



FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



> WTO

> INTER-LINKING OF RIVERS IN INDIA

> INDIA'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CRISIS

20th JULY, 2026 - 26th JULY, 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**

SWATHI S BABU
AIR 522

MANJIMA P
AIR 235

KASTURI SHA
AIR 68

FABI RASHEED
AIR 71

OORMILA J S
AIR 561

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WTO: ISSUES AND RELEVANCE

Syllabus: GS II - International Relations

PYQ MAPPING

Q) What are the key areas of reform if the WTO has to survive in the present context of 'Trade War', especially keeping in mind the interest of India? **(2018)**

Q) The broader aims and objectives of WTO are to manage and promote international trade in the era of globalization. But the Doha round of negotiations seem doomed due to differences between the developed and the developing countries." Discuss in the Indian perspective. **(2016)**

SHORT TAKES

- **Plurilateral agreement:** It is a **trade agreement within the WTO signed by a group of willing member countries (not all members)**, making its rules applicable only to those participants.
- **G33 Countries:** A coalition of **developing and least-developed countries** within the WTO, formed around the 2003 Cancún Ministerial, mainly to protect agricultural interests and ensure food security.

WHY IN NEWS

Several countries at the WTO have criticised India for opposing plurilateral trade agreements, saying this is slowing down efforts to reform the global trade system.

INTRODUCTION

The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** is the main global institution that regulates **international trade** through a **rules-based system**. It aims to promote **free, fair, and predictable trade** among countries while also addressing the concerns of **developing nations**.

ABOUT WTO

- ➔ The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** is an international body that sets the rules for global trade between countries.
- ➔ It was established in **1995** through the **Marrakesh Agreement**, replacing **GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade)**.
- ➔ It has **160+ member countries** and covers most of global trade.
- ➔ Its main functions include-
 - o Providing a platform for **trade negotiations**
 - o Settling **trade disputes** between countries

- o Monitoring **trade policies**
- o Helping **developing countries** through technical support
- ➔ The WTO has handled **600+ disputes** since 1995, such as the **US-Shrimp case**, balancing trade and environmental concerns.

WHY INDIA OPPOSES PLURILATERAL AGREEMENTS?

- ✳ **Threat to Multilateralism:** Plurilateral deals involve only select countries, weakening the **consensus-based system**.
 - o **Example:** India opposed **Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs)** on e-commerce as they exclude many developing nations.
- ✳ **Bypassing WTO Framework:** Such agreements are often negotiated outside formal WTO structures.
 - o **Example:** Investment facilitation talks proceeded without full member approval, raising procedural concerns.
- ✳ **Risk to Policy Space:** They may impose rules limiting domestic regulation in areas like **data governance and digital trade**.
 - o **Example:** India fears e-commerce rules could restrict its ability to regulate **data localization**.
- ✳ **Marginalization of Developing Countries:** Smaller economies may be excluded from negotiations.
 - o **Example:** Least Developed Countries (LDCs) often lack capacity to participate in complex digital trade talks

IMPORTANCE OF WTO

- ★ **Promotes Free and Stable Trade:** WTO reduces **tariffs** and **trade barriers**, making trade smoother and ensures **predictability** and stability in global trade
 - o **Example:** The 1997 Information Technology Agreement under the WTO eliminated tariffs on tech products across 82 member countries.
- ★ **Provides Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM):** WTO offers a **legal system** to resolve trade conflicts peacefully which prevents escalation into **trade wars**.
 - o **Example:** **Brazil vs USA (cotton subsidies case)** resolved through WTO instead of retaliation.

- ★ **Supports Developing Countries:** Provides **Special and Differential Treatment (SDT)** and offers **technical assistance** and flexibility
 - **Example:** India - defending food security (public stockholding) at WTO negotiations.
- ★ **Ensures Transparency:** Members must **notify trade policies and subsidies**, build **trust and accountability**.
 - **Example:** WTO audits global economic powers like China and the EU to ensure their domestic subsidies are publicly disclosed
- ★ **Prevents Trade Wars:** Encourages **dialogue and rule-based system** over unilateral actions.
 - **Example:** Disputes on **US tariff measures** taken to WTO instead of escalating globally.
- ★ **Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Principle:** Ensures non-discriminatory trade by mandating any benefit given to one member must be extended to all.

ISSUES

- ▼ **Dispute Settlement Crisis: Appellate Body (AB)** non-functional since **2019** which weakens enforcement of WTO rulings.
- ▼ **Slow Decision-Making:** Based on **consensus**, requiring agreement of all members, leads to **deadlock and delays**.
 - **Example:** The **Doha Development Agenda**, launched in 2001 to lower global trade barriers, has remained largely stalled for over two decades.
- ▼ **Rise of Protectionism:** Countries imposing **tariffs and subsidies** to protect domestic industries.
 - **Example:** The United States unilaterally imposed heavy "Section 232" tariffs on foreign steel (25%) and aluminum (10%) in 2018 to shield its domestic producers.
- ▼ **Developed vs Developing Country Conflict:** Disagreements over **agriculture, subsidies, and market access**.
 - **Example:** India vs developed nations on subsidy and tariff issues.
- ▼ **Outdated Rules:** WTO rules do not fully cover **digital trade and Artificial Intelligence (AI)**.
 - **Example:** Lack of consensus on **e-commerce regulations**.
- ▼ **Lack of Transparency:** Poor reporting of **subsidies and trade measures**.
 - **Example:** Over 90 WTO members failed to submit their required 2023 subsidy notifications on time.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳ **Reform Dispute Settlement System:** Restore **Appellate Body (AB)**.
 - **Example:** **MPIA (Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement)** used as a temporary solution by over 50 members including the EU and China.
- ✳ **Address Developing Country Concerns:** Focus on **food security and livelihood protection**.
 - **Example:** India and G-33 countries demanding **permanent solution for public stockholding**.
- ✳ **Update Rules for Modern Trade:** Include **digital economy, AI, and climate-related trade**.
 - **Example:** WTO discussions on **data flows and e-commerce**.
- ✳ **Improve Transparency:** Strengthen **subsidy reporting and notification systems**.
 - **Example:** Efforts to improve **compliance and trust** among members.
- ✳ **Strengthen Multilateralism:** Prevent fragmentation into **regional trade blocs**, promote **inclusive global trade governance**.
 - **Example:** WTO still governs a **major share of global trade**, making reforms essential.

CONCLUSION

Despite facing multiple challenges, the WTO remains essential for ensuring **stability in global trade**. Comprehensive **reforms and modernization** are necessary to maintain its relevance in the **evolving global economic order**.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) "The World Trade Organization (WTO) plays a crucial role in maintaining a rules-based global trading system, yet it faces multiple structural challenges." Examine the importance of WTO, discuss the key issues affecting its functioning. **(15 marks, 250 words)**

INDIA'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CRISIS AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

Syllabus: GS III - Indian Economy

PYQ Mapping

Q) “The nature of economic growth in India in recent times is often described as jobless growth. Do you agree with this view? Give arguments in favour of your answer.”
(2015)

Why in the news

India's **youth unemployment rate (15–29 years)** rose from **13.8% in April 2025 to 16.2% in June 2026**, while youth **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)** fell from **42.7% to 40.3%**, raising concerns that inadequate job creation

could undermine the country's **demographic dividend**.

Introduction

India's **young population, with a median age of around 29 years, presents a significant demographic opportunity**. However, this advantage can yield a demographic dividend only when supported by **quality education, employable skills and sufficient productive jobs**. Rising youth unemployment thus raises concerns over whether India can fully convert its youthful population into a **driver of economic growth**.

Indicator	Data
Youth unemployment, June 2026	16.2%
Youth unemployment, April 2025	13.8%
Youth LFPR, June 2026	40.3%
Youth LFPR, April 2025	42.7%
Overall unemployment, June 2026	5.5%
Overall LFPR	54.4%
Unemployed graduates aged 20–29, 2023	1.1 crore out of 6.3 crore
Unemployment among graduates below 25, 2023	39.3%
Male graduates obtaining permanent salaried jobs within a year	<7%
Getting white-collar jobs	3.7%
Informal-sector jobs created in 2025	74.5 lakh, down from 1.1 crore earlier

Particularly worrying: unemployment is rising even while fewer young people are participating in the labour market.

Issues and Challenges

🔥 Job-Poor Growth & Weak Labour-Intensive Manufacturing:

- o High GDP growth has not always translated into sufficient employment, as **capital- and technology-intensive sectors** generate output with fewer workers. India has also underutilised labour-intensive sectors such as **textiles, garments, footwear and food processing**.
- o **Example-** Bangladesh's garment industry has created millions of jobs, especially for women.

🔥 Skill-Employment Mismatch & Educated

Unemployment:

- o Rising educational attainment has not been matched by **industry-relevant skills and suitable jobs**, leading to high graduate unemployment. Employers often face shortages of practical skills in areas such as **technicians, programming and machine operation**.
- o **Example-** High graduate unemployment coexists with vacancies for skilled technical workers.

🔥 Low Female Participation & Regional Disparities:

- o **Unpaid care work, safety concerns, inadequate childcare and social norms** restrict women's

workforce participation. Employment opportunities also vary widely across States, encouraging migration towards major economic centres.

- o **Example-** Safe transport, childcare and flexible work can increase female employment.

✧ Informal & Low-Quality Employment:

- o A large share of workers remain in the **informal sector**, where jobs often lack adequate wages, social security and stability. Thus, India faces not only a **job quantity problem but also a job quality problem**.
- o **Example-** Youth often prefer government jobs because of greater security and predictable career progression.

✧ Automation & Technological Disruption:

- o **AI, automation and digitalisation** can replace routine and repetitive jobs while creating demand for new skills. Without continuous **reskilling and upskilling**, technological change may widen unemployment and skill gaps.
- o **Example-** AI-based customer support and automated manufacturing can reduce demand for certain routine occupations.

Implications

Loss of Demographic Dividend & Lower Growth:

- o Persistent youth unemployment leaves a large working-age population underutilised, reducing **productivity, consumption, savings and economic growth**.
- o With India's median age expected to rise from **~29 years today to ~38 by 2050**, this demographic opportunity is time-bound.

Social Unrest & Inequality:

- o Educated unemployment can create **frustration, protests and declining faith in institutions**, particularly when recruitment is delayed or affected by irregularities.
- o Unequal access to quality jobs can further widen **income inequality and weaken social mobility**.

Migration Pressure:

- o Lack of opportunities encourages **internal and international migration** towards metropolitan cities, industrial States and overseas labour markets.
- o **Example-** Workers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha often migrate to major employment centres.

Human Capital Loss:

- o Prolonged unemployment leads to **skill depreciation and employment scarring**, reducing future earning potential.
- o **Example-** An unemployed engineering graduate may lose technical skills and eventually accept a job unrelated to their qualification.

Future Fiscal Burden:

- o If today's youth are not productively employed and unable to build savings, an ageing India may face greater pressure on **pensions, healthcare and social security**, increasing the future fiscal burden.

Government Initiatives

- 🇮🇳 **Skill India & Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):** Provides vocational training and industry-relevant skills to improve youth employability.
- 🇮🇳 **Apprenticeship Schemes:** Provide practical workplace training, bridging the gap between **education and industry requirements**.
- 🇮🇳 **Make in India & Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:** Promote manufacturing, investment and employment in sectors such as **electronics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals and renewable energy**.
- 🇮🇳 **Startup India, Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana & Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP):** Promote **entrepreneurship, self-employment and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME)-led job creation** through funding and credit support.
- 🇮🇳 **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) & National Career Service (NCS):** MGNREGA provides **rural employment security**, while NCS connects **job seekers, employers and training institutions**, helping reduce labour-market mismatches.

Way Forward

✧ Promote Employment-Intensive Growth

- o Prioritise sectors such as **textiles, tourism, construction, food processing and logistics**, which can absorb large numbers of semi-skilled workers.
- o **Example-** India's **tourism sector contributed around 5.1% of GDP and supported about 46.5 million jobs in 2023**, highlighting its employment potential.

✧ Strengthen Labour-Intensive Manufacturing & MSMEs

- o Integrate India more deeply into global value chains in **textiles, footwear, electronics assembly and light manufacturing**.
- o **Example:** India's **MSME sector accounts for around 30% of GDP and nearly 45% of exports**, making it crucial for employment generation.

✧ **Reform Education & Skill Development**

- o Align education with industry requirements through **apprenticeships, internships and vocational training**.
- o **Example:** Germany's **dual vocational education system** combines classroom learning with paid workplace training, providing a model for reducing skill mismatches.

✧ **Boost Female Employment**

- o Expand **affordable childcare, safe transport, flexible work and workplace safety** to increase female labour-force participation.
- o **Example:** According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023–24**, India's female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for those aged 15+ rose to **41.7%**, up from 23.3% in 2017–18, showing significant scope for further gains.

✧ **Promote Entrepreneurship & New-Age Jobs**

- o Strengthen **Startup India, Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana and Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)** while preparing workers for AI, semiconductors, renewable energy and electric mobility.
- o **Example:** India had **over 2 lakh recognised startups by 2025**, demonstrating the growing role of entrepreneurship in employment creation.

Conclusion

India's demographic dividend is a **time-bound opportunity**, not an automatic outcome. The priority must be to convert **education into skills, skills into jobs and jobs into productivity** through employment-intensive growth and human-capital development. The success of **Viksit Bharat** will depend on whether India can transform its youthful population from a **demographic advantage into a productivity advantage**.

Sample Question

Q) "India's demographic dividend can turn into a demographic liability in the absence of adequate employment opportunities." Discuss in the context of rising youth unemployment in India. **(15 marks, 250 Words)**

INTER-LINKING OF RIVERS IN INDIA

Syllabus: GS I - Geography

PYQ Mapping

Q) The interlinking of rivers can provide viable solutions to the multi-dimensional inter-related problems of droughts, floods and interrupted navigation. Critically examine.” (2020)

Why in the news

- The **Ken–Betwa Link Project (KBLP)**, India’s first river-linking project under the National Perspective Plan to enter implementation, faces protests over **displacement, rehabilitation, compensation and environmental concerns**.
- The protests have renewed debate over the **Inter-Linking of Rivers (ILR) programme**, particularly its implications for **water security, ecology and social justice**.

Introduction

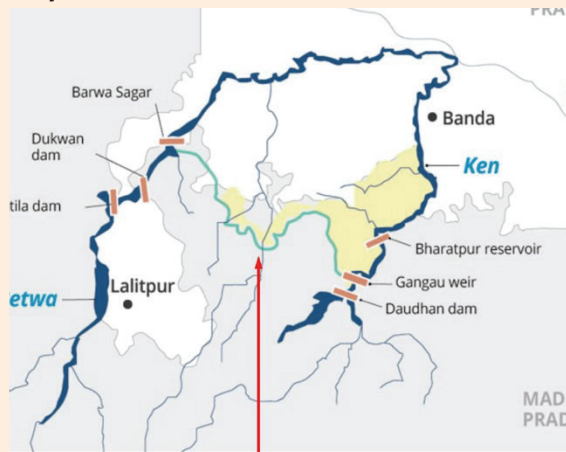
Inter-Linking of Rivers (ILR) aims to transfer water from relatively **surplus to water-deficit regions** through dams, reservoirs, canals and river links, addressing India’s uneven rainfall distribution. Under the **National Perspective Plan (NPP), 1980, 30 river links** have been identified; **14 Himalayan and 16 Peninsular**.

Current Status of River Inter-Linking in India

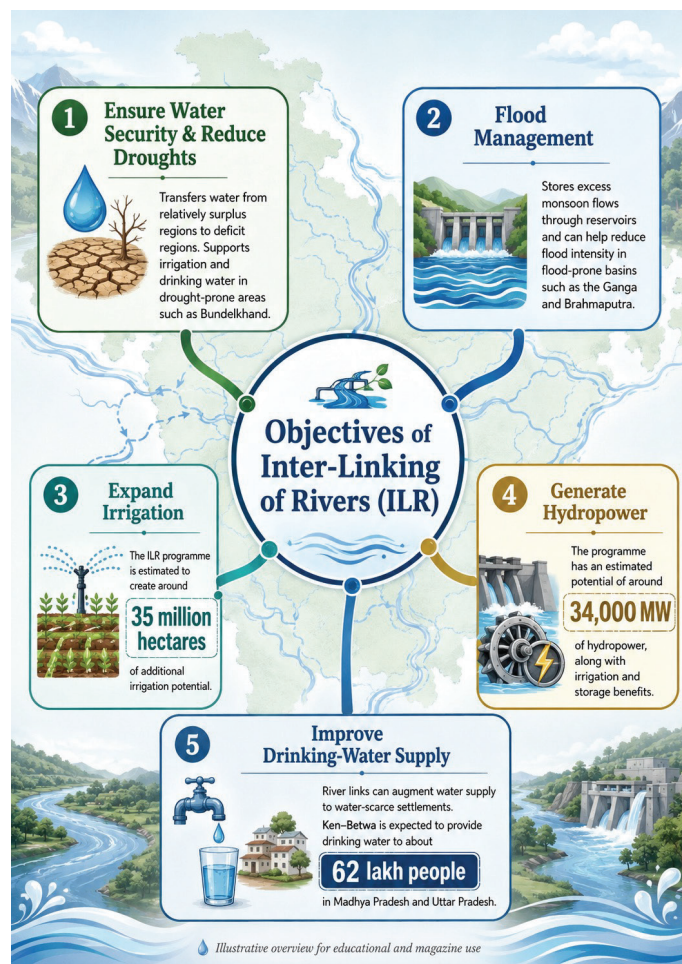
- Thirty links have been identified.**
 - The National Perspective Plan envisages **30 river-link projects**, consisting of **14 Himalayan and 16 Peninsular links**.
 - Pre-Feasibility Reports have been completed for all 30 identified links.
- Twenty-six Feasibility Reports have been completed.**
 - As of **February 2026**, Feasibility Reports have been prepared for **26 of the 30 links**, indicating that most projects have undergone preliminary technical assessment.
- Detailed Project Reports have been completed for 13 links.**
 - The number of completed DPRs increased from **11 in July 2025 to 13 by February 2026**, showing gradual progress in project preparation.
- Ken–Betwa is the first link under implementation.**
 - The **Ken–Betwa Link Project** is currently the only

priority river-link project under the NPP that has entered the implementation stage.

- Other priority links include the **Modified Parbati–Kalisindh–Chambal link** and three links forming part of the proposed **Godavari–Cauvery transfer system**.



Objectives



Challenges of Inter-Linking of Rivers

- ▼ **Inter-State Disputes:** Since water is largely a State subject, sharing river water often creates political conflicts. *Example: Kerala–Tamil Nadu disputes show the difficulty of interstate cooperation.*
- ▼ **Centre–State Coordination:** Delays in approvals, land acquisition and fund sharing can slow implementation of large river-linking projects.
- ▼ **Ecological Damage:** Dams and reservoirs may submerge forests and wildlife habitats. *Example: Ken–Betwa is expected to affect about 98 sq. km of Panna Tiger Reserve.*
- ▼ **Deforestation and Biodiversity Loss:** Large canals and reservoirs require diversion of forest land and can disturb wildlife corridors and river ecosystems.
- ▼ **High Financial Cost:** River-linking projects require massive investment. *Example: Ken–Betwa is estimated to cost about ₹44,605 crore.*
- ▼ **Social Displacement:** Reservoirs and canals can displace families and affect farmers, fishers and forest-dependent communities. *Example: Ken–Betwa may affect around 20,000 people.*
- ▼ **Livelihood Loss:** Changes in river flows and land acquisition can reduce access to farming, fishing and forest-based livelihoods.

Conclusion

Inter-Linking of Rivers can strengthen **water security, irrigation and drought resilience**, but its success depends on balancing development with **ecological sustainability, cooperative federalism and social justice**.

Sample Question

Q) “Inter-Linking of Rivers can address India’s spatial and temporal imbalance in water availability, but its ecological, social and federal costs cannot be ignored.” Critically examine. (15 marks, 250 Words)

Way Forward

- * **Scientific Assessment:** Every link should undergo rigorous hydrological, ecological and economic feasibility studies before implementation.
- * **Better Rehabilitation:** Displaced families should receive timely compensation, housing and livelihood restoration.
- * **Stakeholder Participation:** Farmers, local communities and States should be involved in planning to improve acceptance and reduce conflicts.
- * **Ecological Safeguards:** Sensitive ecosystems should be protected through minimum forest diversion, wildlife conservation and maintenance of environmental flows.
- * **Phased Implementation:** Projects should be implemented gradually so that environmental and social impacts can be assessed before further expansion.
- * **Use Alternatives Alongside ILR:** River linking should complement **rainwater harvesting, watershed development, groundwater recharge and micro-irrigation**, rather than replace them.

GEN-Z AFTERMATH: THE LAW, FAST-TRACK COURTS AND EXPERT BODY

Syllabus: GS III - Government policies and intervention

PYQ Mapping

Q) Comment on the need of administrative tribunals as compared to the court system. Assess the impact of the recent tribunal reforms through rationalization of tribunals made in 2021. (2025)

Why in the News?

The **NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and subsequent youth-led protests** triggered a wider debate over the credibility of India's public examination system and the frustrations of young aspirants. The government subsequently strengthened the anti-paper-leak law, provided for **Special Fast Track Courts**, and constituted a **high-powered task force on examination reforms under Nandan Nilekani**.

Introduction

Competitive examinations are crucial for **education, employment and social mobility**; repeated paper leaks therefore undermine **meritocracy, equal opportunity and institutional trust**. The **2026 Gen-Z protests** highlighted these concerns, prompting a three-pronged response—**stronger laws, faster justice and systemic exam reforms**.

Strengthening the Law

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act

- ➔ Parliament originally enacted the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024** to prevent paper leaks, organised cheating, manipulation of examination systems and other malpractices in major public examinations such as UPSC, SSC, RRB, IBPS and NTA examinations.
- ➔ Following the 2026 controversy, the law was strengthened through the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026**, which took effect on **July 31, 2026**.

Major Changes

- ➔ **Stricter punishment:** Individuals using unfair means can now face **5–10 years of imprisonment and fines up to ₹50 lakh**, increasing the deterrent against examination fraud.
- ➔ **Organised examination crime:** Organised cheating networks can face imprisonment of at least **seven years** and fines of at least **₹10 crore**, recognising paper leaks as organised economic crimes rather than

isolated cheating.

- ➔ **Service-provider accountability:** Service providers involved in malpractice can face fines up to **₹5 crore** and can be barred from conducting public examinations for **eight years**.
- ➔ **Special Task Force:** The Central government has been empowered to constitute an **STF for investigating examination-related offences**, particularly where organised networks are involved.

Significance

- ➔ The law seeks to protect **merit and equality of opportunity**, since paper leaks unfairly disadvantage candidates who rely solely on preparation and performance.

Strong penalties can also attack the **supply side of examination fraud**, including organised gangs, intermediaries and compromised service providers, rather than punishing ordinary candidates alone.

Special Fast-Track Courts

- ➔ The Amendment requires every **State and Union Territory** to designate a Court of Session as a **Special Fast Track Court**, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court.
- ➔ Investigations are required to be completed within **two months**, while trials are to proceed on a day-to-day basis and be completed within **three months of filing the chargesheet**.
- ➔ States and UTs must also appoint **Special Public Prosecutors** for these courts. Appeals will lie before a **two-judge Bench of the High Court**, which should, as far as possible, dispose of the appeal within three months.

Why Fast-Track Courts are Needed

- ➔ **Justice delayed can destroy academic careers:** Examination disputes are highly time-sensitive because a delay of even one academic year can affect admissions, age limits and career progression.
- ➔ **Swift punishment strengthens deterrence:** Quick prosecution can reduce the perception that paper-leak networks can exploit prolonged judicial processes.
- ➔ **Restores institutional confidence:** Timely adjudication can reassure candidates that examination fraud will receive priority treatment.

But Are Fast-Track Courts Enough?

- ➔ **May Shift Rather Than Reduce Backlog:** Re-designating existing judges may not increase judicial capacity. As of **April 2026**, **775 Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)** were functioning, yet **2.45 lakh+** cases remained pending at the end of 2025.

High-Powered Expert Body

- 🌀 On **July 26, 2026**, the Prime Minister announced a **high-powered task force on examination reforms headed by Nandan Nilekani**, shifting part of the response from punishment after a leak to prevention of leaks in the first place.

Why an Expert Body Matters

- 🌀 **Technology-based security:** Examination systems require secure digital architecture, encrypted question-paper transmission, authentication and stronger cyber-security.
- 🌀 **Process redesign:** Reform must examine the entire chain from **question setting - printing/digital storage - transportation - examination centre - evaluation**, because a vulnerability at any stage can compromise an examination.
- 🌀 **Institutional accountability:** Clear responsibility should be fixed on examination authorities, vendors and service providers instead of treating every leak as an isolated incident.
- 🌀 **Learning from past failures:** An expert body can identify recurring vulnerabilities and design uniform national standards for high-stakes examinations.

Three-Pronged Approach

1. **Strong Law equals Deterrence:** Harsher penalties increase the cost of organising paper leaks.
2. **Fast-Track Courts equals Swift Justice:** Time-bound investigation and trials ensure quicker accountability.
3. **Expert Body equals Prevention:** Institutional and technological reforms aim to prevent leaks before they occur.

Prevention + Detection + Swift Prosecution = Examination Integrity

Key Challenges Ahead

- ♣️ **Capacity deficit:** Fast-track courts require additional judges, prosecutors, investigators and forensic facilities rather than merely reallocating existing resources.
- ♣️ **Rigid timelines:** Time-bound investigations and trials must not compromise **fair trial or investigation**

quality.

- ♣️ **Cybersecurity risks:** Digitisation can reduce physical leaks but create risks of **hacking, insider access and cyber manipulation**.
- ♣️ **Centre-State coordination:** Effective implementation requires cooperation between **States, UTs, examination bodies, police and forensic agencies**.
- ♣️ **Trust deficit:** Punishment alone cannot restore confidence without **transparent, secure and accountable examinations**.
- ♣️ **Larger youth concerns:** Examination reform must be accompanied by **quality education, skill development and employment opportunities**.

Way Forward

- ✳️ **Strengthen Capacity:** Add judges, prosecutors, investigators and specialised **cyber-forensic infrastructure**.
- ✳️ **Secure Examination Systems:** Use **encryption, controlled access, audit trails and real-time monitoring** to minimise vulnerabilities.
- ✳️ **Fix Accountability:** Conduct regular security audits of examination bodies and service providers, with **clearly defined responsibility** for failures.
- ✳️ **Balance Speed with Justice:** Follow time limits while allowing flexibility in complex cases, with **written justification for delays**.
- ✳️ **Protect Whistle-blowers & Consult Stakeholders:** Create secure reporting mechanisms and involve **students, States, testing agencies and cybersecurity experts** in reforms.
- ✳️ **Address Root Causes:** Combine examination reforms with **job creation, skill development and affordable quality education** to address wider youth concerns.

Conclusion

The Gen-Z protests highlight a deeper **trust deficit between young citizens and public institutions**. Strong laws, fast-track courts and expert-led reforms are important, but **laws without enforcement, courts without capacity and technology without accountability will remain insufficient**. India must build an examination system that is **secure, transparent, accountable and trusted**, while simultaneously expanding credible pathways to **education, skills and employment**.

Sample Question

Q) "Fast-track courts and stringent penalties can address examination malpractice only partially; restoring trust requires structural reform of the examination ecosystem." Discuss in the context of recent reforms to India's public examination system. **(15 marks, 250 Words)**

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

This week's dossier is about **cybersecurity**, a growing concern for India's **national security, digital economy and technological future**, amid rising cyberattacks, data breaches and AI-enabled threats.

CYBERSECURITY AS A NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGE

India's growing dependence on digital infrastructure has made **cyberspace a new domain of national security**. Cyberattacks can disrupt critical infrastructure, steal sensitive information and undermine strategic capabilities.

Key Concerns

- ◆ **Critical Infrastructure:** Power grids, telecom, banking, defence and transport are vulnerable to cyberattacks.
- ◆ **Cyber Espionage:** State-sponsored actors can target government and defence networks to obtain strategic information.
- ◆ **Cyber Warfare:** Cyberattacks can be used alongside conventional military operations to disrupt essential services.
- ◆ **Emerging Threats:** AI, deepfakes and autonomous systems are increasing the sophistication of cyber operations.

Recent Example

- ◆ In **July 2026**, sensitive files linked to the **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant** were reportedly exposed in a ransomware-linked data breach involving a contractor's third-party server. Although core nuclear systems were reportedly unaffected, the incident highlighted risks to **critical infrastructure and supply chains**.

Government Measures

- ◆ **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC):** Protects critical information infrastructure.
- ◆ **CERT-In:** National agency for responding to cybersecurity incidents.
- ◆ **National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC):** Monitors cyberspace and facilitates threat information sharing.
- ◆ **National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC):** Coordinates cybersecurity efforts across government agencies.

Way Forward

- ◆ Strengthen **CERT-In, NCIIPC** and defence cyber capabilities.
- ◆ Develop stronger **public-private partnerships** for protecting critical infrastructure.
- ◆ Promote international cooperation and information sharing.

Conclusion

Cybersecurity must be treated as an integral component of **national security and strategic preparedness**, requiring continuous investment in resilience, intelligence and technological capabilities.

CYBERSECURITY AS AN ECONOMIC & SOCIAL CHALLENGE

India's digital economy, driven by **UPI, e-commerce, digital banking and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**, has expanded rapidly. However, increasing digital dependence has also created new vulnerabilities for citizens and businesses.

Key Concerns

- ◆ **Financial Cybercrime:** Phishing, identity theft and online scams cause significant financial losses.
- ◆ **Data Breaches:** Large-scale collection of personal data increases privacy risks.

- ◆ **Digital Divide:** Less digitally literate citizens are more vulnerable to cyber fraud.
- ◆ **Business Disruption:** Ransomware and data breaches can particularly affect MSMEs with limited cybersecurity capacity.

Recent Example

- ◆ The **2026 Kudankulam-related data breach** also demonstrated that cyber risks extend beyond individuals and banks to **businesses, contractors and critical infrastructure supply chains**.

Government Measures

- ◆ **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** for reporting cybercrime.
- ◆ **Cyber Swachhta Kendra** for detecting and removing malware.
- ◆ **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** and **Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025** for strengthening data protection.
- ◆ **CERT-In** advisories and cybersecurity audits to improve organisational preparedness.

Way Forward

- ◆ Strengthen **cyber insurance** and **cybersecurity standards for MSMEs**.
- ◆ Expand digital-literacy and cyber-hygiene programmes.
- ◆ Improve coordination between **banks, telecom companies, platforms** and **law-enforcement agencies**.

Conclusion

India's digital transformation can remain sustainable only when **trust and security accompany convenience**. Cybersecurity must therefore become a pillar of India's digital economy.

CYBERSECURITY IN THE AGE OF AI & EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

The rapid adoption of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, **Internet of Things (IoT)**, **cloud computing** and **5G** is transforming India's digital ecosystem. At the same time, these technologies are creating new and more sophisticated cybersecurity risks.

Key Concerns

- ◆ **AI-enabled attacks:** AI can automate phishing, malware generation and vulnerability discovery.
- ◆ **Deepfakes:** Synthetic media can facilitate misinformation, fraud and identity manipulation.
- ◆ **IoT vulnerabilities:** Millions of connected devices can become entry points for cyberattacks.
- ◆ **Cloud dependence:** Concentration of sensitive data in cloud systems creates systemic risks.

Recent Example

- ◆ In **2026**, CERT-In highlighted emerging **AI-assisted vulnerabilities and cyber threats**, while issuing guidance on defending digital infrastructure against AI-assisted exploitation.
- ◆ The increasing use of **AI-generated deepfakes and voice cloning** has also raised concerns over impersonation scams and misinformation.

Government Measures

- ◆ **CERT-In** has issued guidance on **AI-assisted vulnerability exploitation** and emerging cyber threats.
- ◆ **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 & Rules, 2025** strengthen the framework for protecting personal data.
- ◆ **NCIIPC** protects critical information infrastructure from emerging technological threats.

Way Forward

- ◆ Adopt **Security-by-Design** and **Privacy-by-Design** principles.
- ◆ Develop AI systems capable of detecting **deepfakes and automated cyberattacks**.
- ◆ Establish clear standards for **AI safety, accountability and data protection**.
- ◆ Invest in indigenous cybersecurity technologies and skilled professionals.

Conclusion

India must ensure that technological innovation does not outpace cybersecurity capabilities. The goal should be **"secure innovation"**, where emerging technologies are designed with resilience and security from the outset.

BEYOND VERDICTS: KEY JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS

Supreme Court Judgment on Sex Work: A Rights-Based Approach

- ◆ The **Supreme Court's May 29, 2026 judgment** marks a shift towards a **rights-based approach to sex work and trafficking**. It recognises the coexistence of **agency and vulnerability**, distinguishes migration from trafficking, and holds that **consenting adult sex workers cannot be forcibly rescued**. However, **caste, poverty, institutional bias and coercive rescue practices** can undermine these rights. Shelter homes may also become restrictive rather than rehabilitative. Sex workers and their collectives should be involved in **policy implementation and monitoring**, while anti-trafficking agencies must be made accountable. Existing welfare schemes should also reach sex workers as **rights-bearing citizens**, ensuring dignity, choice and equal access to justice.

Supreme Court on Defection and Party Authority

- ◆ The **Supreme Court, in August 2026**, observed that a majority of MLAs or MPs cannot override the directives of their **parent political party** merely because they form a majority in the legislature party. The observation came during the **Shiv Sena faction dispute** involving Uddhav Thackeray and Eknath Shinde. The Court emphasised that **political party and legislature party are distinct entities** under the Tenth Schedule. Allowing legislators to use their numerical majority to change party leadership or switch allegiance could undermine the **electoral mandate and anti-defection framework**.

Supreme Court Judges' Strength Increased

- ◆ The **Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026** raises the Court's sanctioned strength from **34 to 38 judges**, including the CJI, primarily to address rising pendency. As of January 2026, around **92,101 cases** were pending, while in 2025 the Court received **75,410 cases but disposed of 65,615**. However, increasing judges alone cannot solve pendency; **vacancies, frequent adjournments, rising litigation and weak lower-court capacity** must also be addressed. India has only **15.9 judges per million people**, against the Law Commission's recommended 50, highlighting the need for **system-wide judicial reforms**.

Supreme Court Extends Cruelty Law to Live-in Relationships

- ◆ The **Supreme Court, in August 2026**, ruled that the offence of domestic cruelty under **Sections 85–86 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** can apply to live-in relationships that qualify as **"relationships in the nature of marriage."** The Court held that protection against domestic cruelty should not depend solely on marital status, recognising live-in relationships as a reality of modern society. The judgment marks a shift towards **victim-centric and gender-sensitive legal protection**, while limiting the protection to relationships that demonstrate the requisite characteristics and intent of marriage.

Supreme Court on Transgender Rights and Identity

- ◆ The **Supreme Court, in August 2026**, clarified that changes to transgender law cannot automatically invalidate **identity cards issued under earlier legislation**. The Court emphasised that rights already conferred cannot be retrospectively taken away. The case challenges the **2026 amendment**, which petitioners argue dilutes the right to **self-identification** recognised in the landmark **NALSA judgment (2014)**. The issue highlights the constitutional principles of **dignity, equality, autonomy and protection from discrimination**.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) You are the **District Collector** of a backward district where several government welfare schemes, including pensions, food subsidies and scholarships, are increasingly delivered through digital platforms requiring **Aadhaar authentication and online verification**. During a field visit, you discover that many elderly persons, persons with disabilities and tribal families are unable to access their benefits because of **poor internet connectivity, biometric authentication failures and lack of digital literacy**. Local officials argue that allowing offline verification could increase **fraud and leakages**. Meanwhile, a private technology company contracted by the district has offered to provide an alternative authentication system. However, the company expects the district administration to share certain beneficiary data with it for “better service delivery”. A senior political leader pressures you to approve the arrangement immediately, arguing that it will help the district achieve its digitalisation targets. Civil society organisations, however, warn that sharing beneficiary data could compromise **privacy and dignity**, particularly of vulnerable groups.

Questions

- Identify the ethical issues involved in the case.
- What are the competing values that you, as District Collector, need to balance?
- What options are available to you? Examine their merits and limitations.
- What course of action would you adopt? Give reasons for your decision.
- How can the district ensure that **digitalisation becomes a tool of inclusion rather than exclusion**?

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

- Courage:** A 36-year-old swimming and rappelling instructor, R. Rajesh, died after giving his life jacket to a 61-year-old farmer during a flash flood rescue in Kerala. A veteran volunteer of the 2018 Kerala floods and 2024 Wayanad landslides, he lost his grip on the safety rope while returning and was swept away after ensuring the farmer’s safety.
- Resilience:** Himanshika Sharma, diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis at age eight and using a wheelchair since 2014, built a writing career from home, funded her sister’s education, bought her own SUV, and even helped her father start a restaurant achieving financial independence despite chronic pain and multiple surgeries.
- Public Service Ethics:** A massive statewide crackdown was led by IAS officer Tukaram Munde as Maharashtra FDA Commissioner, involving raids, inspections, and strict action against food adulteration, illegal gutkha networks, and hygiene violations in restaurants and food businesses. Under this drive, authorities conducted over 1,100 inspections, suspended licences of several establishments, seized adulterated food worth crores.
- AI Ethics:** On 1 May 2025, Sindhudurg in Maharashtra became India’s first AI-enabled district, where IPS officer Krushikesh Rawale led the integration of artificial intelligence across governance sectors like policing, healthcare, crowd management, and wildlife monitoring to enable faster, predictive decision-making.
- Innovation:** Articulus Surgical, founded by engineer Saurya, is building affordable surgical robotics (Nebula, Galaxi, and Pulsar) to make advanced procedures accessible beyond elite hospitals by reducing costs to nearly one-fifth of existing systems.
- Social Responsibility:** InstaWater, a Tripura University-backed startup, provided over 2,000 litres of clean drinking water to about 30 families in flood-hit Assam using its portable purification system that treats contaminated water on-site. Led by Prof Harjeet Nath, the initiative highlights how local innovation can address urgent needs and reduce disease risks during disaster relief.
- Discipline:** Abhinav Sujith, a 14-year-old from Chennai, became Asia’s youngest solo glider pilot after completing his first solo flight in the UK following three years of dedicated training.

MODEL ESSAY

"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

Introduction

- Quote by Albert Einstein
- Science enables understanding and technological power but lacks moral direction
- Religious or humanist ethics ensure scientific progress serves humanity, not harm.

Science without religion is lame

- **Bioethics Framework:** Religion and philosophy provide ethical limits to scientific advances, preventing misuse. **Eg:** Debates on **CRISPR gene editing** to avoid eugenics.
- **Restraint on Destruction:** Spiritual values act as a moral check on destructive technologies **Eg: Oppenheimer's Bhagavad Gita reflection** after the atomic bomb
- **Environmental Ethics:** Spiritual traditions promote stewardship over exploitation of nature **Eg:** Bishnoi community's protection of trees and wildlife
- **Humanizing Medicine:** Religious ethics ensure compassion and dignity in healthcare **Eg:** Concept of **Seva in patient care and palliative medicine**
- **AI Ethics:** Moral philosophies guide responsible use of artificial intelligence
- **Equitable Distribution:** Ethical values ensure fair access to scientific benefits **Eg: Zakat/ Daana influencing welfare and public health distribution**

Religion without science is blind

- **Ending Superstition:** Science replaces fear-based beliefs with rational explanations **Eg:** earthquakes and pandemics explained by **tectonics and pathogens**, ending witch-hunt.
- **Challenging Authority:** Scientific inquiry questions rigid religious dogma **Eg: Galileo's heliocentrism** challenged Church authority.
- **Medical Pragmatism:** Science promotes

intervention over fatalism **Eg: vaccines eradicated smallpox** instead of relying on prayer.

- **Social Equality:** Science disproves discriminatory hierarchies **Eg: genetic studies show equality of all humans**, challenging caste/gender bias).
- **Cosmological Accuracy:** Science replaces mythological explanations of the universe **Eg: Big Bang theory and evolution** vs creation myths.
- **Material Solutions:** Science solves real-world scarcity problems **Eg: Green Revolution in India led by M.S. Swaminathan** increased food production

Synthesis

- Science provides tools while religion/ethics provide direction
- Ethics restrain destructive potential of science (e.g., **nuclear deterrence shaped by moral and diplomatic considerations**).
- Science without ethics leads to harm, ethics without science leads to stagnation (e.g., **climate change solutions require both technology and moral responsibility**).

Conclusion

- A civilization that relies entirely on blind faith will never build the rockets required to reach the stars, but a civilization that relies entirely on cold, unguided science will eventually forget why the stars were worth reaching for in the first place.

Sample Quotes

- *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity - Immanuel Kant*
- *Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated - Confucius*
- *A society that has more justice is a society that needs less charity - Ralph Nader*

MAINS JOT DOWN



GS II: GOVERNANCE

- ➔ Recent data and reports have highlighted a **serious accountability gap in police functioning**, particularly regarding excessive use of force, custodial violence and illegal detention.
- ➔ **<1%** of cases registered against police personnel for offences such as **custodial death, torture, illegal detention and extortion** resulted in convictions over the past five years.
- ➔ In comparison, the conviction rate for **general IPC/BNS crimes was around 50%**, while **Special and Local Laws (SLL)** recorded around **80%**.
- ➔ **NCRB data reported only 2 civilians injured in police operations in 2024**, despite widespread reports of injuries during farmers' protests.
- ➔ In **2020**, NCRB recorded only **76 civilian injuries**, while the UN Human Rights Office reported **200+ injuries in Delhi** during the anti-CAA protests.



GS III: CYBER SECURITY

- ➔ Digital Arrest Scam
- ➔ **Supreme Court intervention:** On **August 4, 2026**, the Supreme Court directed measures such as **temporary debit holds on mule accounts, e-Zero FIRs, State cybercrime coordination centres and a victim compensation framework**.
- ➔ **Declining complaints:** National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal complaints fell from **1.23 lakh (2024) to 58,249 (2025)**



GS II: EDUCATION

- ➔ Medical Education in India
 - » **Rapid expansion:** MBBS seats have nearly **tripled in 12 years**; private institutions now account for **over 50% of seats**, with **79% of new seats** this year coming from the private sector.
 - » **Affordability paradox:** A government MBBS course may cost **<₹5 lakh**, while private education can cost **10× more**, creating barriers for lower-income students.
 - » **Regional imbalance:** Private colleges are concentrated in **urban and prosperous States**, while rural and underserved areas continue to face shortages of doctors.



GS III: SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- ➔ The **World Bank's World Development Report (WDR) 2026** highlights **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** as a transformative technology for accelerating inclusive growth in developing countries. It notes that only **4.5% of jobs** in developing countries face a high risk of AI-driven automation, while around **16.2% of jobs could experience productivity gains** through AI, suggesting that AI may create greater opportunities for **augmentation and productivity enhancement** than outright job displacement.
- ➔ Scientists have developed **light-activated nanorobots** for targeted breast cancer treatment. These programmable nanoscale devices, typically **50–100 nm** in size, respond to external stimuli such as **near-infrared light or magnetic fields** and internal stimuli like **pH or enzymes**. They have potential applications in **targeted cancer therapy, controlled drug delivery, biosensing, minimally invasive surgery and tissue repair**.

- ➔ Researchers have genetically engineered **lettuce and tobacco plants to produce myoglobin**, potentially enhancing the **nutritional value, colour and flavour** of plant-based meat.
- ➔ Myoglobin is an oxygen-storing protein naturally found in animal muscles. It gives meat its characteristic **red colour** and contributes to its taste and aroma. Importantly, myoglobin contains **heme iron**, which is more readily absorbed by the human body, making it a potential source of dietary iron in plant-based foods.



GS III: *ECONOMICS*

→ Handloom Sector

- » **Livelihood & inclusion:** Handloom supports 35+ lakh weavers and allied workers, with nearly 72% women, making it important for rural employment and women-led development.
- » **Economic potential:** India can leverage its traditional textiles to tap into the growing global demand for sustainable, authentic and handcrafted products, converting cultural heritage into a creative economy.

- The **MSME Sustainable (Zero Defect, Zero Effect – ZED) Certification Scheme**, launched on **28 April 2022** by the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MoMSME)**, aims to promote high-quality manufacturing with minimal environmental impact. It encourages MSMEs to achieve “**Zero Defect**” in product quality and “**Zero Effect**” on the environment, thereby improving competitiveness, resource efficiency and sustainability. The scheme provides **Bronze, Silver and Gold** certification levels based on progressively higher standards.



GS III: *DISASTER MANAGEMENT*

- A **44-year study (1981–2024)** identified **Ahilyanagar, Beed, Dharashiv, Sangli and Solapur** as Maharashtra’s major **flash-drought hotspots**, highlighting the State’s growing vulnerability to rapid-onset droughts.



GS III: *ENVIRONMENT*

- Extreme heat and unprecedented wildfires in **France and Spain** in 2026 highlight the growing link between **climate change, extreme weather and disaster vulnerability**.
- **France:** Over **91,000 hectares** had already been burnt by early August 2026, surpassing the previous record of **75,566 hectares (1989)**.
- **Spain:** Around **1.9 lakh hectares** have reportedly been burnt since June 2026.
- **Displacement:** More than **2.2 lakh people** were temporarily relocated due to the Bordeaux-region wildfire.
- **Climate link:** Europe is the **fastest-warming continent outside the Arctic**, increasing heat and wildfire risks.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

GREEDFLATION:

- A situation where firms are alleged to raise prices excessively to increase profit margins during inflationary periods.

SECULAR STAGNATION

- It is a long economic phase with little or no growth. It happens when total demand stays too low for a long time. People and businesses spend less, and investments drop.

RESOURCE CURSE:

- Paradox where countries rich in natural resources

may experience weak development, corruption or poor institutions.

TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

- It occurs when people use a shared, public resource for personal gain. Because no one owns the resource, individuals take as much as they want. This overuse ruins or empties the resource for everyone.

PIGOUVIAN TAX

- It is a fee placed on activities that hurt society, like pollution. It makes the person or business causing the harm pay for the damage. This helps match the private cost with the true social cost.