



FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



> ECI: WATCHING THE WATCHDOGS

> PRESSURE GROUPS

> WOMAN SAFETY IN INDIA

21st SEPTEMBER, 2026 - 27th SEPTEMBER, 2026

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**FIRST ATTEMPT TOPPERS FROM
OUR PRELIMS CUM MAINS BATCH**

KASTURI SHA
AIR 68

MANJIMA P
AIR 235

FABI RASHEED
AIR 71

SWATHI S BABU
AIR 522

OORMILA J S
AIR 561

WOMEN IN POWER

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PRESSURE GROUPS

Syllabus: GS II - Polity

PYQ MAPPING

Q) What are environmental pressure groups? Discuss their role in raising awareness, influencing policies and advocating for environmental protection in India. (2025)

Q) Pressure groups play a vital role in influencing public policy-making in India. Explain how the business associations contribute to public policies. (2021)

Q) Pressure group politics is sometimes seen as the informal face of politics. With regards to the above, assess the structure and functioning of pressure groups in India. (2013)

WHY IN NEWS

The **Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)** is organising a 'Jail Bharo Andolan' at Mumbai's Shivaji Park against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

INTRODUCTION

Pressure groups are organised groups that seek to influence public policy without directly seeking political power, thereby acting as a link between citizens and the government. In India's diverse democracy, they represent interests ranging from farmers and workers to businesses and civil society, making them an important channel of **participatory democracy**.

ABOUT PRESSURE GROUPS

➔ **Meaning:** Pressure groups are organised groups that seek to **influence government policies and decisions without seeking to directly capture political power or form the government**. They act as intermediaries between citizens and the state.

➔ **Major types in India:**

- **Business groups:** FICCI, CII and other industry associations.
- **Trade unions:** Organisations representing workers' interests.
- **Peasant/farmer groups:** Represent agricultural and rural interests.
- **Professional associations:** Doctors, lawyers,

teachers and other professional bodies.

- **Student organisations:** Represent educational and youth-related interests.
- **Caste, religious and community associations:** Mobilise around identity-based interests.

IMPORTANCE

☀ **Strengthening democratic participation:** Pressure groups provide citizens with channels of participation **beyond periodic elections**.

- **Example:** India Against Corruption (Jan Lokpal) movement mobilized citizens to demand institutional accountability.

☀ **Representation of diverse interest:** Pressure groups give organised representation to **workers, farmers, businesses, professionals, students, women and marginalised communities**.

- **Example:** Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) voices the concerns of farmers.

☀ **Influencing public policy:** They provide policymakers with **specialised knowledge, technical expertise and information** about the likely impact of policies on particular groups.

- **Example:** Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) submit detailed policy recommendations and economic impact assessments to ministries.

☀ **Check on government power:** They can monitor government actions, expose failures, demand greater accountability, and can complement the role of opposition parties in scrutinising governments.

- **Example:** Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE) challenge arbitrary government clearances in courts.

☀ **Contribution to legislation:** Public consultation and stakeholder participation can improve the quality and legitimacy of legislation.

- **Examples:** Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) played an important role in the movement for the Right to Information (RTI)

PRESSURE GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Basis	Pressure Groups	Political Parties
Objective	Seek to influence government policy	Seek to capture and exercise political power
Scope	Usually focused on specific or sectional interests	Usually address a broad range of public issues
Government	Remain outside formal government	May form and run the government
Methods	Lobbying, advocacy, protests, petitions, litigation	Elections, legislative action, campaigns and government formation
Ideology	Need not have a comprehensive ideology	Usually have an identifiable political programme/ideology

The distinction is not absolute: pressure groups and political parties can interact, cooperate or conflict, and some movements have eventually transformed into political organisations. For example, AAP emerged from the India Against Corruption movement.

CHALLENGES

- ▼ **Narrow sectional interests:** Pressure groups may prioritise the interests of their members over the broader public interest.
- ▼ **Lack of transparency:** Informal lobbying and political influence can make it difficult to identify who influenced a policy and in whose interest.
- ▼ **Political affiliation:** Close links with political parties may compromise the autonomy and independent functioning of pressure groups.
- ▼ **Money power:** Financially powerful groups may exercise greater influence through lobbying, campaign support and access to decision-makers.
- ▼ **Agitational politics:** Strikes, demonstrations and bandhs may highlight grievances but can also disrupt public life and economic activities.
- ▼ **Fragmentation:** The proliferation of caste, religious, regional and occupational pressure groups can make it difficult to build broad-based consensus.

channels for marginalised and less-organised groups so that policymaking is not dominated by financially powerful interests.

- * **Promote evidence-based advocacy:** Encourage pressure groups to use research, data, expert opinion and constructive policy proposals rather than disruptive forms of mobilisation.
- * **Strengthen parliamentary scrutiny:** Parliamentary committees should provide structured forums to examine stakeholder views and expert evidence before important policies are finalised.

CONCLUSION

Pressure groups can deepen democracy by providing expertise, representing diverse interests and holding governments accountable. Strengthening **transparent consultation, and inclusive participation** can ensure that organised interests contribute to policymaking while remaining aligned with constitutional and public interests.

WAY FORWARD

- * **Institutionalise stakeholder consultation:** Strengthen systematic and transparent consultation with affected groups before major policies and legislation are finalised.
- * **Ensure transparency in lobbying:** Establish clear norms for interactions between pressure groups, legislators, ministers and bureaucrats to improve accountability.
- * **Ensure a level playing field:** Provide accessible

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Unequal access to political power and resources can make pressure-group politics a source of democratic inequality. Critically examine. **(10 marks, 150 words)**

WOMAN SAFETY IN INDIA

Syllabus: GS I - Role of women and women's organization

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Violence against women occurs throughout the life cycle from cradle to grave. Discuss. **(2022)**

Q) Though women in post-Independent India have excelled in various fields, the social attitude towards women and the feminist movement has been patriarchal. Apart from women education and women empowerment schemes, what interventions can help change this milieu? **(2021)**

Q) Domestic abuse is one among many other social challenges posed by the conditions created by the pandemic. Discuss. **(2020)**

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

WHY IN NEWS

A **17-year-old girl** was allegedly gang-raped in Delhi's Aastha Kunj Park on **21 September 2026**, triggering student protests. The **Supreme Court** took suo motu cognizance of the reported rise in crimes against women and children in Delhi-NCR and directed authorities to conduct a **preliminary safety audit within four weeks**.

INTRODUCTION

Women's safety is integral to **dignity, equality and freedom of participation** in social, economic and public life. The latest government-cited **NFHS-5** data show that **29.3% of ever-married women aged 18–49 have experienced spousal violence**, highlighting that women's insecurity is not confined to public spaces but is also deeply rooted in the private sphere.

STATUS OF WOMEN'S SAFETY IN INDIA

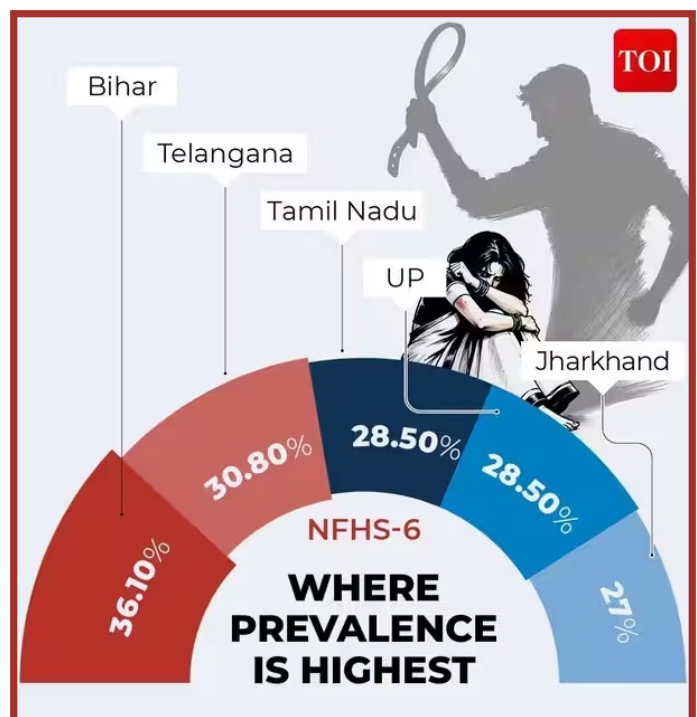
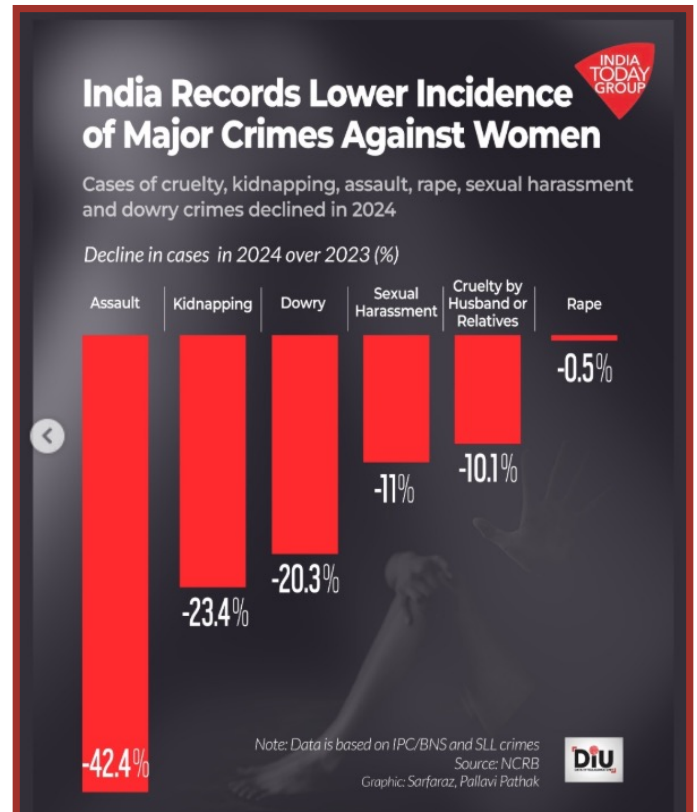
➔ NCRB's Crime in India Report 2024:

- India recorded **4,41,534** registered cases of crimes against women in 2024.
- This marks a slight decline of **1.5%** compared to 2023 (which saw 4,48,211 cases)
- Rape accounted for **29,536** registered cases in 2024, which translates to an average of over **80 cases per day**

➔ National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6):

- 22.3% of ever-married women** in India aged 18 to 49 reported experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional **violence from a spouse**.

- 2.7% of women** reported experiencing physical violence during pregnancy.



LEGAL SAFEGUARDS

Constitutional safeguards:

- o **Article 14** – Equality before law.
- o **Article 15(1)** – Prohibits discrimination on grounds including sex.
- o **Article 21** – Protection of life and personal liberty.
- o **Article 39(a)** – Equal right to adequate means of livelihood.
- o **Article 39(d)** – Equal pay for equal work.
- o **Article 42** – Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023:

- o Came into force on **1 July 2024** and consolidates offences against women and children under **Chapter V**.
- o Contains provisions concerning **rape, sexual harassment, assault, stalking, voyeurism, dowry death, cruelty and other offences**.

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:

- o Provides protection against domestic violence and establishes mechanisms for relief and protection of women.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013:

- o Requires **Internal Complaints Committees** and provides for **Local Committees** for specified cases.

Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:

- o Prohibits the giving and taking of dowry.

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012:

- o Provides a specialised legal framework against sexual assault, sexual harassment and exploitation of children.

National Commission for Women Act, 1990:

- o Provides the statutory basis for the **National Commission for Women (NCW)**.

Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs):

- o Established for expeditious disposal of **rape and POCSO cases**.
- o As per the Department of Justice dashboard, **779 FTSCs, including exclusive POCSO courts, were functional**, with over **4.02 lakh cumulative disposals**

Sambal component addressing safety and security and **Samarthya component** focusing on empowerment.

 **One Stop Centres (OSC):** Launched in **2015**, OSCs provide **medical, legal, police, shelter and psychological support** to women survivors under one roof.

 **Women Helpline – 181:** Provides **24x7 assistance** and connects women with services.

 **Zero FIR and e-FIR:** These mechanisms facilitate **easier and more accessible reporting of offences**.

 **Nirbhaya Fund:** Provides financial support for **projects and initiatives aimed at women's safety**.

 **SHe-Box (Sexual Harassment electronic Box):** A centralized portal by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development** allowing women from both the government and private sectors to directly lodge complaints of **workplace sexual harassment**.

CHALLENGES

▼ **Implementation Gap:** Strong laws do not automatically ensure effective protection without **consistent enforcement and institutional accountability**.

▼ **Under-reporting:** **Fear, stigma, economic dependence and lack of trust** can discourage women from reporting crimes.

▼ **Justice Delays:** **Judicial pendency** can weaken deterrence and prolong survivors' trauma despite mechanisms such as Fast Track Special Courts.

▼ **Police Capacity Constraints:** Shortages in **personnel, training, forensic infrastructure and gender-sensitive investigation** can affect the quality of response.

▼ **Uneven State Capacity:** Differences in institutional capacity across States can lead to **uneven implementation**, as police and public order are State subjects.

▼ **Weak Victim-Support Systems:** Survivors often require sustained **legal, psychological, medical and economic support** beyond immediate intervention.

▼ **Unsafe Public and Digital Spaces:** Poor lighting, transport gaps and isolated locations, along with **cyberstalking, online harassment and other digital abuse**, can restrict women's safety and mobility.

▼ **Social and Intersectional Barriers:** **Patriarchal attitudes, social stigma and intersectional vulnerabilities** can create additional barriers to justice, particularly for economically weaker, rural, tribal and marginalised women.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

 **Mission Shakti:** An umbrella programme focused on **women's safety, security and empowerment**, with

WAY FORWARD

- * **Shift from Reaction to Prevention:** Address **gender discrimination, harmful social norms and violence** through awareness, community engagement and preventive interventions.
 - o **Example:** 24/7 community support system by Kudumbashree – **Snehitha Gender Help Desk**
- * **Strengthen Policing and Investigation:** Increase **women's representation in policing**, specialised training, forensic capacity, digital-evidence capabilities and time-bound investigation.
- * **Ensure Speedy Justice:** Reduce judicial pendency by strengthening **Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)**, prosecutors, judges and victim-support systems.
- * **Create Safer Public Spaces:** Improve **street lighting, public transport, CCTV in hotspots, gender-sensitive urban planning and last-mile connectivity**.
 - o **Example:** **The Safe City Project** implemented under the Nirbhaya Fund across eight major metropolitan cities.
- * **Strengthen Survivor-Centric Support:** Improve **One Stop Centres, legal aid, counselling, shelter and rehabilitation**, while protecting survivors from secondary victimisation.
- * **Adopt a Whole-of-Society Approach:** Promote **legal awareness, cyber-safety, economic empowerment and coordinated action** involving government, police, judiciary, communities, workplaces and civil society.

CONCLUSION

Women's safety requires moving beyond protection after violence towards **prevention, accessible justice, safer public spaces and transformation of social norms**. As of **June 2026, 991 One Stop Centres were operational and had assisted over 15.20 lakh women**, demonstrating the expanding institutional response that must now be matched by effective implementation and social change.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) "Women's safety is not merely a law-and-order issue but a reflection of deeper social and structural inequalities." Discuss. **(10 marks, 150 words)**

ECI: WATCHING THE WATCHDOGS

Syllabus: GS II - Constitutional Bodies.

PYQ MAPPING

Q) Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (2022)

Q) In the light of recent controversies regarding the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), what are the challenges before the Election Commission of India in ensuring the trustworthiness of elections in India? (2018)

SHORT TAKES

➤ Model Code of Conduct (MCC)

- A set of guidelines issued by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** to regulate the behavior of political parties, candidates, and the ruling government during election seasons.
- MCC **does not have direct statutory backing.**

WHY IN NEWS

ECI is in the news over reports of Election Commissioners **Sukhbir Singh Sandhu** and **Vivek Joshi** flagging procedural decisions taken without their knowledge, including those related to **SIR** and **IT file routing**.

INTRODUCTION

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, a constitutional body under **Article 324**, has the mandate of supervising elections to Parliament, State Legislatures and the offices of the President and Vice-President. The scale of this responsibility was evident in the **2024 Lok Sabha elections**, where nearly **98 crore electors** were registered and about **64.6 crore voters** cast their votes.

CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

- ➔ **Article 324:** Vests the ECI with the **superintendence, direction and control** of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.
- ➔ **Article 325:** Provides for **one general electoral roll** for every territorial constituency and prohibits exclusion on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.
- ➔ **Article 326:** Establishes **adult suffrage** for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- ➔ **Article 327:** Gives Parliament the power to make laws relating to elections.

- ➔ **Article 328:** Gives State Legislatures power to make provisions concerning elections to their respective legislatures, subject to parliamentary law.
- ➔ **Article 329:** Restricts judicial interference in electoral matters except through the constitutionally prescribed electoral-petition mechanism.
- ➔ **Composition:** Article 324 provides for a **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and **such number of other Election Commissioners as the President may determine.**
- ➔ **Removal protection:** The CEC enjoys protection similar to that of a Supreme Court judge; other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation.

RECENT ISSUES

- 🔍 **ECI Appointment Law Framework:**
 - The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023**, replaces the **Chief Justice of India** with a **Union Cabinet Minister** on the selection panel, establishing a **2:1** government-to-opposition majority.
 - In September 2026, a two-judge Supreme Court bench delivered a split verdict, **leaving the matter for the Chief Justice of India to decide.**
- 🔍 **Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Authority:**
 - The ECI's **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls has generated debate over voter inclusion, deletion of names and verification requirements.
 - The Supreme Court's May 2026 ruling clarified that **Article 324** grants the ECI constitutional authority over electoral roll preparation and maintenance, while **Article 327** empowers Parliament to legislate on the matter.
- 🔍 **Internal Commission Disagreements:**
 - Media reports highlighted that Election Commissioners **Sukhbir Singh Sandhu** and **Vivek Joshi** recorded objections on multiple occasions over administrative decisions and orders allegedly issued without their prior knowledge or approval.
- 🔍 **Political Objections:**
 - Opposition parties have formally raised political grievances regarding voter roll updates, the SIR

mechanism, and the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct.

IMPORTANCE OF ECI

- ☀️ **Guardian of electoral democracy:** Provides the institutional framework for citizens to exercise their **right to choose representatives**.
- ☀️ **Ensures level playing field:** Administers **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** to regulate the behavior of political parties and candidates during elections.
- ☀️ **Electoral roll management:** It prepares and maintains electoral rolls, making accurate voter registration essential for **universal and meaningful participation**.
- ☀️ **Regulates the electoral process:**
 - o Election scheduling
 - o Nomination process
 - o Polling
 - o Counting
 - o Declaration of results
 - o Election expenditure monitoring
- ☀️ **Quasi-judicial functions:** Advisory jurisdiction regarding the **disqualification of MPs and MLAs** in certain circumstances.
- ☀️ **Political-party regulation:** It registers political parties and handles recognition and election symbol matters.
- ☀️ **Promotes voter participation:** Initiatives such as **SVEEP** seek to increase voter awareness and participation.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

- ⚡️ **Appointment and institutional independence:** Critics argue that the current appointment mechanism gives the executive significant influence over the selection of Election Commissioners.
- ⚡️ **Perception of impartiality:** Even where allegations are not judicially established, perceptions of selective enforcement can affect **public trust** in the institution.
- ⚡️ **Electoral-roll controversies:** Large-scale voter-roll revisions create a difficult balance between preventing bogus/duplicate entries, and ensuring that genuine voters are not excluded.
- ⚡️ **Internal institutional disagreements:** Reported differences among Election Commissioners have raised questions about the Commission's collective decision-making and transparency.
- ⚡️ **Model Code of Conduct:** It largely lacks the comprehensive statutory character of ordinary legislation, which creates questions about **enforcement consistency and available sanctions**.

- ⚡️ **Money/ power in elections:** Rising campaign expenditure and the increasing role of money in elections pose challenges to maintaining a genuinely **level electoral playing field**.
- ⚡️ **Criminalisation and misinformation:** Criminalisation of politics, misinformation, deepfakes, AI-generated political content and social-media manipulation create new challenges for election management.
- ⚡️ **Institutional capacity:** Managing elections across India's huge electorate requires substantial human, technological and administrative capacity.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳️ **Appointment reforms:** Review the composition of the selection committee under the 2023 Act to address concerns over executive dominance.
- ✳️ **Transparent functioning:** Ensure documented decision-making procedures and clear communication of important institutional decisions.
- ✳️ **Voter protection:** Follow the safeguards under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, including claims, objections, and appeals during electoral-roll revision.
- ✳️ **Electoral accountability:** Strengthen disclosure of political funding and expenditure, and improve enforcement of existing electoral regulations.
- ✳️ **Digital election security:** Strengthen monitoring of AI-generated misinformation, deepfakes and digital manipulation during elections.

CONCLUSION

As the constitutional **watchdog of electoral democracy**, the ECI's independence, impartiality, and credibility are essential for maintaining public confidence in elections. Strengthening transparency, institutional accountability and safeguards for voter inclusion can ensure that the watchdog itself remains worthy of public trust.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) "Independence of the Election Commission is essential for ensuring free and fair elections." Examine the challenges to its institutional autonomy and suggest measures to strengthen it. **(10 marks, 150 words)**

12 YEARS OF MAKE IN INDIA: HITS AND MISSES

Syllabus: GS III - Indian Economy

PYQ Mapping

Q) “Account for the failure of the manufacturing sector in achieving the goal of labour-intensive exports. Suggest measures for more labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive exports. (2017)

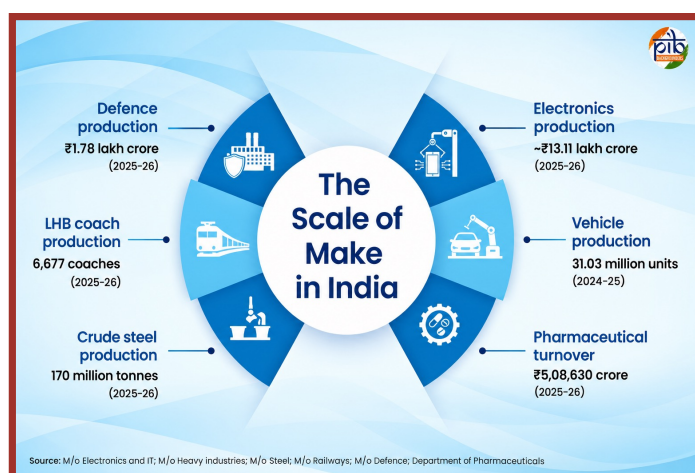
Why in the News?

Make in India completed **12 years in September 2026**, prompting an assessment of its achievements in sectors such as electronics and defence, as well as its limited impact on manufacturing share, employment and global exports.

Introduction

Launched in **2014**, Make in India aimed to transform India into a global manufacturing hub by improving investment, infrastructure, innovation and ease of doing business. After 12 years, it has produced strong sector-specific gains, but broader structural transformation of Indian manufacturing remains incomplete.

Scale of Make in India



Hits of Make in India

🇮🇳 Electronics manufacturing:

- Electronics production increased from about **₹1.9 lakh crore in 2014–15 to ₹13.11 lakh crore in 2025–26**, while electronics exports reached around **₹4.24 lakh crore**, making electronics one of India's strongest manufacturing success stories.

🇮🇳 Mobile-phone manufacturing:

- Production rose sharply from around **₹18,900 crore in 2014–15 to ₹6.3 lakh crore in 2025–26**, strengthening India's position as a major global mobile-phone manufacturing hub.

🇮🇳 PLI-led investment and production:

- Production Linked Incentive schemes have attracted around **₹2.6 lakh crore investment**, generated approximately **₹23.8 lakh crore production/sales**, and supported over **₹15.5 lakh crore exports** across beneficiary sectors.

🇮🇳 Employment generation:

- PLI-supported sectors have generated around **14.6 lakh jobs**, particularly in electronics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, solar modules and specialty steel.

🇮🇳 Defence indigenisation:

- Domestic defence production increased from around **₹46,000 crore to nearly ₹1.78 lakh crore**, supporting import substitution and greater **strategic autonomy**.

🇮🇳 Diversification into strategic industries:

- India has developed or expanded capabilities in **semiconductors, solar modules, pharmaceuticals, specialty steel, automobiles and advanced electronics**, reducing excessive dependence on traditional manufacturing segments.

🇮🇳 Recent manufacturing momentum:

- Manufacturing **GVA and IIP** have recorded significant expansion in the post-pandemic period, indicating strengthening industrial activity.

🇮🇳 Industrial ecosystem and infrastructure:

- Initiatives such as **PM GatiShakti, National Logistics Policy, industrial corridors, National Single Window System and India Semiconductor Mission** are improving logistics, investment facilitation and industrial infrastructure.

Misses of Make in India

➡️ Low manufacturing share:

- Manufacturing continues to contribute only around **15–16% of GVA**, indicating limited structural transformation from agriculture and

low-productivity services towards manufacturing.

→ Limited employment generation:

- o Manufacturing accounts for only around **12% of total employment**, while labour-intensive sectors such as **textiles, footwear, leather and furniture** have not expanded sufficiently to absorb India's large workforce.

→ Weak export performance:

- o India's share in **global merchandise exports remains relatively low at around 1.7%**, indicating limited integration into global manufacturing value chains.

→ Weak private investment:

- o Despite higher public capital expenditure and incentives such as **PLI**, private investment has not yet shown a sufficiently broad-based and sustained recovery.

→ Moderate capacity utilisation:

- o Existing industrial capacity is not fully utilised in several sectors, reducing the incentive for firms to undertake large-scale capacity expansion.

→ Concentration of PLI gains:

- o PLI investment and production have been concentrated in sectors such as **electronics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, solar modules and specialty steel**, while many labour-intensive industries remain relatively weak.

→ Low domestic value addition:

- o Several manufacturing sectors continue to depend heavily on imported **components, advanced machinery, semiconductor equipment and specialised materials**, limiting the domestic value captured from production.

→ Weak MSME integration:

- o MSMEs face constraints in **access to credit, technology, quality certification, scale and export competitiveness**, limiting their participation in global value chains.

→ Low R&D and innovation:

- o Insufficient expenditure on **R&D, patents, advanced technologies and product design** makes it difficult to move from low-value assembly towards high-value manufacturing.

Σ Infrastructure and logistics constraints:

- o Although connectivity has improved, **logistics costs, power reliability, land availability and regulatory compliance** continue to affect the competitiveness of manufacturing firms, particularly MSMEs.

Why Has the Impact Been Patchy?

⚙ High logistics and compliance costs:

- o High transportation, warehousing and regulatory-compliance costs increase the cost of production, particularly affecting **MSMEs and export-oriented firms**.

⚙ Skill gaps:

- o The mismatch between **industry requirements and available job-ready workers** reduces labour productivity, especially in technical, engineering and vocational occupations.

⚙ Low MSME productivity:

- o Limited access to **technology, formal credit, skilled workers and quality certification** prevents MSMEs from scaling up and becoming deeper suppliers to large manufacturing firms.

⚙ Limited global value-chain integration:

- o India's participation in **global manufacturing value chains remains relatively limited** compared with major East Asian economies, restricting opportunities for export-oriented production and technology transfer.

⚙ Policy and tariff uncertainty:

- o Frequent changes in **tariffs, taxation, customs procedures and regulations** can increase uncertainty and discourage firms from making long-term manufacturing investments.

Way Forward

✧ Deepen domestic value addition:

- o Move beyond final assembly by promoting domestic production of **components, intermediate goods, machinery and advanced materials**.

✧ Complement PLI with structural reforms:

- o PLI should be supported by **reliable power, efficient logistics, stable regulations, skilled labour and competitive financing** to create a sustainable manufacturing ecosystem.

✧ Promote labour-intensive manufacturing:

- o Give greater support to **textiles, footwear, food processing, furniture and leather** to generate large-scale employment.

✧ Integrate MSMEs into supply chains:

- o Connect MSMEs with large manufacturers through **technology transfer, quality certification, digitalisation, skill development and easier access to formal credit**.

✦ **Shift from “Make in India” to “Design and Innovate in India”:**

- o Increase investment in **R&D, industrial design, robotics, semiconductors and advanced manufacturing technologies** to move towards higher-value production.

✦ **Measure outcomes, not merely announcements:**

- o Industrial policies should be assessed through measurable indicators such as **employment, exports, productivity, domestic value addition, R&D intensity and global market share.**

✦ **Develop integrated manufacturing clusters:**

- o Create **plug-and-play industrial clusters** connecting ports, logistics infrastructure, industrial parks, research institutions, suppliers and skilled workers.

Conclusion

Make in India has delivered notable success in electronics, mobile manufacturing, defence and several PLI-supported sectors. However, its next phase must focus on deeper value addition, employment generation, innovation and global competitiveness to convert sectoral gains into broad-based industrial transformation.

Sample Question

Q) After twelve years, Make in India presents significant sectoral successes but limited structural transformation of the Indian economy.” Discuss the achievements and shortcomings of the initiative and suggest measures for making India a globally competitive manufacturing hub. **(10 marks)**

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

INDIA'S SOLAR RISE: FROM 3 GW TO 162 GW

Why in News

India's installed solar capacity has risen from about **3 GW in 2014 to around 162 GW by June 2026**, making solar one of the main pillars of India's clean-energy transition.

Introduction

- ♦ India has witnessed a rapid expansion of solar power over the last decade through policy support, falling tariffs, large-scale solar parks, rooftop systems and domestic manufacturing. Solar energy is now central to India's energy security, climate commitments and economic growth.

Major Achievements

- ♦ **Rapid capacity expansion**
 - o Solar capacity increased from nearly **3 GW in 2014 to 162.15 GW by June 2026**.
 - o India has emerged as one of the world's largest solar markets.
- ♦ **Record renewable-energy additions**
 - o India added about **44.61 GW of solar capacity in FY 2025–26**, nearly double the previous year's addition.
 - o Total non-fossil fuel capacity reached about **283 GW**.
- ♦ **Expansion across states**
 - o Large solar capacities are concentrated in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.
 - o Major projects include **Bhadla Solar Park, Pavagada Solar Park and Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Park**.

♦ Declining solar tariffs

- o Competitive bidding reduced solar tariffs from around **₹18/unit in 2010 to nearly ₹2.44/unit in 2017**.
- o This made utility-scale solar among the cheapest sources of new electricity.

♦ Strengthening energy security

- o Solar reduces dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- o It diversifies India's electricity mix and supports long-term energy independence.

Challenges

- ♦ Intermittency of solar generation.
- ♦ Need for battery storage and grid balancing.
- ♦ Land acquisition and ecological concerns.
- ♦ Import dependence for some solar components.
- ♦ Transmission constraints in renewable-rich regions.

Way Forward

- ♦ Expand battery storage and pumped hydro.
- ♦ Strengthen domestic solar manufacturing.
- ♦ Develop smart grids and interstate transmission.
- ♦ Promote rooftop and decentralised solar.
- ♦ Improve recycling of solar panels and batteries.

Conclusion

India's solar expansion represents one of the most significant transformations in its energy sector. Sustaining this momentum will require strong storage, grid infrastructure, domestic manufacturing and decentralised renewable-energy systems.

POLICY ARCHITECTURE BEHIND INDIA'S SOLAR EXPANSION

Why in News

India's rapid solar growth has been enabled by a combination of national missions, competitive bidding, renewable purchase obligations, manufacturing incentives and solar-park infrastructure.

Introduction

- ♦ India's solar success is not the result of a single scheme but of a **coordinated policy ecosystem**. Long-term targets, market-based tariff discovery, infrastructure support and manufacturing incentives have together created favourable conditions for solar investment.

Key Policy Pillars

◆ National Solar Mission

- o Launched in **2010**.
- o Provided the initial long-term vision for scaling solar capacity.
- o Solar targets were later raised substantially as deployment accelerated.

◆ Renewable Purchase Obligations

- o Electricity distribution companies and other obligated entities must purchase a specified share of electricity from renewable sources.
- o This creates assured demand for renewable power.

◆ Competitive bidding

- o Reverse auctions helped sharply reduce solar tariffs.
- o Greater competition improved efficiency and lowered electricity costs.

◆ Solar Parks Scheme

- o Provides developers with pre-arranged land and common infrastructure.
- o As of February 2026, **54 solar parks with around 39,188 MW sanctioned capacity** had been approved.

◆ Green Energy Corridors

- o Developed to evacuate renewable power from generation-rich regions to demand centres.
- o Strengthens interstate transmission and renewable-grid integration.

◆ PLI Scheme for Solar Modules

- o Production Linked Incentive support aims to

develop domestic solar PV manufacturing.

- o It reduces import dependence and improves supply-chain resilience.

◆ ALMM framework

- o Approved List of Models and Manufacturers ensures quality standards in solar modules used in eligible projects.
- o It also supports domestic manufacturing.

Why This Policy Mix Matters

- ◆ Creates demand through RPOs.
- ◆ Reduces costs through competitive bidding.
- ◆ Provides land and connectivity through solar parks.
- ◆ Expands domestic capacity through PLI and ALMM.
- ◆ Improves evacuation through Green Energy Corridors.

Challenges

- ◆ Policy uncertainty across states.
- ◆ Financial stress of DISCOMs.
- ◆ Delays in transmission projects.
- ◆ Dependence on imported technology and raw materials.
- ◆ Land and environmental conflicts.

Conclusion

India's solar expansion shows that renewable-energy growth requires an integrated policy framework covering **demand, finance, infrastructure, manufacturing and transmission**. Policy stability and stronger state-level implementation will be essential for the next phase of growth.

DEMOCRATISING SOLAR ENERGY: ROOFTOPS, FARMS AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Why in News

- ◆ India is expanding solar beyond large power plants through **PM Surya Ghar, PM-KUSUM and international initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance**.

Introduction

- ◆ India's solar transition is increasingly moving from large utility-scale projects towards households, farmers and decentralised systems. This broadens access to clean energy while improving energy security, farmer income and citizen participation.

Solar for Households

PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana

- ◆ Launched in **2024**.
- ◆ Promotes rooftop solar installations for households.
- ◆ Over **43 lakh households** had reportedly been solarised by June 2026.
- ◆ Helps households reduce electricity bills and generate their own power.

Solar for Agriculture

PM-KUSUM

- ◆ Promotes solar pumps and decentralised solar power generation.
- ◆ Nearly **11.49 lakh off-grid solar pumps** have been installed for agricultural use.
- ◆ More than **15.89 lakh agricultural pumps** are covered under feeder-level solarisation.
- ◆ Helps reduce diesel use and improve daytime irrigation.

Floating Solar: PM-Surya Sarovar Yojana

- ◆ Aims to develop around **5,000 MW of floating solar capacity**.
- ◆ Uses reservoirs and inland water bodies, reducing pressure on scarce land.
- ◆ Can also be integrated with energy-storage systems.

Global Leadership

International Solar Alliance

- ◆ Co-founded by India and France in 2015.
- ◆ Promotes solar cooperation, technology transfer and capacity building across countries.

One Sun One World One Grid

- ◆ Envisions interconnected renewable-energy grids across regions.

- ◆ Aims to improve cross-border electricity trade and energy security.

Benefits of Distributed Solar

- ◆ Reduces transmission losses.
- ◆ Lowers electricity expenditure.
- ◆ Creates rural employment.
- ◆ Supports farmers' income.
- ◆ Reduces diesel dependence.
- ◆ Improves access in remote regions.

Challenges

- ◆ High upfront costs.
- ◆ Lack of awareness and maintenance support.
- ◆ Need for easier credit and financing.
- ◆ Grid integration of rooftop solar.
- ◆ Variable implementation among states.

Conclusion

- ◆ The next phase of India's solar transition must combine **utility-scale projects with decentralised solar, storage and international cooperation**. This can make the transition more inclusive, resilient and economically beneficial.

BEYOND VERDICTS: KEY JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS

Elected Office Is Subject to Rule of Law

- ◆ The Supreme Court held that an electoral mandate does not give elected representatives unlimited authority or the right to intimidate others.
- ◆ Public representatives are expected to strengthen institutions and cannot assume the functions of the police, administration or courts.
- ◆ The Court stressed that misuse of political influence can erode public confidence in democratic institutions and the rule of law. It also underlined that grievances, including those against medical professionals, must be addressed only through lawful procedures rather than coercion or vigilantism.

Childlessness Cannot Be Treated as Matrimonial Cruelty

- ◆ The Madras High Court held that **marriage cannot be reduced to the sole purpose of procreation** and that inability to have a child cannot by itself be treated as a matrimonial fault of the wife.
- ◆ The Court noted that the wife's willingness to undergo difficult fertility treatment reflected an effort to preserve the marriage rather than conduct amounting to cruelty. It also stressed that allegations of cruelty must be supported by established facts and cannot rest merely on unproven claims. The judgment reinforces the values of **dignity, equality, reproductive autonomy and fairness within marriage**.

Protection of Medical Professionals and Rule of Law

- ◆ The Supreme Court held that **violence or intimidation against doctors cannot be tolerated**, as medical professionals need a safe environment to exercise independent judgment, especially during emergencies.
- ◆ The Court stressed that patients and families have every right to question treatment, allege negligence and seek legal remedies, but **grievances cannot justify threats, coercion or assault**. It observed that attacks on doctors weaken public healthcare by creating fear, affecting professional decision-making and eroding trust in institutions. The judgment also underlined that elected representatives carry a **higher duty to uphold the law rather than misuse influence or power**.

Balancing Religious Sentiments and Public Health in Firecracker Regulation

- ◆ The Supreme Court indicated that neither a **complete ban nor unrestricted use of firecrackers** is desirable, and instead favoured a calibrated approach balancing cultural sentiments with public health concerns.
- ◆ It stressed that excessive firecracker use can seriously affect **children, the elderly, the sick, air quality and noise levels**, while limited use may be allowed subject to time and safety restrictions. The Court also supported regulated use of improved or "green" firecrackers based on scientific testing and emission standards. The case reflects the constitutional principle of balancing **individual and cultural freedoms with the right to health and a clean environment**.

Supreme Court Flags Excessive Mark-ups on Cancer Drugs

- ◆ The Supreme Court has raised concern over **huge differences between the price at which medicines are supplied to retailers and the price ultimately paid by patients**, particularly for life-saving cancer drugs. The Court cited an instance where a cancer medicine supplied for around **₹3,000 was sold for nearly ₹27,000**, and questioned why the **16% retailer margin under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013** should not be applied more uniformly.
- ◆ It also flagged the practice of some private hospitals compelling patients to purchase medicines from in-house pharmacies, limiting their ability to seek cheaper alternatives. The issue highlights the need to balance pharmaceutical and hospital viability with **affordability, transparency, patient choice and the right to health under Article 21**, while also protecting public finances under schemes such as Ayushman Bharat.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) You are the **Drug Controller of a State**. A media investigation reveals that several life-saving cancer medicines are being supplied by manufacturers to distributors at relatively low prices but are being sold to patients at **many times the procurement cost**. Some private hospitals also require patients to buy medicines only from their in-house pharmacies, where prices are substantially higher than those available outside. Hospital associations argue that pharmacy margins help subsidise infrastructure, specialist salaries and uncompensated care. Pharmaceutical companies contend that high prices are necessary to recover expenditure on **research, regulatory compliance and innovation**. Patient groups, however, allege profiteering from vulnerable families who have little bargaining power when facing life-threatening illnesses. Your department has the legal power to investigate pricing practices and recommend tighter regulation, but excessive price controls may discourage investment, reduce availability of specialised medicines and generate litigation from industry.

As the Drug Controller

- Identify the ethical issues and stakeholders involved in the case.
- What values should guide your decision-making?
- Examine the conflict between commercial freedom, pharmaceutical innovation and the right to affordable healthcare.
- What course of action would you adopt to ensure affordability without undermining availability and innovation? Justify your answer.
- Suggest institutional reforms to promote transparency and ethical pricing in the pharmaceutical and hospital sectors.

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

- Courage:** On September 30, 2026, Flydubai Captain Smit Machchhar was seriously injured when his co-pilot attacked him mid-flight, yet he managed to open the cockpit door, enabling passengers and crew to restrain the attacker and helping save more than 170 lives.
- Technology Ethics/Creativity:** In 2020, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and BlockWorks built the “Uncensored Library” inside Minecraft, using over 12.5 million blocks and 24 builders from 16 countries. It hosts censored articles from journalists in countries including Egypt, Vietnam, Russia and Saudi Arabia as Minecraft books, allowing players to access information that is otherwise restricted.
- Perseverance:** In 1997, Guo Gangtang’s two-year-old son was abducted, after which Guo spent 24 years travelling more than 500,000 km across China on motorcycles, carrying his son’s photograph and searching for clues. In 2021, DNA testing finally reunited him with his son Guo Xinzen, and his journey also inspired the 2015 film *Lost and Love*.
- Governance Ethics:** IPS officer Dinesh Kumar, while serving in Bongaon, West Bengal, spearheaded “Dashabhuja – Women’s Safety 360°,” a comprehensive initiative addressing women’s safety through patrolling, self-defence training, cyber-awareness, safety audits, emergency response and community participation.
- Presence of Mind:** Tamil Nadu Head Constable M. Velmurugan of Kovilpalayam Police Station clung to the roof of a fleeing SUV for nearly 40 km after suspected gutka smugglers tried to escape during an interception near Coimbatore; the vehicle was eventually stopped and three suspects were arrested.
- Resilience:** B. Abdul Nasar, who lost his father at five and spent 12 years in an orphanage, was inspired by then Thalassery Sub-Collector Amitabh Kant to dream of becoming a collector. Despite working as a hotel cleaner, newspaper distributor and health inspector, he became a Deputy Collector in 2006 and an IAS officer in 2017, eventually serving as Kollam District Collector.
- Dedication:** At 92, Dr Suri Srimathi, a Hyderabad-based gynaecologist, continues to treat patients and perform C-sections after more than six decades in medicine; she has delivered around 2 lakh babies and treated women across three generations.
- Social Justice:** Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh, has over 100 bangle-making factories employing nearly 5 lakh workers. Workers are exposed to furnace temperatures above 1,000°C, toxic fumes containing lead, cadmium and mercury, and injuries from broken glass with 23% of workers reportedly suffering from chronic bronchitis.

MODEL ESSAY

"To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman."

Introduction

- Quote by **Mahatma Gandhi**
- In 2014, ISRO's women scientists, many in sarees with jasmine flowers in their hair, celebrated Mangalyaan's successful maiden Mars orbit-challenged gender stereotypes - women could excel in highly technical and complex scientific missions.

Strength of Women

- **Endurance of Structural Violence:** Women demonstrate resilience while navigating **domestic violence, discrimination and insecurity**. Eg: Iranian women's protests against compulsory hijab laws
- **Leadership:** Women have played major roles in **non-violent movements**. Eg: **Gaura Devi and the women of Reni village** during the **Chipko Movement (1973)**.
- **Financial Management:** Women's **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** have expanded savings and credit access. Eg: **Kudumbashree** in Kerala
- **Crisis Management:** Women leaders have played important roles in **public-health crisis management**. Eg: **K. K. Shailaja**, Kerala's former Health Minister, recognised for the state's response to the **2018 Nipah outbreak**
- **Physical Endurance of Reproduction:** **Pregnancy, labour and childbirth** involve substantial physiological demands and endurance.
- **Technological and Strategic Pioneering:** Women scientists have contributed to India's **strategic and defence technologies**. Eg: **Tessy Thomas**, known as the "Missile Woman of India," served as Project Director for the **Agni-IV missile**.

Historical Construction of the "Female Weakness"

Narrative

- **Reproductive Constraints:** High maternal burdens and limited reproductive healthcare restricted women's mobility and participation in public life.

- **Restricted Access to Education:** Exclusion from formal education created inequalities that were later misrepresented as differences in intellectual ability.
- **The "Angel in the House" Ideal:** Victorian ideals associated respectable femininity with domesticity, delicacy and physical restraint.
- **Medicalisation of Women's Behaviour:** Historical medical concepts sometimes pathologised women's emotional or behavioural responses. Eg: **"Hysteria"**, widely used in 19th-century medicine
- **Religious and Cultural Interpretations:** Patriarchal interpretations of religious traditions have sometimes been used to justify gender hierarchies.

Synthesis

- Human strength encompasses **physical endurance, intellectual ability, resilience, empathy, leadership and innovation**, not merely muscular power.
- **Gandhi's "libel" remains relevant** – The idea of women as the "weaker sex" overlooks their demonstrated contributions and the **structural barriers that historically constrained their opportunities**

Conclusion

- ISRO's women scientists demonstrated that space exploration depends on **intellectual discipline, precision, patience and teamwork**, not physical strength.
- A society that restricts half its population cannot realise its full potential; humanity advances when women and men have equal opportunities to contribute.

Sample Quotes

- *Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought* - John Rawls
- *The science of today is the technology of tomorrow.* — Edward Teller
- *The law is reason, free from passion.* — Aristotle

MAINS JOT DOWN



GS I: INDIAN SOCIETY

→ Gender Gap in Contraceptive Responsibility

- » **NFHS-6 (2023–24) shows a stark gender imbalance in sterilisation: 36.5% of married women reported female sterilisation, compared with only 0.5% male sterilisation.** This shows that the burden of permanent contraception continues to fall overwhelmingly on women._
- » According to **NFHS-6**, use of modern contraceptive methods declined from **56.4% in NFHS-5 to 52.7%**, while traditional methods such as withdrawal and fertility-awareness methods increased by about **6 percentage points**. This raises concerns regarding access, awareness and confidence in modern family-planning choices._
- » **The gender gap has persisted over decades: male sterilisation declined from 3.4% in NFHS-1 to 0.5% in NFHS-6**, even though vasectomy is generally less invasive than female sterilisation. This reflects deep-rooted gender norms that treat contraception largely as a woman's responsibility.



GS I: INDIAN GEOGRAPHY

→ Southwest Monsoon Ends with 12.6% Deficit

- » According to the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, India received **759.4 mm rainfall during the 2026 southwest monsoon**, about **12.6% below the Long Period Average (LPA) of 868.6 mm**, making it the weakest monsoon since 2015._
- » The **East and Northeast India region recorded 1,017.1 mm rainfall**, its **driest southwest monsoon since 1901**, while several subdivisions remained deficient through much of the season. This shows that national rainfall averages can conceal severe regional disparities._
- » **The deficit was linked largely to a strong El Niño**, which weakens the Indian summer monsoon by altering Pacific Ocean–atmosphere circulation. Rainfall was also **highly uneven month-wise: June was**

particularly weak, while July saw temporary recovery due to strong rains over central India.



GS I: INDIAN SOCIETY

→ Rising Pendency in Rape Cases: Justice Delayed

- » **NCRB's Crime in India 2024 data** show that **29,536 rape cases were reported in 2024**, while nearly **40,000 cases were under police investigation** after including cases carried forward from previous years. About **63% were chargesheeted**, indicating delays even before cases reach trial.
- » Once cases reached courts, the total trial pool rose to about **2.07 lakh cases**, of which around **1.86 lakh remained pending at the end of 2024**. nearly **90% pendency**. This shows that the central challenge is increasingly one of **judicial capacity and timely disposal**, not merely absence of stringent laws.



GS I: INDIAN SOCIETY

→ Women's Safety in Public Spaces: Beyond Episodic Outrage

- » According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, reported crimes against women increased by about **80%**, from **2.4 lakh in 2012 to 4.4 lakh in 2024**; more than **50 crimes against women were reported every hour in 2024**. This shows that stronger laws alone have not ensured safer public spaces._
- » Post-Nirbhaya initiatives such as the **Safe City Project, Mission Shakti, Women Helpline, Emergency Response Support System (ERSS), One Stop Centres and Fast-Track Courts**, many supported through the **Nirbhaya Fund**, have created institutional infrastructure. However, poor implementation, under-utilisation of funds and weak last-mile response remain major concerns.



GS I: INDIAN SOCIETY

→ Rethinking Suicide Prevention in Adivasi

Communities

- » Suicide prevention among Adivasi communities cannot rely only on **clinical or hospital-based mental-health care**. Loss of land, livelihoods, language, culture and community networks can deepen psychological distress, so interventions must also address these **social and structural determinants**.
- » A **2026 PLOS Mental Health study on Indigenous adolescents in Jharkhand** found that young people often preferred support from **friends, siblings, teachers, trusted health workers and trained peers**, with group-based support widely acceptable. This underlines the need for culturally rooted, community-based prevention rather than a purely biomedical approach.
- » An **Indian Journal of Medical Research systematic review** found that evidence on tribal mental health remains limited, with available studies highlighting problems such as **alcohol-use disorders, anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviour**. The evidence gap itself points to the need for better disaggregated tribal mental-health data and research.



GS II: EDUCATION

➔ Education Spending and Inequality in India

- » According to the **NSO's Comprehensive Modular Survey on Education (April–June 2025)**, a household that is **10% richer spends about 14% more on children's schooling**, giving education an expenditure elasticity of **1.42**. Since elasticity above 1 indicates luxury-like spending, education increasingly behaves as a “luxury good” across income classes.
- » Among **137.9 million households with at least one school-going child**, average annual expenditure on schooling, coaching and hostel fees was about **₹26,615**, or roughly **13% of household consumption**. The poorest decile spent about **₹11,700 annually**, while the richest spent nearly **₹67,200**.
- » The richest 10% spend about **₹55,553 more annually** on education than the poorest 10%, and **school fees alone account for 63% of this gap**. Private-school attendance rises sharply from about **18% among the poorest students to 61% among the richest**, showing that income increasingly determines access to private schooling.

- » The inequality is much lower where **public education is relatively strong**: education expenditure elasticity is only around **1.03 in Kerala and Tamil Nadu**, compared with **2.63 in Uttarakhand and above 2 in Telangana, Jharkhand and Punjab**.



GS II: HEALTH

➔ Child Leprosy Cases Show Continuing Transmission

- » According to the **National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) Annual Report 2025–26**, India detected **3,832 new leprosy cases among children**, including **37 children with Grade-2 disability (G2D)** at diagnosis. The child caseload was **91.6% above the NLEP target of 2,000**, signalling continuing transmission and delayed detection.
- » The **WHO** treats new leprosy cases among children below 15 years as an indicator of **recent transmission**, while Grade-2 disability at diagnosis indicates **late detection**. India also reported the world's highest number of new leprosy and child leprosy cases in the latest WHO update.



GS III: AGRICULTURE

➔ Sulphur Price Shock and India's Fertiliser Vulnerability

- » **Global sulphur prices rose nearly four-fold**, from about **\$280/tonne in July 2025 to \$1,050/tonne in July 2026**, largely due to supply disruptions linked to the Russia–Ukraine war and conflict in West Asia.
- » About **92% of global sulphur production is recovered as a by-product of petroleum refining and natural-gas processing**, making its supply highly vulnerable to attacks or shutdowns in energy infrastructure.
- » India produced about **3.7 million tonnes of sulphur**, yet remains import-dependent; nearly **90% of its sulphur imports came from West Asia**, exposing fertiliser supply to geopolitical risks.
- » According to the **Fertiliser Association of India**, about **52% of sulphur required by the fertiliser industry was met through imports in 2024–25**. Higher sulphur prices raise

the cost and availability risks of **DAP, SSP and complex fertilisers**, linking geopolitical instability directly with India's **food security**.



GS III: AGRICULTURE

- ➔ **Strong Industrial Growth Builds a Positive Base**
 - » According to the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**, India's industrial output grew **8% in August 2026**, the second-fastest pace in the revised series, while cumulative growth during **April–August 2026 was 6.8%**. This suggests that the current industrial recovery is broad-based rather than a one-month spike.
 - » **Manufacturing emerged as a major growth driver**, expanding by nearly **9% in August** and averaging **7.6% during April–August 2026**, compared with about 4.2% in the corresponding period of the previous year. This is significant because stronger manufacturing can generate employment, investment and export capacity.



GS III: AGRICULTURE

- ➔ **River Interlinking and Invasive Species Risk**
 - » A **2026 study by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bengaluru**, published in **Scientific Reports**, warns that India's **National River-Linking Project (NRLP)** could create "ecological highways" that allow invasive alien species and aquatic pathogens to move between previously isolated river basins.
 - » The study modelled **15 freshwater invasive species** and found that **Northeast and peninsular basins** are especially vulnerable. Ecologically sensitive regions such as the **Western Ghats, Kaveri, Krishna, Lower Ganga and Brahmaputra** could face biodiversity loss through competition, predation and disease transmission.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

INFLATION BROADENING:

- A situation where price increases spread across a large number of goods and services instead of remaining concentrated in a few categories; this has recently entered RBI-policy discussions.

AI SANDBOXING:

- Running AI systems in restricted environments so they cannot access sensitive systems or perform high-risk actions without permission.

EARLY HYDROGEN GLOW:

- Faint radiation from neutral hydrogen in the early universe, studied to understand the cosmic dawn and formation of the first stars; Indian scientists recently reported work in this area.

SEDIMENT STARVATION

- It occurs when a river or coastal system receives a greatly reduced supply of sand, silt, and clay compared to its natural capacity to transport them.

GREEN PREMIUM

- It is the additional cost of choosing a clean, zero-emission technology or product over an equivalent option that emits greenhouse gases.