecting all mistakes blocks the very path by which truth enters.**

How Shutting Out Error Also Shuts Out Truth

- **Serendipitous Breakthroughs:** Mistakes can reveal unexpected truths that planned experiments might miss. *Eg: Penicillin* was discovered by **Alexander Fleming** on a forgotten petri dish.
- **Innovation from Failure:** Errors in experiments can lead to entirely new products or ideas. *Eg: Post-it Notes* came from a chemist trying to make a strong adhesive, but instead producing a weak, reusable glue
- **Wrong Turns Becoming Tools:** Accidental errors can produce practical solutions when observed carefully. *Eg: Implantable pacemakers* were invented after **Wilson Greatbatch** used the wrong resistor, producing electrical pulses like a heartbeat.
- **Everyday Truths from Mistakes:** Even minor accidental observations can transform daily life. *Eg: Microwave ovens* were invented when **Percy Spencer's** chocolate bar melted near radar equipment

Challenges of Fear of Mistakes

- **Hinders Creativity:** Fear of errors makes people avoid experimenting with new ideas, limiting innovation.
- **Blocks Learning Opportunities:** Avoiding mistakes prevents reflection and learning from experience.
- **Encourages Risk Aversion:** Excessive caution

leads to stagnation and missed breakthroughs.

- **Promotes Perfectionism:** Constantly seeking flawless outcomes increases stress and reduces productivity.

Way Forward

- **Embrace Mistakes:** Treat errors as learning opportunities rather than failures. *Eg: Thomas Edison* viewed thousands of failed attempts at the light bulb as lessons, not failures.
- **Promote Experimentation:** Encourage trial and error in education, science, and innovation. *Eg: STEM classrooms* often use hands-on projects where students test hypotheses and learn from mistakes.
- **Foster Open-Mindedness:** Accept unexpected outcomes as potential paths to discovery
- **Integrate Reflection:** Analyze failures to extract lessons and improve future decisions. *Eg: SpaceX* studies each rocket launch failure, using lessons to make **successful reusable rockets.**

Conclusion

- Truth and error are companions in the pursuit of knowledge.
- Embracing mistakes with reflection allows learning to deepen, science to progress, creativity to flourish, and individuals to grow.

Sample Quotes

- *All good things which exist are the fruits of originality-* John Stuart Mill
- *Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it -*Mark Twain
- *Affliction comes to us, not to make us sad but sober; not to make us sorry but wise.-* H. G. Wells.

MAINS JOT DOWN



GS I: IMPORTANT PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

- The President unveiled a bust of **C. Rajagopalachari** at Rashtrapati Bhavan, replacing the statue of **Edwin Lutyens** as part of efforts to remove colonial-era symbols. Lutyens, who designed much of New Delhi, including India Gate, North and South Block and co-designed Rashtrapati Bhavan with **Herbert Baker**, was a central figure in imperial architecture.
- Rajagopalachari, popularly known as **Rajaji**, was a freedom fighter, lawyer, reformer and administrator born in 1878 in Tamil Nadu.
- He participated in major national movements, led the Vedaranyam Salt March in 1930, and proposed the C.R. Formula to address Hindu-Muslim tensions before Partition, served as India's last Governor-General (1948–50), was a member of the Constituent Assembly, and later founded the Swatantra Party.



GS II: GOVERNMENT POLICIES & INTERVENTIONS

- India's rooftop solar push has crossed 30 lakh beneficiary households under the **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana**, marking a major milestone in what is considered the world's largest domestic rooftop solar programme.
- Introduced in 2024 by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the scheme seeks to equip 1 crore homes with rooftop solar systems and provide up to 300 units of free electricity every month, advancing energy self-reliance while lowering household power expenses.



GS III: ENVIRONMENT

- The Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change inaugurated the 25th edition of the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS), organised by **The Energy and Resources Institute**, along with the launch of Him-CONNECT. The summit is themed "Transformations: Vision, Voices, and Values for Sustainable Development," underscoring the need for systemic shifts toward sustainability.
- Him-CONNECT is a dedicated platform of the Ministry that seeks to bridge science and society by linking Himalayan researchers with start-ups, industry leaders, investors, and policymakers. It aims to translate research under the National Mission on Himalayan Studies into scalable, real-world solutions.



GS II: HEALTH

- The Union Health Minister has launched an indigenously developed **Tetanus and Adult Diphtheria (Td) vaccine**, now included under the **Universal Immunization Programme**.
- Started in 1978 and expanded in 1985, UIP provides free vaccination against 12 diseases, including Polio, Measles, Rubella, Hepatitis B, and Japanese Encephalitis (in endemic districts). It has achieved milestones like Polio-free status (2014) and elimination of neonatal tetanus (2015), and is currently strengthened through initiatives such as **Intensified Mission Indradhanush 5.0** and the U-WIN portal.



GS III: INFRASTRUCTURE

- The Prime Minister inaugurated India's first **Namo Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)**, a rail-based, semi-high-speed commuter network aimed at transforming connectivity across the National Capital Region (NCR).
- Designed for speeds of up to **180 km per hour**, it enables faster long-distance regional travel with fewer stops, distinguishing it from metro systems that focus on intra-city mobility. Unlike conventional railways, the RRTS provides **high-frequency, point-to-point services on dedicated corridors**, ensuring seamless movement between cities and Delhi.
- The project is being implemented by the **National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC)**, a joint venture between the Centre and the States of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi.

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has deployed **Mobile Quality Control Vans** to strengthen real-time quality monitoring of National Highway construction.
- These vans are equipped with advanced tools such as **Ultrasonic Pulse Velocity meters** to detect hidden cracks in concrete, **asphalt density gauges** to ensure proper compaction and durability, and **Light-Weight Deflectometers** to assess the strength of compacted soil and sub-base layers.
- They also use **reflectometers** to check the visibility of road signs and markings, improving road safety.



GS III: DEFENCE

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has launched '**PRAHAAR**', India's new National Counter-Terrorism Policy based on a zero-tolerance approach. It focuses on intelligence-led prevention through Multi Agency Centre (MAC) and Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI), swift response by local police backed by the **National Security Guard**, and strong investigation by the **National Investigation Agency**.



GS III: INDIAN ECONOMY

- The Union Government has launched a **National Access Pass system** to regulate sustainable fishing in India's **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**, which extends up to 200 nautical miles from the coast. The pass is mandatory for about 64,000 mechanised and large motorised vessels (above 24 metres), while traditional artisanal fishers are exempt.
- Issued free of cost through the **ReALCRaft** digital platform (developed by NIC and the Department of Fisheries), the system promotes deep-sea fishing and formation of Fisheries Cooperatives and FFPOs.
- It is integrated with the **Marine Products Export Development Authority** for catch certificates and the **Export Inspection Council** for health certification, strengthening traceability and export compliance.

- India's maritime sector is gaining strategic and economic prominence, driven by its vast **11,098 km coastline**, a resource-rich **Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.3 million sq. km**, and **14,500 km of inland waterways**, reflecting strong blue economy potential.
- The sector currently contributes about **4% to GDP**, with nearly **95% of trade by volume and 70% by value** handled through ports. In FY 2024–25, major ports processed around **855 million tonnes of cargo**, while inland waterways cargo movement surged to **146 million metric tonnes in 2025**, up from just 18 MMT in 2014, signalling a major structural shift toward cost-effective and sustainable transport.



GS II: GOVERNANCE

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), along with the **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing**, has launched the 'Blockchain India Challenge' to encourage startups to develop and pilot innovative blockchain-based solutions for digital governance.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

FLUORESCENT PROTEINS

- They are biological macromolecules that emit visible light when exposed to ultraviolet or blue light, first discovered in organisms such as the jellyfish *Aequorea victoria* and certain corals.
- The discovery of **Green Fluorescent Protein** transformed modern biology by allowing scientists to visually track molecules and processes inside living cells. Initially used as optical markers, these proteins are now widely applied in cancer research, neural circuit mapping, and protein tracking.

CHICORY

- It is a blue-flowered perennial plant belonging to the Asteraceae family. Its roasted and ground roots are commonly blended with coffee to add colour and a characteristic bitterness, and since it is caffeine-free, it can also serve as a coffee substitute.
- Chicory contains inulin, a natural sweetener with probiotic properties that supports gut health.

FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY

- It is the aspect of biodiversity that reflects the range of functional traits species possess in an ecosystem, influencing its stability, productivity, and nutrient cycling.
- For example, in a forest, different bird species may crack seeds, control insects, or disperse fruits, each playing a distinct ecological role. Higher functional diversity improves resilience by ensuring that if one species is lost, others can compensate.

PEATLAND

- It is a waterlogged ecosystem where partially decomposed organic matter accumulates as peat.
- These areas store large amounts of carbon, but when drained or burned, they release significant greenhouse gases, contributing to at least 5% of global emissions.

BIOSURFACTANTS

- They are eco-friendly, biodegradable surface-active molecules produced by microorganisms like bacteria and fungi. They reduce surface tension between substances and are used in bioremediation, medicine, food processing, and personal care products.