FWD

FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



- SILVER ECONOMY
- AGRIVOLTAICS
- JUDICIAL RESTRAINT

26th OCTOBER, 2026 - 01st NOVEMBER, 2026

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FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST

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 guage 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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AGRIVOLTAICS

Syllabus: GS III - Infrastructure: Energy

PYQ MAPPING

Q) *India has immense potential of solar energy though there are regional variations in its developments. Elaborate.* ***(2020)***

SHORT TAKES

➢ **Land Equivalent Ratio (LER)**

- Measures the **combined land-use efficiency** of an agrivoltaic system compared with separate agricultural and solar installations.
- An LER **greater than 1** indicates that the combined system produces more total output per unit of land than the equivalent separate land uses.

WHY IN NEWS

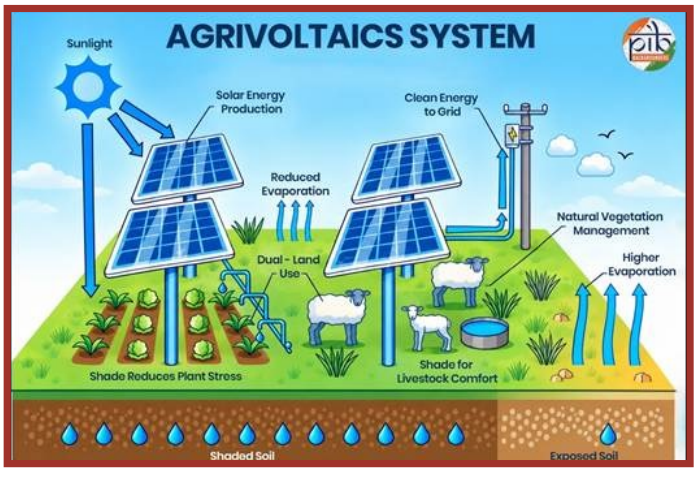
New Delhi hosted the 7th Agrivoltaics World Conference (21–23 October 2026) under the theme **"Powering the Global South",** focusing on integrating solar energy generation with agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

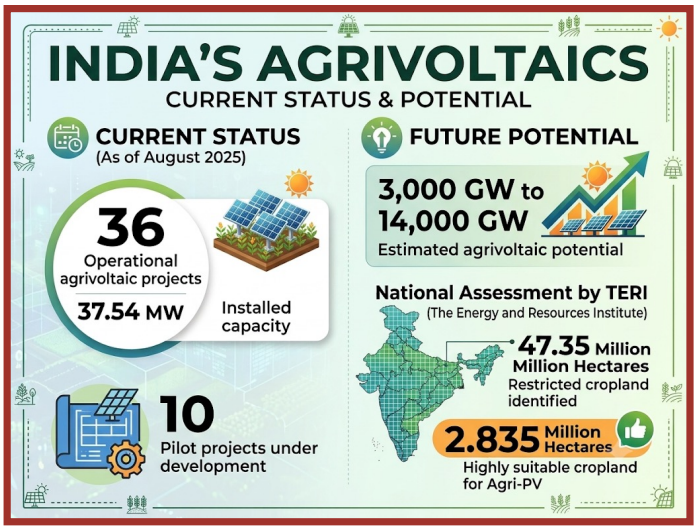
With agriculture supporting around **46% of India's workforce** and increasing land-use competition from renewable energy projects, balancing food and energy security has become a developmental priority. Agrivoltaics (Agri-PV) offers a pathway towards achieving both objectives.

ABOUT AGRIVOLTAICS

- **Definition:** Agrivoltaics (Agri-PV), also known as **solar farming or dual-use solar**, refers to the simultaneous use of the **same land for agricultural production and solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation.**



- **Major Configurations:**
  - **Elevated Systems:** Solar panels **mounted on raised structures** to facilitate crop cultivation and movement of farm machinery.
  - **Interspace Systems:** Solar panels installed in **rows with sufficient space** for cultivation between them.
  - **Dynamic Systems:** Solar panels equipped with **tracking mechanisms to adjust their orientation** and optimise sunlight availability.
- **High-potential states:** Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Moderate-potential states:** Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Telangana, Bihar and West Bengal



SIGNIFICANCE

- **Land-Use Efficiency:** Enables **simultaneous food and electricity production,** reducing competition between agriculture and solar infrastructure.
- **Farmers' Income:** Provides **additional revenue through electricity generation** and sale of surplus power, diversifying income beyond crop cultivation.
- **Climate Resilience:** Partial shading can **reduce heat stress and protect sensitive crops** against extreme weather conditions.
- **Water Conservation:** Solar panels reduce direct solar exposure and evaporation, potentially lowering irrigation requirements in water-stressed regions.
- **Renewable Energy Transition:** Supports India's target

of achieving **500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity by 2030.**

- **Example:** Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL), Kerala uses interspaces between ground-mounted solar panels to cultivate organic pumpkins and ash gourds.

- **Rural Development:** Creates employment opportunities in solar installation, maintenance and agricultural management.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Reduces pressure to divert agricultural land exclusively for large-scale solar installations and contributes to decarbonisation.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- **PM-KUSUM (2019):** Promotes decentralised solar power generation, solarisation of agricultural pumps and additional income opportunities for farmers.
- **Centre of Excellence on Agrivoltaics:**
  - Established through **collaboration between the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) and the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)** to promote research, demonstration projects and capacity building.
  - Includes a 100 kW agrivoltaic pilot project at IARI.
- **India Agrivoltaics Alliance (2023):** A multi-stakeholder platform anchored by the National Solar Energy Federation of India (NSEFI), promoting research, policy advocacy, pilot projects and scalable business models

CHALLENGES

- **High Initial Investment:** Elevated structures, tracking systems and specialised infrastructure make agrivoltaics more expensive than conventional ground-mounted solar installations.
  - **Example:** Research indicates installation costs can be 20–90% higher.
- **Crop Yield Uncertainty:** Excessive shading can **reduce photosynthesis** and crop yields.
- **Technological Constraints:** Designing panels with optimum height, spacing, tilt and orientation requires specialised engineering and agro-climatic assessments.
- **Land-Use Conflicts:** Large solar installations may gradually replace agricultural activities, defeating the dual-use principle.
- **Small and Fragmented Landholdings:** India's fragmented agricultural holdings make large-scale installation, financing and maintenance difficult.
- **Financial and Institutional Barriers:** Limited access to credit, uncertainty over power purchase agreements (PPAs) and inadequate financial incentives discourage farmers.

WAY FORWARD

- **National Agrivoltaics Policy:** Develop a dedicated national framework defining agrivoltaics, establishing minimum agricultural productivity requirements and preventing the conversion of farmland into conventional solar parks.
- **Crop-Specific Research:** Promote region-specific research to identify suitable crops, particularly shade-tolerant fruits, vegetables, spices and medicinal plants.
- **Financial Incentives:** Extend concessional loans, capital subsidies and viability gap funding for farmers adopting agrivoltaic systems.
- **Research and Development:** Invest in lightweight panels, semi-transparent photovoltaic modules, smart tracking systems and AI-based sunlight optimisation.
- **Strengthen Institutional Collaboration:** Promote partnerships between the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), agricultural universities and private enterprises.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Adopt standardised indicators such as **Land Equivalent Ratio (LER),** crop yield, water-use efficiency and farmer income to assess project performance.

CONCLUSION

According to the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**, agrivoltaics could increase farmers' annual earnings from **around ₹60,000 to over ₹1 lakh per acre**. By combining agricultural productivity with renewable energy generation, India can transform **farmers from merely 'Annadatas' into 'Urjadatas'**, advancing inclusive rural prosperity.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) "Agrivoltaics offers a sustainable solution to the competing demands of food security and energy security." Examine its potential and challenges in the Indian context. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**

INDIA'S SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE

Syllabus: GS II - Government policies and interventions

PYQ Mapping

Q) *"Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of policy process. Discuss."* ***(2019)***

Why in the news

The Union Government's constitution of two National Social Security Boards in October 2026, alongside India's reported expansion of social protection coverage to 68.4%, has renewed debate over the adequacy, inclusiveness and federal governance of social security, particularly for unorganised and gig workers.

Introduction

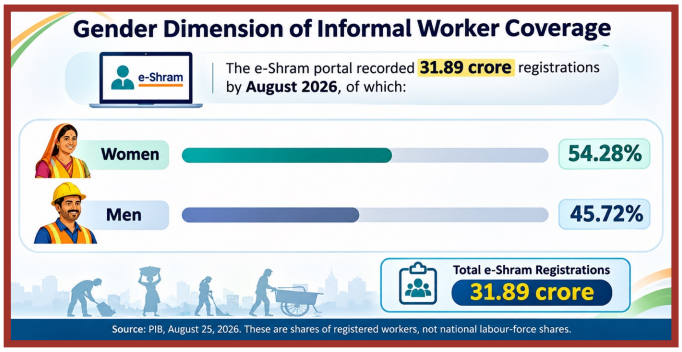
Social security is a cornerstone of a welfare state, ensuring dignity, equity and economic resilience by protecting citizens against socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Despite India's remarkable expansion in social protection coverage from **19% in 2015 to 68.4% in 2026**, persistent informality, fragmented schemes and inadequate benefits highlight the need to shift from numerical coverage to universal, adequate and portable social security.

Understanding Social Security

- The International Labour Organization conceptualises social security as protection against life-cycle risks through access to healthcare and income security during circumstances such as sickness, unemployment, maternity, employment injury, disability and old age.
- **Social security is broadly delivered through three mechanisms:**
  - **Social insurance:** Contributory mechanisms financed by workers, employers or both, such as provident funds, pensions and employment insurance.
  - **Social assistance:** Non-contributory, publicly financed support such as old-age pensions, disability assistance and targeted welfare transfers.
  - **Labour market protection:** Measures supporting employability, income stability and protection against employment-related vulnerabilities.-

Status of Social Security Coverage in India





Why Social Security Is Essential for India

- **Persistent informal employment:**
  - Informal employment dominates India's labour market, with workers facing income insecurity due to the lack of social security, paid leave, pensions and employment-linked health insurance.
  - The ***Arjun Sengupta Commission*** highlighted the vulnerability of the vast majority of India's workforce.
- **Rapid expansion of the gig economy:**
  - **According to *NITI Aayog's India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy (2022)*:**
    - Gig workers represented an estimated **1.5%** of India's total workforce in 2020–21.
    - Their number is projected to rise to approximately **4.1% of total employment by 2029–30**, based on NITI Aayog's methodology.
    - Gig employment faces income uncertainty, platform dependence, occupational risks and

gaps in traditional employer-provided benefits.

- **Vulnerability to economic and health shocks:**
  - Illness and occupational accidents can abruptly reduce the income of households dependent on daily wages.
  - Workers without paid sick leave face a trade-off between treatment and income continuity.
  - Inadequate insurance increases the risk of distress borrowing and depletion of household savings.
- **Demographic transition and old-age insecurity:**
  - India's ageing population will increasingly require sustainable pension and healthcare financing.
  - Informal workers frequently lack sufficient retirement savings or consistent contributory pension coverage.

India's Social Security Framework: Major Initiatives and Achievements

Code on Social Security, 2020

- The Code on Social Security consolidates nine central labour laws into a unified legal framework covering organised and unorganised workers and recognising gig and platform workers.
- **Major provisions:**
  - **Expanded legal recognition:** Recognises gig workers, platform workers and unorganised workers as categories requiring social protection.
  - **Social Security Fund:** Provides a framework to finance welfare schemes for unorganised and platform workers.
  - **Aggregator contribution:** Envisages contributions from aggregators of 1–2% of annual turnover, subject to a ceiling of 5% of the amount paid or payable to gig and platform workers.
  - **Maternity protection:** Provides up to 26 weeks of maternity benefits for eligible women employees.
  - **Provident fund and pensions:** Consolidates the statutory architecture governing provident funds, pensions, gratuity and insurance.
  - **Worker registration:** Provides for registration to facilitate identification and access to social security schemes.

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)

- EPFO provides retirement savings, pension benefits and deposit-linked life insurance to eligible workers.
- **Recent reforms include:**
  - **Wage ceiling revision:** In September 2026, the government approved raising the mandatory coverage wage ceiling from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000, expected to bring more than 51 lakh additional employees within its ambit.
  - **Claim settlement:** The automated settlement limit for eligible advance claims has been increased to ₹5 lakh.
  - **Pension portability:** The Centralised Pension Payment System enables pensioners to receive pensions through bank branches across India.
  - **Digital service delivery:** The EPFO 3.0 initiative seeks to integrate core banking capabilities and enable faster, more accessible services.

e-Shram Portal

- Launched in August 2021, e-Shram creates a national database of unorganised workers, including migrant, construction, agricultural, domestic, gig and platform workers.
  - 31.89 crore registrations as of August 2026.
  - Assigns a Universal Account Number (UAN).
  - The One-Stop Solution launched in October 2024 integrates welfare, employment and skill-development services.
  - State-specific microsites aim to improve local registration, verification and service delivery.

Other major social security schemes

Scheme	Protection offered
Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM)	Minimum assured pension of ₹3,000 per month after 60 for eligible subscribers
Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY)	₹2 lakh life insurance cover, subject to policy conditions
Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)	Accident insurance, including up to ₹2 lakh for specified events
Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY	Up to ₹5 lakh annual family health cover for eligible beneficiaries
Employees' State Insurance Scheme (ESIS)	Medical care and specified cash benefits for eligible insured employees
Pradhan Mantri Samajik Sahayata Yojana	Social assistance for eligible elderly persons, widows, persons with disabilities and bereaved families

National Social Security Boards, 2026: Institutional Reform and Federalism Concerns

On October 30, 2026, the Union Government notified two National Social Security Boards under the Code on Social Security, 2020. The boards have a three-year tenure and are chaired by the Union Labour Minister, with the Union Labour Secretary as Vice-Chairperson.

Composition and representation

Particulars	Unorganised Workers Board	Gig and Platform Workers Board
Total members	40	22
Worker representatives	7	5
Employer / aggregator representatives	7	5
Workers' share of total membership	17.5%	22.7%
Chairperson	Union Labour Minister	Union Labour Minister

Major concerns

- **Centralisation of decision-making:** Union-level control over appointments and leadership may limit regional and occupational representation.
- **Inadequate worker representation:** Low worker representation (17.5% and 22.7%) and exclusion of major trade unions may weaken inclusive decision-making.
- **Weak cooperative federalism:** Limited State participation undermines Centre–State coordination and locally responsive welfare policies.
- **Advisory nature of boards:** Their recommendations do not guarantee social security benefits, making implementation dependent on government funding and administrative follow-through.

Major Challenges in Achieving Universal Social Security in India

- **Coverage vs comprehensive protection:** Enrolment under one scheme does not ensure protection against all life-cycle risks. (Over 100 crore reported under the social protection framework in 2026).
- **Structural informality:** Irregular wages, seasonal employment and unstable employer relationships hinder regular contributions. (31.89 crore e-Shram registrations).
- **Inadequate benefits:** Low pension and social assistance amounts fail to ensure a dignified standard of living.
- **Fragmented welfare architecture:** Multiple schemes, varying eligibility criteria and administrative systems create duplication and portability challenges.
- **Digital exclusion:** Documentation gaps, poor connectivity, low digital literacy and weak grievance redressal restrict access to benefits.
- **Gender inequalities:** Unpaid care work, employment interruptions and limited contributory participation weaken women's social security. (54.28% of e-Shram registrations are women).
- **Gig economy vulnerabilities:** Income instability, algorithmic control and unclear employer responsibilities weaken platform workers' protection. (2.35 crore gig workers projected by 2029–30).
- **Weak outcome measurement:** Excessive focus on enrolment overlooks actual benefit delivery, adequacy, accessibility and continuity.

Important Committees and Reports

- **National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector(Arjun Sengupta Commission):**
  - Highlighted informal workers' vulnerability and recommended a minimum social security framework covering healthcare, employment injury, old age and death.
- **NITI Aayog – Gig Economy Report (2022):**
  - Estimated the growth of gig workers and recommended social protection, skill development and financial inclusion for platform workers.
- **ILO – World Social Protection Report:**
  - Emphasises life-cycle social protection and distinguishes nominal coverage from effective, adequate benefit delivery.
- **Justice V. Gopala Gowda Committee (Kerala, 2026):**
  - Raised concerns regarding the Social Security Code's implications for worker protection and Centre–State relations, recommending relevant amendments.

Way Forward: Towards Universal Social Security

- **Universal social protection floor:**
  - Guarantee minimum healthcare and income security during old age, disability, maternity and other contingencies, in line with ILO

Recommendation.

- **Cooperative federalism and worker participation:**
  - Strengthen Union–State coordination and ensure adequate representation of informal workers, trade unions, women, migrants and gig workers.
- **Sustainable financing and adequate benefits:**
  - Combine tax-funded basic protection with contributory insurance and aggregator contributions; periodically revise pensions and benefits against inflation.
- **Portable and inclusive entitlements:**
  - Integrate welfare databases to ensure seamless benefits across employers, platforms and States, while providing offline access and protecting personal data.
- **Outcome-based monitoring:**
  - Shift beyond registration targets to measure actual benefit delivery, adequacy, claim settlement, exclusion rates and grievance redressal.

Conclusion

India must move beyond enrolment-based coverage towards adequate, accessible and portable social protection that safeguards every worker against life-cycle risks. Strengthening cooperative federalism, sustainable financing and worker participation is essential to realise constitutional social justice, achieve **SDG 1.3** and advance the vision of a developed and inclusive India.

Sample Question

Q) "India's progress in expanding social security coverage has not been matched by comprehensive protection for its informal workforce." Critically examine the statement with reference to recent institutional reforms. **(15 marks)**

SILVER ECONOMY

Syllabus: GS I - Population and associated issues

PYQ MAPPING

Q) *"In order to enhance the prospects of social development, sound and adequate health care policies are needed particularly in the fields of geriatric and maternal health care. Discuss."* ***(2020)***

SHORT TAKES

➢ **National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF):** Introduced in December 2013 and revised in June 2023, NSQF is an outcome and competency-based framework that classifies qualifications according to levels of knowledge, skills, aptitude and responsibility.

WHY IN NEWS

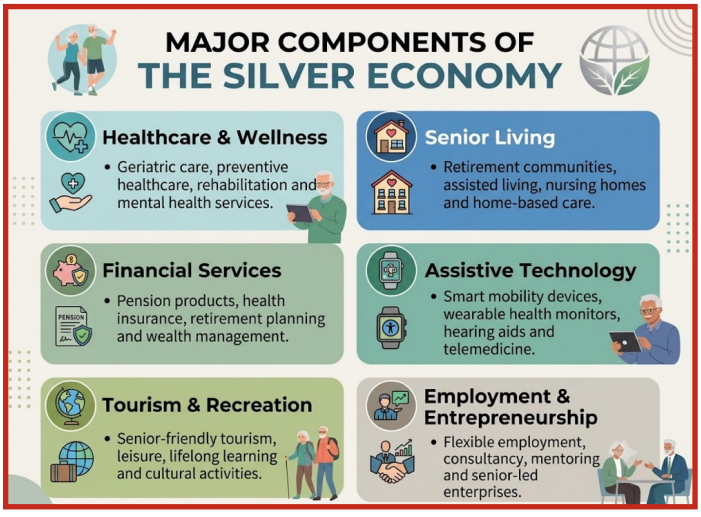
The Keralam Government introduced the Keralam Senior Citizens (Care and Protection of Rights) Bill, 2026, in the State Legislative Assembly on 13 October 2026.

INTRODUCTION

India is undergoing a significant demographic transition, with its population aged 60 years and above **accounting for 14.9% of the population.** Recognising this emerging demand, the **Union Budget 2026–27 proposed NSQF-aligned training for 1.5 lakh multi-skilled caregivers** to develop a care ecosystem covering geriatric and allied services, reflecting the growing **importance of the Silver Economy**.

ABOUT SILVER ECONOMY

- **Definition:** The silver economy refers to the range of economic activities, products and services designed to meet **the needs and preferences of older persons**, generally those aged 60 years and above.



STATUS OF INDIA'S AGEING POPULATION

Demographic Trends

- **Rising Elderly Population:** India's population aged 60 years and above is projected to increase from **10 crore in 2011 to 23 crore in 2036**, accounting for 14.9% of the total population ***(Technical Group on Population Projections).***
- **Long-Term Projection:** Elderly population will constitute over 20% of India's population by 2050 ***(UNFPA's India Ageing Report 2023).***
- **Regional Variation:** Kerala and Tamil Nadu are among the states experiencing advanced demographic ageing. Kerala's elderly population share could exceed 22% by 2036 ***(RBI projections)***

Growth of the Silver Economy

- **Market Size:** NITI Aayog's 2024 position paper, Senior Care Reforms in India, estimated India's silver economy at approximately ₹73,082 crore.
- **Senior Care Market:** India's organised senior care market was estimated at ₹88,100–1,32,150 crore, with projections of ₹2.64–4.40 lakh crore over the following decade ***(IBEF September 2025)***

Economic Status

- **Living Standard:** 40% of India's elderly population belongs to the poorest wealth quintile, while approximately 18.7% live without any income ***(UNFPA India Ageing Report 2023)***

IMPORTANCE

- **Economic Growth:** Creates new markets in healthcare, senior housing, pharmaceuticals, assistive technology, tourism and financial services, contributing to economic diversification.
- **Employment Generation:** Generates jobs for geriatricians, nurses, physiotherapists, trained caregivers, counsellors and healthcare technology professionals.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Promotes tailored pension products, insurance, retirement planning and other services to improve financial security among older persons.
    - **Example:** RBI mandated banks to provide doorstep services (cash delivery, life certificate collection) for citizens above 70 years.

- **Harnessing Elderly Workforce:** Enables experienced senior citizens to contribute through flexible employment, consultancy, mentoring and entrepreneurship.
    - **Example: SACRED (Senior Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity)** Portal launched by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** to connect senior citizens above 60 with re-employment opportunities.
- **Healthcare Innovation:** Drives investment in preventive healthcare, geriatric medicine, rehabilitation, dementia care and home-based healthcare.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- **Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY):** Umbrella scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment aimed at ensuring dignified and productive ageing.
- **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY):** Provides assistive living devices such as walking sticks, hearing aids, wheelchairs and spectacles to eligible senior citizens
- **Seniorcare Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE):** Promotes start-ups developing innovative products and services for elderly care.
- **Elderline (14567):** National helpline providing information, guidance, emotional support and intervention for senior citizens
- **Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY:** Ayushman Vay Vandana: Extended health coverage of up to ₹5 lakh per year to all senior citizens aged 70 years and above, irrespective of socioeconomic status.
- **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007:** Provides a legal framework for maintenance of parents and senior citizens, protection of their life and property, and establishment of maintenance tribunals.

CHALLENGES

- **Inadequate Social Security:** A large section of elderly persons lacks regular pensions, retirement savings and stable income, increasing dependence on family members.
    - **Example:** Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) provides central assistance of **₹200/month to BPL citizens aged 60–79 and ₹500/month to those aged 80 and above.**
- **Healthcare Burden:** Rising incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), dementia, Alzheimer's disease and age-related disabilities increases demand for specialised geriatric care.
- **Caregiver Shortage:** Inadequate availability of trained geriatricians, nurses and professional caregivers restricts the expansion of organised senior care.
- **Changing Family Structures:** Urbanisation, migration and nuclearisation of families weaken traditional family-based support systems.
    - **Example:** High out-migration for employment from states like Kerala, Punjab, and Bihar has created widespread **"empty nest syndrome,".**
- **Digital Divide:** Limited digital literacy and accessibility barriers restrict elderly persons' access to online banking, telemedicine and digital public services.
    - **Example:** According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), 1,03,488 senior citizens reported **financial cyber fraud complaints involving ₹4,005.12 crore.**
- **Feminisation of ageing:** Elderly women, particularly widows, face greater risks of poverty, financial dependence, social isolation and inadequate access to property and inheritance.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Limited availability of accessible public transport, elderly-friendly housing, walkways and healthcare facilities restricts independent living.

WAY FORWARD

- **Strengthen Social Security:** Expand pension coverage, improve pension adequacy and promote affordable health and long-term care insurance.
- **Develop the Care Economy:** Invest in geriatric healthcare infrastructure, assisted-living facilities, home-based care and rehabilitation services.
- **Skilling and Capacity Building:** Expand NSQF-aligned caregiver training, geriatric nursing programmes and specialised medical education to address workforce shortages.
- **Age-Friendly Infrastructure:** Integrate universal design principles into housing, public transport, healthcare facilities and urban planning.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Encourage collaboration between government, start-ups, healthcare providers, NGOs and financial institutions to expand affordable senior care.
- **Strengthen Local Governance:** Involve Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and community organisations in identifying elderly needs and delivering last-mile services.

CONCLUSION

NITI Aayog estimates of India's silver economy highlights its potential as an emerging economic sector. Moving beyond a welfare-centric approach towards productive ageing, senior entrepreneurship and accessible healthcare can transform demographic ageing into an opportunity for inclusive growth and dignified living.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) "The silver economy represents an opportunity to transform population ageing from a socioeconomic challenge into an engine of inclusive economic growth." Examine in the Indian context. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**

JUDICIAL RESTRAINT

Syllabus: GS II - Separation of powers between various organs and dispute redressal mechanisms.

PYQ MAPPING

Q) *Judicial Legislation is antithetical to the doctrine of separation of powers as envisaged in the Indian Constitution. In this context justify the filing of large number of public interest petitions praying for issuing guidelines to executive authorities.* ***(2020)***

Q) *Do you think that Constitution of India does not accept principle of strict separation of powers rather it is based on the principle of 'checks and balance'? Explain."* ***(2019)***

SHORT TAKES

- **Central Empowered Committee (CEC):**
  - **Constituted by the Supreme Court on 9 May 2002** in T**.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India**.
  - It can **inspect sites, examine complaints, seek official records and submit recommendations** to the Court.
  - In September 2023, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change notified the CEC as a **permanent statutory body** under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

WHY IN NEWS

Supreme Court Justice Ujjal Bhuyan's comments opposing mass voter deletions during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls sparked debate over judicial restraint, particularly whether judges should publicly comment on issues that are still under judicial consideration.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Constitution establishes a **system of checks and balances among the legislature, executive and judiciary,** without providing for a strict separation of powers. Judicial restraint refers to the practice of courts exercising their constitutional authority cautiously while respecting the functions of other organs of government.

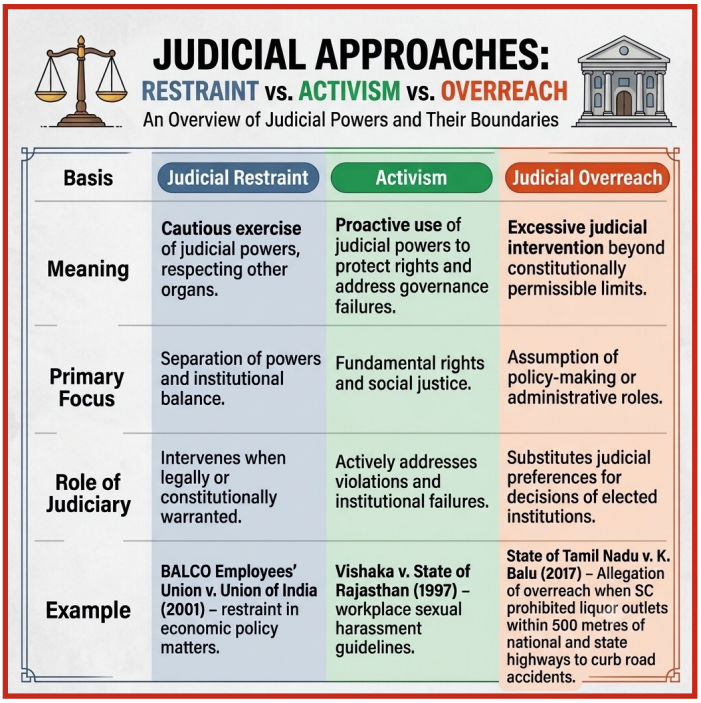
ABOUT JUDICIAL RESTRAINT

- **Definition:** Judicial restraint refers to a judicial philosophy in which **courts exercise their constitutional powers cautiously,** respect the domain of the legislature and executive, and avoid unnecessarily interfering in policy decisions.
- **Constitutional Foundation:** Rooted in the principles of **separation of powers, constitutional supremacy, institutional balance and democratic accountability.**

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Constitution vests the higher judiciary with expansive, discretionary powers of judicial review to enforce fundamental rights and check state action.

- **Article 13:** Declares laws inconsistent with Fundamental Rights void, providing the constitutional basis for judicial review.
- **Article 32:** Empowers the Supreme Court to issue writs for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights.
- **Article 226:** Empowers High Courts to issue writs for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights and for any other purpose.



While Articles 13, 32, and 226 provide the judiciary with expansive powers of review, the Constitution simultaneously limits this overreach through the following articles

- **Article 50:** Directs the State to separate the judiciary from the executive in the public services of the State.
- **Article 74(2) & 163(3):** Courts are strictly barred from inquiring into the advice tendered by the Council of Ministers to the President or Governor.
- **Article 122:** Protects parliamentary proceedings

from judicial scrutiny on the ground of procedural irregularity.

- **Article 212:** Provides similar protection to State Legislature proceedings against scrutiny for procedural irregularities.

IMPORTANCE

- **Preserves Separation of Powers:** Prevents concentration of governmental authority and respects the functional autonomy of the legislature, executive and judiciary.
- **Strengthens Democracy:** Respects the policy-making mandate of elected representatives and preserves democratic accountability.
- **Promotes Judicial Credibility:** Ensures that judicial decisions are based on constitutional and legal principles rather than subjective preferences.
- **Prevents Policy Uncertainty:** Avoids frequent judicial interference in economic, administrative and technical policies, allowing governments to implement long-term programmes.
- **Encourages Executive Accountability:** Ensures that courts intervene when there is illegality, arbitrariness, abuse of power or violation of fundamental rights, without assuming routine administrative responsibilities.
- **Protects Federalism:** Respects the constitutional division of powers between the Union and State governments.

LANDMARK SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENTS ILLUSTRATING JUDICIAL RESTRAINT

- **BALCO Employees Union v. Union of India (2001):** The Supreme Court ruled that courts should strictly refrain from interfering with the government's economic policies, specifically regarding the disinvestment of public sector undertakings
- **Re: Assent, Withholding or Reservation of Bills by the Governor and the President (2025):** Held that courts cannot prescribe fixed timelines for the Governor or President to decide on Bills and cannot create the concept of deemed assent.
- **Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay v. Union of India (2026):** The Supreme Court held that courts cannot create criminal offences or prescribe additional punishments, which fall within the legislative domain.

CHALLENGES

- **Executive Inaction:** Failure of the legislature and executive to discharge responsibilities often compels judicial intervention, blurring institutional boundaries.
  - **Example:** In ***Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006),*** the Court issued seven binding directives to the Centre and states for police reforms.
- **Expanding PIL Jurisdiction:** Public Interest Litigation (PIL), though vital for access to justice, can become a means of seeking judicial intervention in policy matters.
- **Ambiguous Constitutional Boundaries:** Overlapping functions and the absence of rigid separation of powers complicate the limits of judicial intervention.
- **Fundamental Rights Protection:** Excessive restraint may allow executive arbitrariness, discrimination and rights violations to persist.
- **Media and Public Pressure:** Media trials and public opinion may pressure courts to intervene, potentially affecting judicial independence

WAY FORWARD

- **Constitutional Discipline:** Courts should exercise judicial review within constitutional boundaries while **protecting fundamental rights and the Basic Structure.**
  - **Example:** Navtej Singh Johar case (2018) decriminalised consensual same-sex relations under Section 377 IPC, protecting LGBTQ+ rights.
- **Clearer Judicial Standards:** Develop consistent principles for intervention in policy matters, considering legality, proportionality and constitutional rights.
- **Strengthen Legislative Oversight:** Parliamentary committees and legislative debates should effectively scrutinise government policies, reducing the need for judicial intervention in routine governance.
- **Promote Institutional Dialogue:** Encourage constructive engagement between the judiciary, legislature and executive while respecting their constitutional independence.
- **Judicial Capacity Building:** Strengthen judicial research support and access to domain experts in specialised areas such as technology, environment, finance and public administration.
  - **Example:** In **T.N. Godavarman Case (2002)** the Supreme Court constituted the **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** to obtain expert assistance on forest conservation.
- **Strengthen Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):** Promote mediation, arbitration and Lok Adalats to reduce judicial workload and enable courts to focus on important constitutional questions.

CONCLUSION

In **BALCO Employees' Union v. Union of India (2001),** the Supreme Court emphasised that courts should not substitute their own views for government policy in the absence of constitutional or legal violations. Upholding constitutional supremacy, institutional comity and judicial independence requires a judiciary that is neither passive in protecting rights nor excessive in exercising its powers.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) "Judicial restraint is as essential to constitutional democracy as judicial review." Discuss in the context of separation of powers in India. **(15 Marks, 250 Words)**

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES: INDIA'S NEXT DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Why in the News?

- A PIB report (October 2026) highlighted India's growing immersive technology ecosystem and its applications across multiple sectors.

Introduction:

- Immersive technologies represent the next phase of India's digital transformation, moving beyond conventional screen-based interactions to interactive experiences that integrate physical and virtual worlds.

Major technologies:

- **Virtual Reality (VR):** Creates a completely simulated digital environment.
- **Augmented Reality (AR):** Overlays digital information onto real-world surroundings.
- **Mixed Reality (MR):** Enables physical and digital objects to interact.
- **Extended Reality (XR):** Umbrella term encompassing VR, AR and MR.

Applications in India:

- **Education:** Virtual laboratories and experiential learning; IIT Madras is developing AR/VR solutions for rural schools.
- **Healthcare:** Surgical simulations, medical training and rehabilitation.
- **Tourism:** Virtual museum tours and heritage reconstruction through initiatives such as JATAN.
- **Governance:** Digital twins for urban planning, infrastructure and traffic management.
- **Entertainment:** Immersive gaming, virtual production and interactive content.

Economic potential:

- India's immersive technology market was estimated at $1.26 billion in 2023 and projected to reach $7.82 billion by 2030, with a CAGR of 29.8%.

Challenges:

- High implementation and infrastructure costs.
- Digital divide and unequal access.
- Shortage of skilled professionals.
- Data privacy and cybersecurity risks.
- Dependence on foreign technologies.

Way Forward:

- Promote indigenous R&D and innovation.
- Develop affordable XR infrastructure.
- Strengthen digital skilling and training.
- Ensure data privacy and cybersecurity.
- Establish responsible technology governance.

Conclusion

- Effective adoption of XR technologies requires balancing innovation with affordability, inclusivity and responsible governance to ensure equitable technological progress.

INDIA'S AVGC-XR ECOSYSTEM: A NEW DRIVER OF THE ORANGE ECONOMY

Why in the News?

- Union Budget 2026–27 allocated ₹250 crore to establish AVGC Content Creator Labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges.

Introduction:

- India's Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics and Extended Reality (AVGC-XR) sector is emerging as an important component of the Orange Economy, combining creativity, digital innovation and intellectual property to generate employment and economic growth.

Significance:

- **Employment:** Creates skilled jobs in animation, gaming, VFX and immersive content.
- **Economic growth:** India's gaming sector is projected to expand from $3.8 billion in 2024 to $9.2 billion by FY2028–29.
- **Soft power:** Promotes Indian culture, mythology and heritage through digital storytelling.
- **Startups:** Encourages innovation in gaming, AR/VR and spatial computing.

- **Digital exports:** Strengthens India's position in global creative industries.

Major Government initiatives:

- **AVGC Promotion Task Force (2022):** Coordinates industry growth and policy development.
- **Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT), Mumbai:** Established in 2025 as a National Centre of Excellence.
- **AVGC Content Creator Labs:** ₹250 crore allocation for 15,500 educational institutions.
- **GENESIS Scheme:** Aims to support approximately 1,600 technology startups over five years.
- **WaveX:** Media-tech startup accelerator supporting emerging creative businesses.

State initiatives:

- Kerala's AVGC-XR Policy 2024 targets 50,000 jobs by 2029, while Tamil Nadu's 2026 policy targets around two lakh jobs by 2030.

Challenges:

- Skill gaps and shortage of trained professionals.
- High production and operational costs.
- Inadequate digital and physical infrastructure.
- Limited indigenous intellectual property (IP).

Way Forward:

- Strengthen industry–academia collaboration.
- Develop regional creative clusters.
- Improve startup financing and investment.
- Promote indigenous content creation and IP development.

Conclusion

- Strengthening domestic capabilities, innovation and skilled talent is essential to building a globally competitive and self-reliant creative industry.

DIGITAL TWINS: TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Why in the News?

- **The Government highlighted applications of digital twin technology under initiatives such as Sangam:** Digital Twin for infrastructure planning and urban development.

Introduction:

- Digital twin technology represents a shift towards predictive and data-driven governance by creating virtual replicas of physical assets, systems or cities to simulate real-world conditions and improve decision-making.

What is a Digital Twin?

- A digital twin is a virtual model of a physical object, system or place that uses real-world data to monitor performance, simulate scenarios and predict outcomes.

Applications:

- **Urban planning:** Traffic management, infrastructure development and smart-city planning.
- **Disaster management:** Flood simulations, risk assessment and emergency preparedness.
- **Education:** Interactive 3D models and virtual learning environments.
- **Healthcare:** Simulated medical training and hospital infrastructure planning.
- **Heritage conservation:** Virtual museum collections and digital preservation.

Indian examples:

- **Sangam:** Digital Twin: Department of Telecommunications initiative integrating digital twins, AI, IoT and 5G for infrastructure planning.
- **Varanasi Urban 3D Spatial Planning:** Uses digital spatial mapping to support city planning.
- **JATAN:** Enables digitisation of museum artefacts and cultural collections.

Challenges:

- High implementation and maintenance costs.
- Data privacy and security concerns.
- Lack of interoperability between systems.
- Cybersecurity vulnerabilities.
- Shortage of technically skilled professionals.

Way Forward:

- Develop indigenous digital twin platforms.
- Establish interoperable data systems and standards.
- Strengthen technical skills and capacity building.

- Ensure robust data protection and cybersecurity frameworks.

Conclusion:

- Indigenous innovation, skilled manpower and secure data governance are essential for the effective adoption of digital twin technology.

BEYOND VERDICTS: KEY JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS

Supreme Court on 'Protest Economy': Balancing Right to Protest and Livelihood

- The Supreme Court (November 3, 2026), headed by CJI Surya Kant, emphasised balancing the right to peaceful protest under **Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b)** with the right to trade under Article 19(1)(g) and right to livelihood under Article 21. The observation came during a petition filed by Kirana Committee Delhi over business losses caused by prolonged demonstrations.
- **Justice Joymalya Bagchi** highlighted the concept of a '**protest economy'**, observing that demonstrations may generate income for hawkers, street vendors and small traders supplying essential goods, even while disrupting established businesses.
- In ***Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020),*** the Supreme Court held that public roads and spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely for demonstrations. Similarly, ***Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018)*** emphasised balancing peaceful assembly with the rights of other citizens.

Supreme Court Relaxes Firecracker Ban in Delhi-NCR

- The Supreme Court (2026) temporarily relaxed the firecracker ban during Deepavali, permitting only certified green crackers under regulated timings. The ruling highlighted the need to balance religious freedom under Article 25 with the right to a pollution-free environment under Article 21.
- Only green crackers certified by CSIR-NEERI and PESO were permitted, with restrictions around hospitals and educational institutions.
- In ***Arjun Gopal v. Union of India (2018)***, the Supreme Court restricted conventional firecrackers to reduce air pollution. The decision reflects the principle of sustainable development, balancing cultural practices, public health and environmental protection.

Supreme Court Questions Two-Child Norm Amid Declining Fertility Rate

- The Supreme Court (2026), in ***Mangala Bhimrao Ingle v. Additional Commissioner,*** questioned the two-child norm disqualifying individuals from contesting local body elections.
- India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) declined from 3.02 in 2003 to 1.9 in 2024, below the replacement level of 2.1.
- The Court raised concerns regarding reproductive autonomy under Article 21 and democratic participation.
- In ***Javed v. State of Haryana (2003),*** the Supreme Court upheld the two-child norm; however, the 2026 Bench referred the issue to a larger Bench for reconsideration.

Supreme Court Questions Effectiveness of Delhi-NCR Air Pollution Control Measures

- The Supreme Court (November 6, 2026), headed by CJI Surya Kant, termed restrictions on vehicles and construction activities as outdated and ineffective tools for tackling Delhi-NCR's air pollution.
- The Court questioned the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) about the lack of scientific and long-term solutions, as Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) approached 400.
- The **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), i**mplemented by CAQM under the CAQM Act, 2021, provides emergency pollution-control measures based on AQI levels, but cannot substitute for permanent solutions.
- The Court highlighted environmental inequality, observing that poorer sections often suffer disproportionately from pollution generated by affluent consumption and commercial activities.

Supreme Court: 24-Hour Arrest Rule Begins from Detention, Not Formal Arrest

- In ***Sujit Das v. Union of India (2026)***, the Supreme Court ruled that the 24-hour period for producing an accused before a Magistrate begins from actual detention, not the time of formal arrest.
- Article 22(2) of the Constitution and Section 58 of BNSS, 2023 protect against arbitrary detention, permitting exclusion only of necessary travel time to the Magistrate's court.
- A Bench of Justices ***Ujjal Bhuyan and Atul S. Chandurkar*** held that any artificial distinction between detention and arrest violates constitutional safeguards.
- The Court directed Magistrates to record the actual time of detention and order immediate release if the 24-hour limit is violated; even detention within 24 hours must be reasonable.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) You are the Editor-in-Chief of a leading national news channel. During a major communal disturbance, your reporting team obtains an unverified video allegedly showing members of a particular community attacking civilians. The video has gone viral on social media, creating widespread public outrage. The channel's management pressures you to broadcast the video immediately, arguing that competitors are already reporting it and that delaying coverage could reduce Television Rating Points (TRPs) and advertising revenue. However, your fact-checking team warns that the video's authenticity and location have not been established. Broadcasting it could inflame communal tensions, endanger innocent lives and undermine public trust in the media. Meanwhile, the government requests media organisations to exercise restraint, raising concerns among journalists about censorship and freedom of the press.

Questions:

a. Identify the ethical dilemmas and stakeholders involved in this case.

b. Examine the conflict between freedom of the press, public interest, commercial pressures and journalistic responsibility.

c. What options are available to you as Editor-in-Chief? Evaluate their ethical implications.

d. What course of action would you adopt? Justify your decision using relevant ethical principles.

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

1. **Empathy:** In its first major restructuring, Canva announced organisational changes affecting 1,271 employees (22% of its workforce). Departing employees are offered at least six months' salary, 12 months of healthcare and family assistance, free retention of company MacBooks, one year of LinkedIn Premium, career coaching and US$10,000 grants to start ventures, without surrendering equity.
2. **Accountability:** Siddharth Student Welfare App was launched by Keralam Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan on 4 November and developed by Digital University Kerala, it allows students to confidentially report ragging through text or audio, seek counselling for substance abuse and mental distress, and access an SOS campus response system.
3. **Environmental Ethics:** Dr Samrat Ghosh, IISER Mohali, developed the IISER-M green firecracker using recycled plastic bottles and a specially formulated combustible material, designed to produce sound and flight without conventional smoke and particulate emissions. In 2019, his team experimented with distilled cow urine to reduce formulation costs by 50%.
4. **Inclusivity:** Despite living with myelitis, a spinal cord condition, Rehana Khatun from Odisha became a community climate champion under UNDP's Enhancing Climate Resilience of India's Coastal Communities (ECRICC) project. She has reached over 200 beneficiaries, promoting climate-resilient farming and sustainable livelihoods.
5. **Public Service Ethics:** Kadepur Gram Panchayat, Maharashtra under IAS officer Vishal Narwade adopted AI, blockchain, GIS mapping, robotics and paperless e-Office systems within ten months. It received the National Award for e-Governance 2026 for grassroots e-governance.
6. **Social Responsibility:** Sama Digital Foundation refurbishes discarded corporate laptops and provides them to underserved women and young people for education and livelihoods. One beneficiary, 19-year-old Shrutika from Maharashtra, established a village digital service centre that served over 900 people.
7. **Technology Ethics:** Developed with support from IIT Guwahati, Drones Tech Lab deployed drones carrying around 5 kg of relief supplies per flight, covering 5 km in 25 minutes to reach flood-isolated villages in Assam. During the 2026 floods, aerial surveys also helped locate stranded people and livestock.
8. **Empowerment:** Mothers of Courage is a women-led grassroots movement documented through a film of the same name. Through community gatherings called Shiksha Chaupals, mothers and mothers-in-law challenge social norms, prevent child marriages and support girls in continuing or resuming their education. The movement has mobilised over 1.19 million citizens across 14 districts in Bihar and won the 2026 UN SDG Action Award in the Creativity category in October 2026.

MODEL ESSAY

"Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants."

Introduction

- Quote by **Epictetus**
- In 4th-century BCE Corinth, Alexander the Great reportedly visited Diogenes of Sinope, a Cynic philosopher who renounced material possessions and lived in a large ceramic storage jar (pithos). When Alexander asked if he could grant him anything, Diogenes simply replied, "Stand a little out of my sun." Impressed by his indifference to power and wealth, Alexander remarked, "If I were not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes."
- True wealth lies not in possessing everything one desires, but in needing very little to be content.

The Sovereignty of Minimized Wants

- **Time Wealth and Financial Independence:** Reducing material wants enables greater savings and allows individuals to reclaim time otherwise spent earning and maintaining possessions. **Eg**: Financial Independence, Retire Early (FIRE) movement.
- **Ecological Sustainability:** Limiting excessive consumption helps conserve finite natural resources and reduce environmental degradation. **Eg**: Degrowth movement advocates reducing fast fashion
- **Cognitive Liberation:** Minimising unnecessary choices reduces decision fatigue and frees mental resources for meaningful activities. **Eg**: Steve Jobs reportedly wore similar outfits daily to minimise routine clothing decisions.
- **Buddhism and Dukkha:** Overcoming Tanha (craving) helps individuals escape attachment and suffering.
- **Freedom from Debt:** Limiting consumerist desires reduces dependence on credit and protects individuals from debt traps.
- **Philanthropy:** Beyond a certain level, directing surplus wealth towards social welfare can create greater public value than personal accumulation. **Eg**: Warren Buffett pledged to donate over 99% of his wealth to philanthropy.

Wants as the Engine of Civilizational Progress

- **Medical Advancement:** Scientific ambition drives medical innovation and disease eradication. **Eg**: WHO declared smallpox eradicated in 1980.
- **Economic Growth:** Consumer demand stimulates industrialisation, investment and employment. Eg: India's automobile and electronics manufacturing sectors.
- **Scientific Exploration:** Material investment enables ambitious scientific discoveries. **Eg**: ISRO's Chandrayaan-3 lunar landing in August 2023.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Financial independence enables women to escape economic dependence and assert autonomy.
- **Voluntary vs Forced Poverty:** Minimalism must not be confused with involuntary deprivation.

Synthesis

- **Not all desires are harmful;** while excessive material cravings fuel consumerism, aspirations drive human progress.
- True wealth is achieving the absolute freedom from petty cravings, solely so we can deploy our finite human energy toward magnificent, enduring ambitions.

Conclusion

- While Alexander the Great conquered empires he lamented having no more worlds to conquer, Diogenes conquered his desires and found contentment in needing little.
- **He who owns the world yet craves more is a beggar in a crown,** while he who masters his desires is truly wealthy.

Sample Quotes

- A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world. — John le Carré
- Rules are not necessarily sacred, principles are. — Franklin D. Roosevelt
- The tyranny of a multitude is a multiplied tyranny. — Edmund Burke

MAINS JOT DOWN

GS II: HEALTH

India's Anaemia Burden

- According to **NFHS-5 (2019–21)**, anaemia affects 67.1% of children (6–59 months), 57% of women (15–49 years) and 52.2% of pregnant women, highlighting India's persistent nutritional challenges.

Besides iron deficiency, anaemia results from vitamin B12 and folate deficiencies, malaria, hookworm infections, chronic inflammation and genetic disorders such as thalassaemia, making iron supplementation alone inadequate.

GS III: CLIMATE CHANGE

Amazon Rainforest Turns from Carbon Sink to Carbon Source

- A 2026 study published in Nature found that the Amazon rainforest has become a net carbon source, releasing more CO_2 than it absorbs, based on atmospheric measurements from 2010–2024.
- The Amazon released an average of 0.32 billion tonnes of carbon annually, with forest fires being the dominant contributor; 2024 recorded the highest emissions during the study period.
- **Major Causes:** Deforestation, forest degradation, agricultural burning and droughts intensified by El Niño and warming of the tropical North Atlantic have weakened the forest's carbon absorption capacity.

GS II: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Demonetisation and Its Hidden Health Costs: Impact of Cash Shortages

- Demonetisation (November 8, 2016) withdrew ₹500 and ₹1,000 notes, representing 86% of India's currency in circulation by value, causing a sudden liquidity shortage; according to the RBI, 99.3% of the withdrawn currency returned to the banking system.
- A study forthcoming in the ***Journal of Economics and Management Strategy*** found that purchases of medicines for acute illnesses declined by 3.6% in volume and 3.1% in value, relative to medicines for chronic illnesses, due to cash shortages.
- Researchers from IIM Ahmedabad, IIM Calcutta and the University of Sussex, using the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD) database, found that areas with fewer Primary Health Centres (PHCs) experienced greater reductions in medicine purchases.

GS II: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Sewer Cleaning Deaths in India

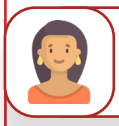
- The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) recorded 859 sewer and septic tank cleaning deaths during 2014–2025, while 332 deaths were reported between January 2021 and June 2026, highlighting failures in occupational safety.

GS II: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

India–EU Horizon Europe Programme: Strengthening Scientific Cooperation

- India and the European Union (November 2026) concluded negotiations for India's association with Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship €93.5 billion research and innovation programme (2021–2027).
- **Research Collaboration:** Indian universities, researchers and industries will be eligible for direct research funding and leadership of multinational projects under Pillar II – Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, once the agreement enters into force.
- **Priority Sectors:** Cooperation will focus on healthcare, artificial intelligence, digital technologies, space, climate change, clean energy and bioeconomy, promoting technology transfer and scientific innovation.
- **Institutional Framework:** The initiative builds

upon the India–EU Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement (2001) and the India–EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), strengthening strategic technological partnerships.



GS I: GEOGRAPHY

Climate Change Increased Cyclone Arnab's Damage by 33%

- Cyclone Arnab struck eastern India on October 28, 2026, with winds reaching 202 km/h, causing significant infrastructure damage in Andhra Pradesh.
- A study by Imperial College London's Grantham Institute, using the Imperial College Storm Model (IRIS), found that climate change increased cyclone damage by 33%, compared with a pre-industrial climate baseline.



GS III: AGRICULTURE

Paddy Field Conservation in Kerala

- Kerala's area under paddy declined from 8.82 lakh hectares (1974–75) to 1.76 lakh hectares (2024–25), an approximately 80% reduction, driven by crop shifts, urbanisation, land conversion and commercial development.
- **Legal Dilution:** The Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 aims to prevent indiscriminate land conversion; however, the 2015 amendment (Section 3A) permitted regularisation of certain earlier unauthorised conversions, weakening conservation safeguards.
- **Governance Failure:** The Kerala Revenue Department reportedly collected up to ₹1,606 crore through land regularisation, creating a potential conflict between revenue generation and environmental conservation. Incomplete paddy-land databanks further weaken enforcement.



GS III: AGRICULTURE

Cabinet Raises Wheat MSP to ₹2,610 for 2027–28

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) increased wheat's Minimum Support Price (MSP) by ₹25 (0.97%) to ₹2,610 per quintal for 2027–28, the smallest absolute hike in 17 years.



GS III: DEFENCE

IAF's IL-76 Makes Record High-Altitude Landing at Nyoma Airbase (2026)

- The Indian Air Force's IL-76MD 'Gajraj' successfully landed at Nyoma airbase in eastern Ladakh (November 7, 2026) at an altitude of 13,629 feet, marking the highest-altitude landing ever achieved by this aircraft type.
- Nyoma airbase is situated approximately 25 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, strengthening India's military preparedness along its northern border.
- The IL-76MD is a Russian-origin, four-engine heavy-lift transport aircraft capable of carrying troops, military equipment, armoured vehicles and approximately 40–45 tonnes of cargo, depending on conditions.



GS III: DEFENCE

Agnipath Scheme Revised: Two-Year Extension and Regular Enrolment for Agniveers

- The Union Cabinet approved a two-year service extension for Agniveers, creating a pathway for regular enrolment in the Armed Forces.
- Under the Agnipath Scheme (2022), 25% of Agniveers will continue to be selected for regular service after four years, while the remaining 75% can opt for an additional two-year tenure.
- After completing six years, all willing Agniveers will be eligible for regular enrolment, subject to physical fitness, discipline and prescribed selection criteria; enrolment is not unconditional.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

VIABILITY GAP FUNDING (VGF):

- Viability Gap Funding (VGF) is a government financial grant program in India designed to make socially and economically essential infrastructure projects commercially viable through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).

MERCHANT DISCOUNT RATE (MDR):

- A fee charged to merchants for processing certain digital payment transactions, generally shared among payment service providers.

BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM (BESS):

- Stores electrical energy in rechargeable batteries for later use, improving grid stability and renewable energy integration.

QUASI-BALLISTIC MISSILE:

- A missile that follows a relatively low, manoeuvrable trajectory compared with a conventional ballistic missile, making interception more challenging.

FOUNDATION MODEL

- It is a large-scale artificial intelligence model trained on vast, generalized datasets using self-supervised or unsupervised learning, allowing it to adapt to a wide variety of downstream tasks.